

# workers POWER

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**NUCLEAR POWER**

## Workers demand truth about nuclear accidents

ON 30 SEPTEMBER the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl happened in Tokaimura, Japan. Within seconds radiation levels inside the uranium processing plant reached 4,000 times their normal levels. At its height, radiation levels 15,000 times the normal level were recorded two kilometres from the site.

Two of the nuclear power workers are critically ill with radiation poisoning and thought likely to die. A third appears doubtful, as do three dozen others,

including firefighters called out to contain the reaction. Some 310,000 residents, in a six mile radius from the plant, were ordered to remain inside and seal windows and doors.

Could it have been avoided? And what are the implications for the industry worldwide?

The media coverage has emphasised the "human error" that led to the accident. The workers involved were not wearing regulation safety clothes, they carried the fuel in buckets rather than

using automated pumps, and they poured in seven times the amount of enriched uranium than allowed.

But no worker takes these kinds of risks knowingly. JCO, the private company that ran the plant, had failed to train its workforce. The workers were handling 19 per cent enriched uranium instead of the usual two per cent solution: an obvious explanation for the overdose. Again, the switch over to the new solution was unsupervised. Getting the job done on the cheap and making mega-

profits as a result took precedence over health and safety.

Local residents were not alerted to the danger for several hours. Schoolchildren were out playing when radiation levels were already ten times above safety limits. Many local residents did not even know it was a nuclear plant. Such is the secrecy surrounding nuclear power, in Japan, Britain and elsewhere.

As the government presses ahead with its £1.5 billion sell-off of British Nuclear Fuels Limited, we need to step up the

fight for workers' and local community control of all aspects of the industry.

■ For workers' inspections and control in all plants

■ Shut down all plants and processing units found to be unsafe and a moratorium on the development of all new plants

■ Stop the sale of BNFL

■ For a massive programme of research into nuclear, solar, wind and hydro-electric power under workers' control.

## IN BRIEF

One of the last remaining members of the Red Army Faction (RAF), Horst-Ludwig Meyer, was killed in a shoot-out with Austrian police last month. The RAF was formed in Germany in 1970. Its members were largely middle class radicals, appalled at the involvement of ex- and not so-ex Nazis in the German state and big business. But they had no faith in the working class. The RAF turned to the hopeless and useless methods of individual terrorism - kidnappings, bombs and assassinations. Although many of the RAF's targets were later proved to have been leading Nazis, their strategy was a dead-end. In 1998 they declared "the struggle is over" We should of course defend the remaining RAF militants from state repression. However, we should reject their failed strategy - because, for us, the struggle is not over.

In the Austrian General Elections the Freedom Party of Jörg Haider campaigned for an end to the "flood" of foreign immigrants and the "abuse of the asylum laws". As we go to press Haider is expected to push the Austrian Tories into third place.

The growth of this far-right, racist party - whose leader praises Hitler's labour laws - clearly represents a serious threat to the immigrant communities as well as to the Austrian workers. The Austrian section of the LRCI, the Ast, and the youth organisation REVO took the initiative in organising action against these racists on the streets during the election. They were joined by other socialists. On the eve of poll, Haider addressed a rally of over a thousand in Vienna. He did not go unchallenged. Three hundred demonstrators kept up a constant barrage of chanting which led to scuffles with the more active racists. Ast and REVO members addressed a lively public meeting after the demo.

Tony Blair claims to be "horrified" at the thought that half of all those arrested have heroin or cocaine in their system. Maybe they should start testing the businessmen and pop stars who regularly dine with Blair at Number 10. Blair's drugs shock-horror was just an excuse for another draconian law. Everyone arrested will now be tested for drugs, if Jack Straw gets his way. Since cannabis - which leaves traces in the body 12 weeks after use - is the most commonly used illegal drug, especially in the black community and among youth generally, the new law will be used to criminalise them further. It could even lead to house searches and refusal of bail. And all on the grounds of having smoked a spliff three months ago!

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## POLICE RACISM

# Police racists guilty - again

*Officers arrested victims of racist mob*

ONE OF the first inquiries into racist police actions since publication of the Macpherson report has resulted in disciplinary charges against one South Wales officer. Another is to be "admonished" while a further two will receive the lightest treatment possible: "advice".

Local campaigner, Betty Campbell, was disgusted that all four had not been dismissed: "If they cannot behave as they should then they should not be in the force. It's as simple as that."

The undisputed facts of the case reveal how useless the Police Complaints Authorities are in redressing injustices at the hands of the police.

In August 1997, two black teenagers, Marcus Walters and Francisco Borg, were attacked in Cardiff by a gang of racist white youths. One of the gang, Sean Canavan, punched Marcus in the face, while another, John Shepherd, threatened to set his pitbull terrier onto Marcus' five year-old sister, Emma. Throughout the attack, the police were yards away, in full view. Yet when they intervened they arrested Marcus and Francisco!

Luckily all of this was captured on CCTV video. What wasn't captured was how Marcus and Francisco were sprayed with CS gas and left in the back of a van for hours and told that if they did not confess to assaulting the police they

would have drugs planted on them and be arrested for trafficking.

It was eight months before the police eventually dropped the charges and over two years before just one of the real thugs, the police, was charged. How many more months and years before the case is heard?

Meanwhile working class and black people continue to face intolerable brutality and abuse from the police. In August, Asian student Sarah Thomas died in police custody at the notorious hell-hole in London, Stoke Newington police station; in September in neighbouring Hackney, Harry Stanley was gunned down, unarmed, in the street on the strength of a hoax phone call. Who will they kill this month?

The police are institutionally racist. The Macpherson report exposed that. Despite all the pious words from Jack Straw about rooting out institutional racism, nothing has changed. We need to remain vigilant, organised and fight for:

- Workers' and community inquiries into all reports of police misconduct
- Sack all cops found guilty of racism, corruption or brutality
- Self-defence is no offence - build workers' and community defence groups against police and racist attacks!



This month sees the final round of the court battle to extradite former Chilean dictator Pinochet (above). The legal profession and Home Secretary Jack Straw are set to cook up a "clemency" deal based on the torturer's ill health. So prepare to join mass pickets outside the court. See [www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com) for details

## KASHMIRI PRISONERS

# Free Riaz and Quayyum

TWO KASHMIRIS, Mohammed Riaz and Quayyum Raja, have been languishing in British prisons since 1984. They were sentenced for their alleged involvement in the killing of an Indian diplomat. Their continued incarceration is nothing short of a scandal.

Despite the fact that their direct participation in the murder was never proved, various Home Secretaries have actually increased their jail sentences. Jack Straw, Home Secretary, is ignoring pleas from civil liberty organisations and judicial experts and is standing by the decisions of his Tory predecessors.

The case dates back to the abduction of an Indian diplomat, Ravindra Mhatre, based in Birmingham. He was kidnapped in an attempt to save the life of a Kashmiri leader, Shaheed Maqbool Butt, who was held in the death cell in Tihar jail Delhi.

The Kashmiri question is a legacy of British imperial rule. At independence, Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan, which have gone to war over the territory on a number of occasions. Kashmiri self-determination has always been denied.

The abduction of Ravindra Mhatre was a failure. It went badly wrong and the diplomat was killed. The now disbanded and discredited West Midlands Serious Crime Squad pursued the case. Remember, this was the squad involved in a number of fit-ups, including of the Birmingham Six.

On 1 March 1984, Mohammed Riaz Malik, then a twenty-one year old stu-

dent at Leicester University, was arrested and charged with murder. At his trial at Birmingham Crown Court he was found guilty on the technicality that he knowingly removed a lock from a door to facilitate removing the hostage from his temporary prison to his place of execution.

The trial judge accepted that Riaz was a minor member of the operation who had unwittingly got involved. He sentenced Riaz to 12 years for unlawful imprisonment and wrote to the Lord Chief Justice recommending that Riaz should also serve ten years for the life sentence for murder, to run concurrently.

Riaz, therefore, should have been released five years ago if the initial recommendations had been followed.

Abdul Quayyum Raja was active in the fight for Kashmiri freedom, having grown up close to the "bloody line", the border which divides the Kashmiri people between India and Pakistan. He

was arrested in February 1984 and tried a year later.

The initial charges of kidnapping and conspiracy were dropped and a charge of murder substituted. The judge, Mr Justice Bristow, accepted that there was no "clear hard evidence" against Raja, but argued that as Raja had lied to police during interviews to protect his co-accused, he must be telling lies at the trial.

Raja was convicted for murder, given a life sentence and the judge did not make any public recommendations as to the length of sentence. Subsequently it has been revealed that the judge privately recommended 15 years.

If this had been followed, Raja would have been deported to his native country in February of this year.

If the initial decisions and sentences were unfair and unsound, the actions of subsequent government and law officers have been even worse. In Raja's case, the Lord Chief Justice increased the min-

imum sentence to 21 years and the Tory Home Secretary arbitrarily decided to increase it to 25. Riaz' sentence was raised to 20 years

In December 1994, following a judicial review, the London High Court upheld the petitions of the two prisoners, arguing that the Home Secretary's decision making process was "fatally flawed". The Home Office gave a commitment to a fresh review but two years later confirmed the previous decision. The decision was based on a "case summary" prepared by officials who were not present at the original trials.

This vindictive decision was clearly politically motivated, designed to preserve relations with India, and it drew wide opposition. Thirty-three MPs signed an early day motion in support of the Kashmiris' release in December 1994.

The campaign hoped for an early and sympathetic review from Jack Straw. Instead Straw decided to maintain the sentences, arguing that they could not be reduced because the case involved the murder of a diplomat. He preferred to ignore the lack of evidence against the accused, to ignore their exemplary record in prison - Quayyum Raja has been a key intermediary and educator at Long Lartin - and to ignore the many voices of criticism, such as that of Lord Donaldson who pointed out that Riaz was being held for purely political reasons.

Jack Straw, like the Tories before him, is guilty of a patent abuse of human rights in this case. We should not let him get away with it.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Write to Mohammed Riaz (C48423) and Quayyum Raja (C48348) HM Prison, Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham Worcs WR11 5TZ
  - Write to the Home Secretary and demand the end of politically motivated and discriminatory sentences
  - Join the Free Riaz and Quayyum Campaign (FRAQC) and get your trade union or students union to invite a speaker, pass resolutions and affiliate.
  - Write to your MP and ask them to support the campaign for early release and against Jack Straw's decision.
- The Campaign can be contacted directly at:  
FRAQC, c/o PO Box 609 Bradford BD6 3UL

# Phoney Tony

**Dave Telfer** reports from the Labour Party Conference, where grassroots members struggled to make their frustration heard above the clink of champagne flutes and the sound of bureaucrats grovelling

THIS YEAR'S Labour Party Conference took place as the party reached the halfway stage in its first term of office. After 18 years of misery under the Tories, Labour has had two and a half to begin to make things better.

So far, though, many workers might be forgiven for feeling that nothing much has changed. There is real frustration with Labour's failure to deliver its promises, even if this is not yet on a mass scale and not yet taking shape as action.

Two of the famous five early pledges, given out by the party on credit cards, concerning the Health Service and education, are a particular cause for concern for Labour. According to a Guardian/ICM poll, 41 per cent of voters now believe the health service is getting worse, compared to 30 per cent last year. Only 14 per cent believe it to be getting better. The promise was to cut NHS waiting lists, but this has proved impossible without the required injection of extra money.

As far as education goes, promises to reduce class sizes have not been met while teachers' morale gets worse, particularly as the government ploughs ahead with the introduction of divisive measures such as performance related pay.

The minimum wage has been delivered. But the rate, £3.60 per hour, designed to keep the bosses happy rather than to really improve the conditions of those workers who most need such a change. Younger workers, between the ages of 18 and 21, found they would have to make do with an even lower rate of £3.00, while workers below this age were excluded altogether. As if to underline Labour's shameful attitude to the issue it was reported that stewards employed by the Labour Party for the duration of the conference were being paid a mere £12.50 per day!

From the outset, Labour needed to put on a convincing performance. It had just suffered a bad by-election result in Hamilton which in turn had followed poor results in the European elections. Labour voters are staying at home and it has particularly suffered in its heartlands - in Wales and Scotland where it would appear that Labour has alienated many of its core voters.

Labour gathered in Bournemouth for the first time since 1985 - a conference which was marked by the then leader Neil Kinnock's attacks on Militant. The stormy scenes of that conference, when Eric Heffer did a famous walk-out and heckling was par for the course, seemed a lifetime away.

This year's conference was a thoroughly New Labour affair bearing all the trademarks of Blair and the Millbank Mafia. Debates are out - anodyne discussion is in. Fish and chips on the sea front are out - champagne fund-raising suppers at £350 a head are in. The Red Flag still gets an airing but with the singing led by a sweet voiced children's choir. And this "centenary" conference was debased yet further when Tom Sawyer, the former General Secretary, took the stage dressed up as Keir Hardie and started to mock working class accents.

The annual conference is now a televisual extravaganza, an Oscars ceremony for the Cabinet, with delegates being,

as one put it, "walk-on extras". They have little control over what is debated and the leadership does its best to stifle any unseemly wrangles that get through the vetting process. Set-piece discussions are followed by the acceptance or rejection of policy documents.

This system demonstrates the success Blair has had in changing the party's internal structures to suit himself. The "Partnership in Power" version of party democracy that now operates is the means to ensure that Blair's way is the one that prevails no matter what. Its introduction, after the ditching of Clause Four, was the means Blair used to attack and marginalise the activists of the left.

**"The class war is over" Blair declared in his speech to conference. He declined to say who had won it, but then his speeches have never been strong on detail**

Couched in the language of increasing the contact between the party and its grassroots members, it is actually a means of carefully controlling debate.

Conference remains nominally the party's sovereign body. What it discusses are reports put forward by the National Policy Forum (NPF). This body submits reports based on a two-year process of discussion with the members at local policy forum meetings. The NPF then decides which views, expressed either at these meetings or via submissions by CLPs and other bodies, go into the final document. This whole process is overseen by the Joint Policy Committee, which is chaired by the Prime Minister. Only at the end of the second year is the report submitted for full debate at conference and then becomes party policy. This year the documents which had reached this stage were the ones on health, crime and justice, and welfare.

Despite the party managers' best efforts, some protests at Labour's Tory policies did reach the conference floor. Conference clearly wanted to vote against the Private Finance Initiative, and when it was told by the platform that it could not amend the economy policy document, voted against the whole thing.

Falling back on manoeuvres worthy of Old Labour, the platform told Conference that it had been "confused" and to try to get it right the next day! Conference duly obliged.

Further trouble was averted by some back door deals.

The manufacturing union MSF forced Trade Secretary

Stephen Byers into a retreat over the implementation of the EU working time directive. Byers, at the behest of the bosses, had been trying to get away with a voluntary system but has now had to make the maximum 48 hour week legally binding.

Other signs of discontent came in contributions to the debates over transport and health, and at times frustration boiled over. One delegate from the broadcasting union BECTU won cheers when he complained of the stage management at conference and the lack of opportunity to submit resolutions from the grass roots. "Could I be told how ordinary rank and file members get in

on the debate?" he asked.

The answer is - with extreme difficulty. Each CLP or other affiliated body is allowed to submit only a single resolution to conference on a "contemporary issue", provided it is not covered by the work of the NPF.

This restriction, together with the policy forum system means that despite having to make the odd concession, the leadership has gathered into its hands complete control of the formulation of policy. Under old Labour, Conference frequently made policy which was then ignored or overturned by the leadership, especially Labour in power. New Labour tries to avoid accusations of betrayal by avoiding specific commitments.

Nevertheless, Labour still has to appear as a reforming party. The leadership has to listen to the language of the polls and the warnings that it must not sacrifice its traditional past to meet the needs of Middle England. Blair is performing a balancing act, and with the economy in reasonable shape, he can keep the union leaders on board.

"The class war is over" he declared in his speech to conference. He declined to say who had won it, but then his speeches have never been strong on detail. His aim was to carry on his project of realigning British politics and he needs the empty rhetoric of class harmony in order to do this.

It has always stuck in Blair's throat that the party he leads is the party created by the working class one hundred years

ago to defend its specific class interests. He would like to reverse this historic gain for the working class and short of achieving this, he wants to ensure that class politics don't get a look in.

When he attacks the "forces of conservatism" he means both the Tories and the left - those who continue to insist that class is still an issue in Britain today. His venom is aimed particularly at the left - after all, the day after his speech he was busy inviting some of the key forces of conservatism - former Conservative ministers like Heseltine and Clarke - to join New Labour.

This is the essence of Blair's "Third Way". It is neither traditional Toryism

nor Old Labour. It is a way which is unmistakably capitalist, but a newer, caring kind of capitalism, founded on the lie that class has disappeared from politics.

What the Third Way means when applied to specific policies is notoriously hard to pin down but can be typified by Labour's approach to privatisation. Via the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), Labour mixes public ownership with private funding. In education, for example, Blair's Labour Party has never set out to actually create a better education system, designed to create better and more rounded human beings. They seek rather to give the education system over to private business so that the bosses of industry can use the system to provide themselves with the human material they need.

Likewise, staff in the NHS have had to cope with the problems thrown up by the Private Finance Initiative. This backdoor form of privatisation inevitably leads to NHS staff having to work harder, for less money and under poorer conditions. As the British Medical Association's recent report revealed, PFI is a rip-off. But it keeps

Labour's big business friends happy because it secures considerable profits for them.

Blair's speech also emphasised that the Labour Party is now considered a competent manager of

the economy and people can safely vote for it with their hearts as well as their heads. He said that Labour wouldn't risk this by relaxing its grip on public spending. Chancellor Gordon Brown, who spoke on the economy on the first full day of conference, backed this up.

The message was New Labour's love of profit and the promotion of enterprise. Short on specific promises, almost without anything to say on crucial issues such as the European Single Currency, one thing he did promise was full employment. But contained within this promise was much that was illustrative about what New Labour is about:

"If those who can work take responsibility to work, if employers take the responsibility to train and to invest and all of us show the same responsibility in pay, then Britain can deliver, in our generation employment opportunity for all."

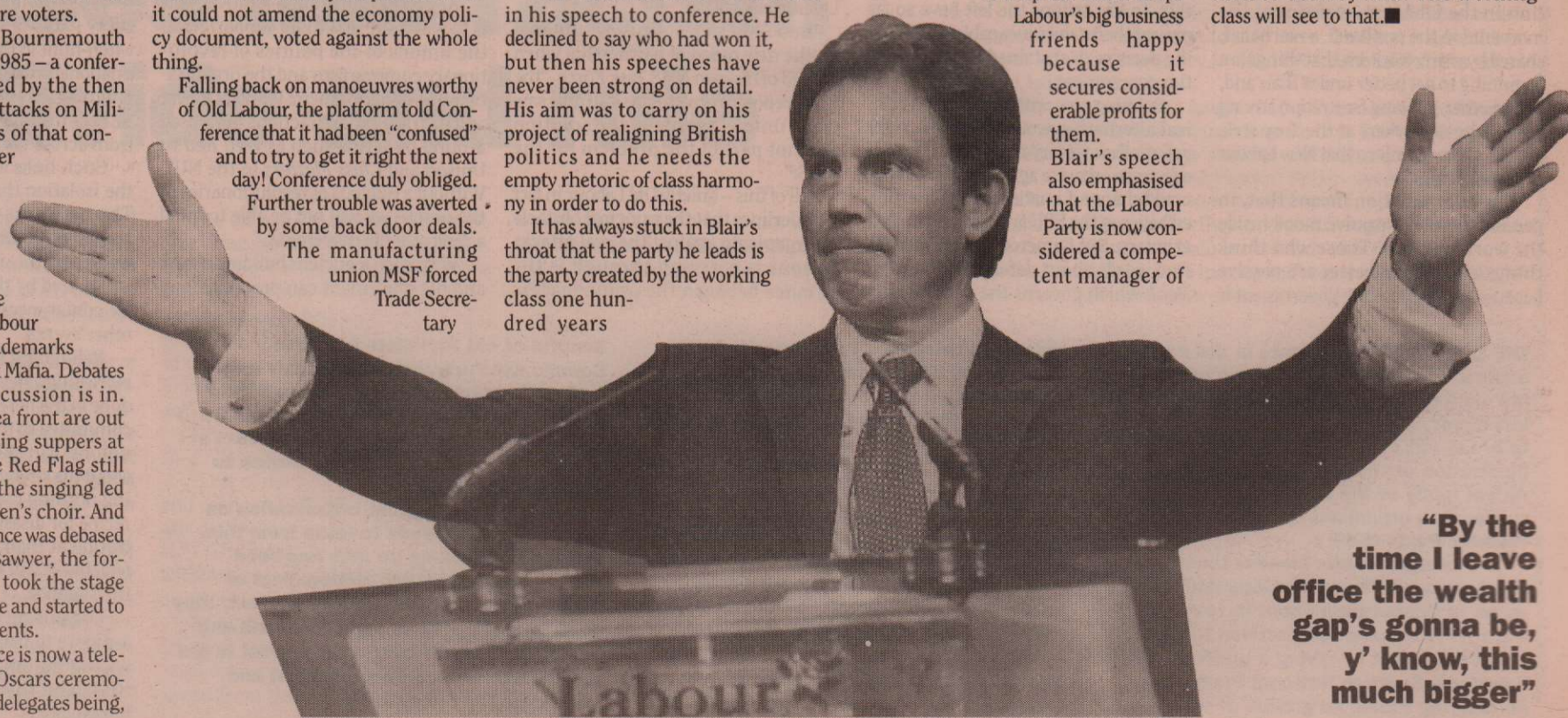
In other words, if you are out of work, the opportunity will be put before you to accept soul-destroying jobs on low wages while the rest of the working class foregoes wage rises. And even this commitment depends upon employers finding the means to provide training and investment. It depends on continued economic growth.

And so the delegates left Bournemouth not very clear on Labour's policies or on their role in the party but very clear that Blair's grip on power within the party has been strengthened to an unprecedented degree.

Of course, there were moments when dissent surfaced: after Alistair Darling's speech on welfare, for example, Bill Morris and Barbara Castle led the attacks over pensions and Labour's refusal to restore the link to earnings. There were minor problems for the leadership over the privatisation of the post office and the working time directive. But these are small details in Blair's on-going project to mould the Labour Party into an increasingly openly pro-business party.

The leadership are able to get away with this sort of conference for two reasons: the current economic upturn and the weakness of the left. Neither of these factors is permanent.

Blair's claim that the class war is over will come back first to haunt him and then to destroy him. The working class will see to that. ■



**"By the time I leave office the wealth gap's gonna be, y' know, this much bigger"**

# Our millennium challenge –

## How do we break the alliance between Blair and the union leaders?

BRITAIN'S TRADE union leaders have gone from being frightened rabbits to happy bunnies. After two and half years of settling in, the Labour government has stopped issuing warnings to them and started issuing jobs.

Within the trade union leadership the principal effect of the defeats of the Thatcher years was to push them to the right. They developed a creed – New Realism – designed to avoid industrial conflict and turn the unions into service providers. With membership slumping they used mergers to shore up their bureaucratic machines and protect their privileges.

New Realism dovetailed nicely with New Labour. So when Blair came to power telling the unions that they would get "fairness not favours" there were few complaints.

The top brass eagerly embraced Tony Blair's strategy of "partnership" – unions and bosses pulling together for the good of the company. All of them are now looking forward to the consummation of this strategy in a joint conference with the government and CBI next year, suggested by Blair at last month's TUC congress.

John Monks, the TUC general secretary, cooed:

"New rights at work, a tighter labour market, the decline of adversarial industrial relations and the growth of partnership all provide new opportunities for unions."

Amidst this sea of official contentment Ken Cameron, the left leaning general secretary of the firefighters' union, the FBU, told a *Tribune* fringe meeting at the TUC congress that it was time for the unions to think about cutting their link with Labour. Cameron said: "As we move into the new millennium, the ties that bound us together in the early years of this century are frayed and ragged at the edges ... loosening the link is a big step to take but I think it will be in the best interests of the trade union movement."

Cameron is a lone voice at the moment. Monks reflects the official line of the key union leaders. But the sentiments of both reflect a real contradiction in the labour movement at the moment: on the one hand, a real belief, shared by many workers, that things are beginning to get better under Blair and, on the other, growing frustration among a minority of workers at the Tory style attacks on trade unions that New Labour is perpetrating.

The contradiction means that, in general, there is a passive mood inside the working class. Those who think things are getting better are passive because they believe the government is



Monks needs members ...

acting on their behalf. The union leaders are, by and large, encouraging this. Labour's reforms – the minimum wage, rights at work, training schemes under the New Deal – are all cited as proof positive of the government's kind attention to the needs of the working class.

To those frustrated by Labour's attacks – notably PFI and Best Value, its planned onslaught on firefighters' pay and conditions, performance related pay for teachers, the attacks on the welfare state and its maintenance of the key planks of the Tories' anti-union laws – there is a lack of clarity about what to do about them. Isolated examples of resistance, such as the recent Tower Hamlets' Unison strike, show what can be done. But they remain isolated.

That is why Cameron's remarks smack of desperation. Cameron, who is well aware that the Blairite faction have themselves thought about cutting loose from the unions, is putting the case for getting a split in before the right can do it on their own terms. But his call reveals the reformist left's weakness, within both the party and the unions. In the party the left are nowhere, and the recent conference demonstrated this. In the unions the left have so far proved themselves incapable of delivering decisive or sustained action against the government.

Splitting now, without a serious political alternative, would hand the right yet another victory instead of acting as a focus to organise against them. Things could change if a national dispute erupted between the FBU and the Labour government. But Cameron himself, despite fine words about defending the *Grey Book* which governs the pay and con-

ditions of firefighters, has so far delayed organising any action, let alone a national strike.

Moreover, the majority of the leaders of the affiliated unions are happy with the link as it is – despite the reduction of union influence over the party that Blair has carried through via his various reforms. In fact this suits the New Realists as it makes collaboration with the employers less fraught. Just as significantly, the Blairites are happy with it because it is proving a very effective way of delivering class peace.

Far from the union leaders being excluded from Blair's coalition they have become a key component of it. John Monks explained:

"Today we are much closer to the Whitehall machinery. Our views are sought and our people involved. Ministers regularly attend our conferences."

This is true. A TUC economist has just been appointed chair of the Health and Safety Commission, the first union appointee to this post since 1974. Trade union officials have been appointed to all eight of Labour's new Regional Development Agencies. They are on all of the relevant Task Forces and quangos that Labour has set up.

Bob Abberley of Unison summed up the new mood of partnership when he said of his own NHS Task Force, "the final report from the task group saw trade unions as part of the solution and not part of the problem for the NHS."

All of this – quietly Old Labour in fact – underlines that the principal obstacle to organising against the real attacks Labour is carrying through is the alliance between the union leaders



... but members need action

and Labour.

That alliance explains why there is a witch-hunt in Unison. It explains why Ken Jackson of the AEEU is doing his best to push through one no-strike deal after another with the bosses. And it explains why many workers believe things are getting better under Labour – because their unions are telling them so day in and day out.

There are two ways of breaking this alliance. One is to take on Labour in a national strike and shake up the entire bureaucracy as a result. But at the moment organising such a strike is well beyond the capabilities of the left. The FBU or possibly the postal workers' union, the CWU, could be drawn into such a battle over conditions or over privatisation.

But waiting for such an event is not a strategy for the left. That is why we need to pursue the other means of breaking the power of the bureaucracy and its alliance with Labour – organising a united front of militants within and across every union to carry out a sustained campaign for both union reform and class struggle action. We need to patiently build a rank and file movement.

Key to building such a movement is to win more and more supporters in the unions to the politics of revolutionary communism and the organisation that fights for them: Workers Power and its trade union fractions organised around bulletins such as *Well Red* in Unison and *Class Matters* in the NUT. Without a nucleus of revolutionaries in the unions we will not be able to build a rank and file movement.

With such a nucleus building a rank and file movement can proceed along

two paths: first by taking the lead in rebuilding the unions themselves. The TUC has set itself a "Millennium Challenge" to recruit new workers because, on John Monks' own admission, "we are not good at appealing to the young". Bureaucrats will never be able to appeal to the mass of youth. Their ingrained conservatism, lack of fight and groveling before the bosses will put most youth off straight away.

But revolutionaries can and should make use of the resources of the unions to conduct a mass recruitment campaign among young workers and ensure that those workers are organised in thoroughly democratic branches. Such branches can take the fight, for example over the discriminatory minimum wage, to the bosses. They must be openly political and take up issues like the legalisation of drugs, third world debt and the environment. Such branches can become bastions of rank and file democracy and class struggle against the bureaucracy and can take up the fight on these issues throughout the union.

The second line of march towards the rank and file movement must be to use every dispute within a union, every focus of struggle – such as the witch-hunt in Unison, the campaign for a national strike in the FBU and the campaign against no-strike deals in the AEEU – to build links between militants from across the country.

Such links are vital to break down the isolation that many militants feel. The networks created can begin to launch bulletins to reach out to other workers in the union, publicise disputes smothered by the bureaucracy, organise conferences, marches, lobbies and other events.

Rebuilding unions from below and recreating a network of militants can be done in the here and now. Communists, committed to the transformation of the unions, can start this work. Moaning about the strength of the right, but offering nothing concrete to militants is a recipe for disaster. It will feed the frustration at Blair that the best militants feel, but it will not help overcome it in the slightest.

Organising the rank and file is the antidote to frustration and the key to wiping the smug grin off the faces of Blair and his friends in the union bureaucracy.

**THE LEGACY of the defeats in the past – especially the serious break up of rank and file shop floor and office organisation – has left major obstacles facing militants trying to break out of isolation. A good illustration of this weakness was the recent lobby of the Labour Party conference organised by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).**

**It was significantly smaller than two previous such demonstrations and it had an air of desperation about it, revealed by the SWP's scandalous decision to try and boost the event by giving a platform to the bourgeois Scottish National Party. It had no unifying focus, no groups of workers**

**organised through it to address fighting demands to the Labour government.**

**Above all, it proved incapable of mobilising the one union that has been at the centre of a number of key local struggles – Unison – because the leadership of that union ordered its members to have nothing to do with the march. The SWP in particular and the left in general were too weak to counter this order and were unwilling to fight it by organising a united rank and file campaign to take on the witch-hunting leadership.**

**The march was a failure. It was a ritual SWP event built under the pretence of being a united front. But apart from a tiny**

**handful of old Stalinists from the Communist Party, some genuinely angry and well organised pensioners and the usual array of left Labour worthies like Tony Benn, the members of the mass organisations declined the invitation to unite with the SWP.**

**The SWP, the biggest organisation on the British left, needs to learn from this. Instead of shacking up with has-been Stalinists and Scottish Nationalists or concocting a new party building stunt, they need to unite with us and other rank and file militants in building a movement in the unions that can challenge, defeat and overthrow the bureaucracy.**

# workers POWER

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COMMENT

## Dealing in debt, dealing in death

**F**OREIGN SECRETARY Robin Cook and former Defence Secretary – now Nato chief – Lord Robertson kept a low profile at the Labour Party conference last month.

Well they might. In May 1997, Cook promised that New Labour would introduce “an ethical dimension” to Britain’s foreign policy. The government’s record some two and a half years later is disgraceful. Their ethics are those of the smash-and-grab imperialist.

At the end of the twentieth century 1.3 billion people – nearly a quarter of the world’s population – subsist on less than a dollar a day, the World Bank’s definition of “absolute poverty”; 840 million people lack sufficient food; a billion have no access to clean water or sanitation facilities.

In contrast the concentration of wealth in the world’s richest countries – like Britain – gathers pace daily. The 358 richest people in the world own more than 45 per cent of the annual income of the world’s population; the world’s top five multinational companies, which include GEC (UK), have a greater turnover than the gross product of Africa and the Middle East put together.

The world’s poorest countries owe the West’s banks \$2,200 billion dollars. The repayments, often at crippling interest rates of nine per cent, are a prime cause for this entrenched poverty.

What has Labour done about this?

Gordon Brown made much at the International Monetary Fund’s meeting last month of Britain’s efforts to write off \$23 billion of this debt. In fact, Britain has put up a paltry \$221 million for emergency debt relief; most of this money will come through accounting tricks, such as re-valuing the World Bank’s gold reserves. And this will only to write off debt that had become unrecoverable, thus ensuring payments on the remaining balance can be made. Far from being a blow against imperialism, even the hard-nosed bankers accept this will work in their favour in the medium and longer term.

Meanwhile British companies continue to make a killing out of other people’s misery – nowhere more dramatically than in the arms trade.

Britain is the second biggest arms exporter in the world. It sells one and a half billion dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia alone. Cook’s supposed policy of refusing licences to regimes with poor human rights records obviously doesn’t include the Saudis, who publicly executed over a thousand of its citizens in 1998.

Labour’s crocodile tears for the Timorese are also repulsive given that they approved 92 licences for arms exports – sniper rifles, Hawk jets, water cannons – and £300 million in military aid to Indonesia in 1998 alone. Only after intense pressure did Cook finally suspend (for four whole months!) the delivery of the Hawks, which had by then already proved deadly over the skies of Dili.

But Britain under Labour has not just made and sold weapons, it has dramatically increased its use of them.

After a five day blitzkrieg – Operation Desert Fox – against Iraq in December 1998, Blair and Clinton have maintained a constant and daily low-level bombing campaign targeting the Iraqi people. This has gone hand in hand with the US and British policy of keeping up the strict sanctions which are murdering 6,000 children a month.

This is how it works. Iraq’s water facilities were virtually destroyed in the Gulf War and new ones bombed since. Spare parts, even pipes, to repair and maintain the water supply system are denied under the sanctions. This has led to spiralling cases of cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea but medical supplies are not available because sanctions refuse the importation of refrigerators to keep them. A million Iraqi children have been killed by this policy in the 1990s. And Labour has tightened, not loosened the screw.

The Kosovan war was not fought to stop a genocide. Nato bombed Serbia, not the murderous troops in Kosova. Over 1,200 civilians were killed and £20 billion of damage wreaked by the Nato bombers. Who will rebuild – at a profit – Serbia and Kosova? British and American multinationals. It is a mark of the world powers’ trust in Labour’s imperialist and military credentials that they appointed George Robertson to the post of Secretary-General of Nato immediately after the war.

Now the imperialist powers have turned their eyes to East Timor. If, as seems likely, they establish another garrison there, this time led by Australia, then the trend for military outposts to be stationed in the world’s trouble-spots will be further confirmed. The New World Order, announced by George Bush and taken up by the Tories, is being implemented by New Labour. And underpinning it all is the drive to keep the profits flowing from the poorest people in the world to the richest.

Tens of thousands of young people and workers in Britain today see this as Labour’s greatest hypocrisy. The Campaign Against the Arms Trade, Jubilee 2000 and the East Timorese solidarity movement have mobilised angry demonstrations in the past months.

We need to take the arguments for active opposition to Labour’s murderous foreign policies into the labour movement and we need to build a militant anti-imperialist movement out of these protests. Multinational profiteering, third world debt, the arms trade, sanctions and war are all interlinked, are all part of the imperialist system.

Labour is committed to preserving this system. We are sworn to destroy it.

### ELECTRICIANS

# Strikes get results!

LAST MONTH thousands of electricians, members of the AEEU, staged a series of walk-outs at key building projects throughout Britain.

The leader of their union, Sir Ken Jackson, had told the TUC conference that his vision was of a “strike free Britain”. The electricians that this knight of the realm claims to represent gave him their answer: carrying placards demanding “Jackson Out”, the struck and marched.

The electricians are well organised and are carrying out work on a number of prestige building sites – the Jubilee Line extension, the Dome, the Royal Opera House. Their position made them

strong and their bosses vulnerable.

Given that much of their work is very dangerous, their hours long and their expenses heavy (many of them are contract workers living away from home) their demand for an extra £4 an hour was not outlandish, as the press and the bosses claimed, but absolutely necessary.

Their strikes were rock solid, despite leadership opposition. Sir Ken declared: “This reinforces what I have been saying – we have got to find a more civilised way of doing things.”

However, he wasn’t calling the shots. The electricians have got a strong shop stewards’ organisation and it was

the stewards who called, organised and led the strikes. They did this in defiance of the anti-union laws and in defiance of their leaders.

As we go to press the electricians are planning to ballot on a management offer of a 30 per cent pay increase. This isn’t what it seems, since the offer consolidates bonuses and overtime payments. But the size of the offer does prove one thing – strikes work. The bosses had originally offered a 46 pence an hour rise. The new offer is well in excess of that.

Blair may say the class war is over and Jackson may not like strikes – but the electricians have proved both of these men 100 per cent wrong.

### HOME HELPS

# Dial B for Boycott

HOME HELPS, members of Derbyshire County Unison, are in dispute over the introduction of electronic timesheets. The social services staff will, under the new procedures, have to phone in to a call centre in Ipswich before they leave for work and then at each service user’s house on their round.

Obviously this is a well over the top encroachment on workers’ terms and conditions, as every movement is logged with Big Brother. It is also an effective pay cut since some staff will be forced to have phones put in ... and then pay the line rental on that phone, just so the council can hear from them each morning.

The home helps are solidly against the new arrangements and have boycotted the training and patch meet-

ings in the run-up to implementation of the new timesheets. The branch executive fully supported this boycott.

The bullies at County Council informed Unison Region that the boycott action was illegal. Region’s officers duly doffed their caps and repudiated the action. In a deliberate attempt to stir things up between the branch and Region, the Council claimed that the repudiation was inadequate. The fear among branch activists is that continued support for the home helps’ unofficial action would be used as an excuse to suspend the branch and/or its officers – as happened in Sheffield and Birmingham.

Region have agreed to ballot the home helps for action short of a strike, but in the meantime the members have been instructed to attend management’s

training sessions – even though the managers now use these sessions to harass them. Already under the cosh from the Council, members now feel betrayed by the union.

Well Red supporters, Workers Power’s bulletin in Unison, argued that it was vital that the branch executive stick by their members and support their right to collectively boycott the training sessions.

We believe any climbdown will only be interpreted as weakness by the Region, and a let down by the rank and file members. It won’t stop the branch being attacked by the union leaders, it will encourage them.

To successfully fight the witch-hunt in Unison, we must show all the members that the left are their best defenders, not the bureaucracy.

### FORD DAGENHAM

# Bosses use racism to divide and rule

FORD DAGENHAM workers are well organised and have a tradition of militancy and anti-racism. Last month toolmakers greeted the AEEU leader’s call for a strike free Britain with a 24 hour strike!

In the 1980s there were a series of strikes against a sick, racist questionnaire, issued as a “joke”, by two foremen at the plant. And in disputes since the solidarity between the 40 per cent of the workforce who are black and Asian and the white workers has been noticeable.

This makes the case of Sukhjit Parma all the more sickening. Sukhjit has been subjected to a four year campaign of vile racist intimidation, including violent threats, racist abuse, punishment duties handed out by racist foremen and Ku Klux Klan graffiti.

The management knew all about this campaign but did not lift a finger. By allowing the harassment of Sukhjit to continue they conspired in it, no doubt hoping to break the traditions of black and white solidarity that existed in the plant. Racist workers were tolerated because they served this divide-and-rule purpose.

The leader of the transport union, the TGWU, Bill Morris said:

“This is not just about the ‘lower’ end of the shop floor – this is systematic institutionalised race discrimination. The company paid no attention whatsoever to the complaints brought by our members.”

The case is now at an industrial tribunal. Whatever verdict the tribunal reaches there is a valuable lesson to be learnt from this affair – racism in the

workplace needs to be taken up by the unions and fought by them. Appealing to management – even management with equal opportunities policies – will not root out racism.

We need to fight for a policy of: workers’ control over hiring and firing to drive out active racists; unions to embrace active anti-racist policies; fascists and active racists must be expelled from the unions; racist practices by management and their foremen must be met with immediate strike action until those guilty are sacked by the company.

In this case a united strike to get rid of the racists who tormented Sukhjit would be an excellent answer to a management who thought they could get away with allowing this to happen.

# 1929: When Wall Street crashed

**Bill Jenkins** remembers the Wall Street crash of 1929, seventy years ago this month, which plunged the world economy into recession, and punctured capitalism's dreams of an endless golden future

IN 1996 Alan Greenspan, the Head of the US Federal Reserve, warned of the "irrational exuberance" of the American stock market. Since his warning the Dow Jones index, the measure of US shares, has risen a further 80 per cent. It now stands at \$12 trillion and, according to nearly all commentators, is set to crash.

The US has experienced a decade of growth: profits, output and the budget deficit are all up. It was the motor that drove the world economy through the Far Eastern crash of 1997-98. This growth is now slowing but through most of 1999, Wall Street has continued to ride high, despite nervous wobbles.

It was much the same in October 1929, when Wall Street crashed. Boom went to bust in the space of a month.

The "roaring twenties" were a period of economic growth across the USA. The rich had never had it so good. In the mid-1920s, every sector of industrial production grew strongly and rates of return were rising rapidly.

The growth of industrial output was matched at every step by Wall Street's rise. In May 1924 the New York Times Index was 106, by December 1925 it was 181. By December 1927, the index stood at 245.

In 1928 there were already warning signs. Agricultural prices were falling, there was a sharp contrast between the boom areas of the US and, for example, the depressed South. The first signs of overproduction could be seen in some consumer goods areas. But the stock market continued its upward trend. In March 1928 the market rose 25 points: in one month it had increased by as much as the whole of 1925. The speculative boom had begun in earnest.

There has been much speculation around the cause of this sudden surge in share prices in 1929. Some commentators blamed it on low interest rates. Others believed that misplaced over-investment in radio companies – as in the Internet today – triggered the rest of the market. But they are both wrong.

The real reasons lay in the nature of capitalism itself. As capitalism entered its imperialist phase at the start of the 20th century, the stock market became a vital source of investment funds, as production outstripped the limits of individual capitalist owners. The stock market was the means through which capitalists could concentrate and consolidate their enterprises and through which the banks could exert increasing control over industry.

Stocks entitle their owner to a share of the future profits of a company. Like anything under capitalism, they can be traded: and their price usually reflects the level of profits that the particular firm is expected to earn. The share price depends on future profits that do not yet exist.

There are periods however, like the mid 1920s, when a lack of profitable investments in the real economy means capitalists are driven to speculate in shares. They hope that their speculation will yield them returns beyond the given rate of profit. As profits decline across the economy, this instinct to speculate represents a real social force. If it is strong enough it can become a self fulfilling prophecy for a while.

The sudden influx of funds into the stock market leads to a rise in share prices irrespective of real profit rates. The value of the shares becomes increasingly detached from their "real" worth. This in turn leads to a rise in rates of return as investments are not measured by dividends realised but in the rise in



*Inevitably the Wall Street crash had a profound effect on the US economy. The collapse in demand for consumer goods led directly to mass unemployment*

the value of shares themselves. For a period the rise becomes cumulative.

Ever wider and deeper strata of society are drawn into the speculation, easy money becomes the norm and this money seeks out the new sources of savings required to guarantee the next rise. In turn each rise leads to the further deepening and extension of the speculation, until there is no more money and reality intrudes with a bump.

But before the crash there are always several false alarms. As speculation grows the level of trading expands enormously. In March 1928 share trading reached an all time high of 3,875,910 shares. By June it stood at 5,052,790. The election of President Hoover in November led to a further surge in prices and volumes. But the market swings became increasingly exaggerated. On 8 December 1928, in a portent of things to come, radio shares fell by 72 points. Even so by the year end the market as a whole had grown from 245 to 331 points.

These hysterical levels of activity were financed on the never-never. The huge increase in brokers' loans provided a guide to the level of speculation across the market. The banks lent to the brokers, who lent to the customers, who speculated with the money, paying interest to the brokers, who in their turn paid the banks.

These loans grew from around \$1 billion in the early 1920s to \$6 billion by the end of 1928. They provided the funds to buy stocks "on margin". Paying for stocks on margin released the funds for an ever increasing scale of speculative activity. The speculator would pay for example 10 per cent of the cost of the stock they wanted to buy, using the broker's loan for the remaining 90 per cent. The collateral for the loan is guaranteed

by the value of the stocks themselves.

This is great while the market is rising since a 1 per cent increase in the value of the stocks provides a 10 per cent return on the speculator's money. But it leaves a terrible hostage to fortune once the market begins to fall. A fall of 10 per cent will wipe out the speculator's investment. Any fall greater than 10 per cent will mean they are unable to pay back their loan. They will have to sell. In turn this will reduce prices and so on.

In practice as loans were provided on a given rate of interest and the price of stocks was no longer related to dividends, stocks had to rise to pay the brokers and then the banks.

In this situation, standstill leads to collapse. Buying on a loan was not the only financial innovation invented to assuage the lust for speculation. For the first time in the US, investment trusts were organised on a large scale. These trusts held shares in a broad portfolio of firms, they produced nothing except financial speculation. Both the numbers of trusts and their worth grew massively between 1926 and 1929.

These trusts represented an unparalleled opportunity to fleece small investors. Behind each trust stood a sponsoring firm or bank. These organised the trusts and released their shares on to the market.

The sponsoring firm received share options that allowed them to buy shares at their original offer price. If the price increased, as it invariably did, these shares could be immediately sold and enormous profits generated.

For example, in 1929 Goldman Sachs was at the forefront of the new investment trusts. It launched a series of share issues, such as the Shenandoah Corporation. Oversubscribed sevenfold,

its initial securities of \$102,500,000 opened at \$17.5 before reaching \$36. In the crash to come the price fell to 50c.

In 1929, as today, the problem exercising the minds of the American bankers was how to squeeze the bubble. As today the Federal Reserve was led by austere men renowned for their financial conservatism but they failed to stem the speculative tide. They tried letters to the market, they tried meetings with financiers.

At one meeting in March 1929, the silence afterwards caused a panic. The index dropped 15 points and 8,246,740 shares were traded. The ticker tape that recorded the day's transactions fell two hours behind. A crash loomed but did not arrive. The head of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, Charles Mitchell was forced to issue a statement: "We have an obligation to avert any crisis in the money market". It worked and the crisis abated.

The bankers considered interest rate rises to increase the cost of borrowing and so hopefully reduce speculation. But when stocks are rising in leaps and bounds who cares about the rate of interest? Any rise will more than cover the cost of debt incurred. So the Federal Reserve did nothing, only increasing interest rates in the summer of 1929.

The boom continued. From June to August, the index rose by a further 25 per cent. Brokers loans grew by \$400 million a month. Professor Irving Fisher, the Yale economics professor cheerfully announced: "Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau." There were voices of caution, but their repeated failure to accurately predict the end meant that, as J.K. Galbraith puts it in his description of the crash: "Only a durable

sense of doom could survive such discouragement."

In September the index began to fall and falls in some areas began. Irving Fisher was not, however, perturbed noting: "There may be a recession in stock prices, but not anything in the nature of a crash."

By the end of the summer, the US economy had begun to slow down. Industrial production was now falling. Steel production and house building both fell. Confidence was being shaken.

Confidence had become a material factor: the belief that the market would rise was central to sustaining Wall Street. Once selling started, more would follow – to pay loans, realise profits and to protect vulnerable "positions".

The value of the market – then as now – rested on an illusion: its wealth could never be realised. Any attempt to do so would cause the price of shares to collapse. Their value would simply disappear. This is exactly what happened.

On Saturday 19 October the crash began in earnest. On Wednesday 2,600,000 shares were exchanged in the last hour of trading and the index fell 31 points. On Thursday morning 12,894,650 shares changed hands. Chaos began to give way to panic. It was averted for the one and only time by the intervention of "organised support", the clique of bankers and traders at the head of the market. They guaranteed to support stocks at their former high levels. It was enough to halt the slide for that day.

But on Monday 28 October 1929 the index fell 49 points; on Tuesday the ticker tape could not keep up. By the close of play 16,410,030 shares had been sold. The index fell a further 43 points, wiping out the entire gains of the previous year.

The bankers met the next day. From now on they were looking after their own interests. Regional banks began to recall their loans.

Even so the market rallied on Wednesday and Thursday, before an early closure for three days designed to allow investors to "return to their senses". They did and the market collapsed. By the middle of November the index closed at 224 down from its 542 high on 9 September. In a little over a month the savings of the American middle class had halved in value.

Inevitably the Wall Street crash had a profound effect on the US economy. The collapse in demand for consumer goods led directly to mass unemployment. The destruction of share values affected so called "sound" and "unsound" firms alike.

Neither could raise money for investment capital. The demand for fixed capital goods plummeted. The banks which had lent on the basis of their share portfolios were robbed of their financial base. There were widespread banking failures.

Today as we survey the current Wall Street boom it is tempting to see every blip as the start of the crash. But it is simply impossible to predict the point at which the rise in share prices will exhaust the limits of investment capital needed to keep it at its currently exaggerated height. We can, however, be sure that point will come.

Today's changed circumstances may mean that a stock market slide will not automatically lead to a total crash or subsequent world depression, but the 1929 crash remains an illustration of the instability inherent in the capitalist system.

Speculative bubbles are always likely to burst. And the workers are always the hardest hit.

# marxism

## THE BASICS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

# Socialism in a 'backward' country?

**John McKee** looks at the "three concepts of the Russian Revolution" that grew up in the debates prior to the outbreak of mass struggle in 1905

IN DECEMBER 1917, the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci welcomed the revolution in Russia with an article called "The revolution against *Capital*".

Like many other socialists across Europe, Gramsci thought socialist revolution was ruled out in a backward, semi-feudal country. In Russia there were only five million industrial workers out of a population of 150 million and more than 80 per cent of the population were peasants.

"This is a revolution against Karl Marx's *Capital*", Gramsci declared. "In Russia Marx's *Capital* was more a book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat. It stood as a critical demonstration of how events should follow a pre-determined course; how in Russia a bourgeoisie had to develop, and a capitalist era had to open...before the proletariat could even think in terms of its own revolt, its own class demands, its own revolution."

What was Gramsci talking about? Why would a Marxist have ruled out socialist revolution in a country like Russia?

George Plekhanov, the "father of Russian Marxism", had popularised the idea that Russia had to go through capitalist development before it reach socialism. The idea arose in the debate between socialists and "populists" in the 1880s.

The populists argued that Russia's revolution could skip straight over from a peasant economy to communism because in some places peasant life was communal. Plekhanov argued that Russia would have to follow the road of western European development. With the development of capitalism the working class would grow and, Plekhanov thought, make common cause with the liberal bourgeoisie to establish democratic rights. Only then, after decades of capitalist development, would the working class enter into direct struggle with the bourgeoisie for a socialist revolution.

At the time, most socialists agreed with this.

Plekhanov could certainly point to a number of passages from Marx to justify his position. In a much quoted passage in the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1959, Marx wrote:

"No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed."

This economic argument – that in a "backward" country there could be no question of the workers taking power, as the productive forces were not developed sufficiently for socialism – proved decisive within the Marxist movement.

On the other hand, every socialist in the second half of the nineteenth century could see that the bourgeoisie was becoming afraid of its "own" revolution: of the struggle for land, democratic rights and national independence. In many cases the bourgeoisie, terrified of the revolutionary working class, turned to the military machine of the old order to crush the workers, abandoning their own struggle for a democratic republic.

Marx summed up his view of the relationship between the workers' revolution and the unfinished bourgeois revolution in his *Address to the Communist League* in 1850:

"While the democratic petty bourgeoisie want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible...it is in our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions."

He went on to outline how the workers should do this: "Alongside the new official government they must simultaneously establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, local executive committees, councils and clubs...The whole proletariat must be armed at once with muskets, rifles, cannon and ammunition, and the revival of the old style citizens' militia, directed against the workers, must be opposed."

### IN BRIEF

■ **Before 1905 Marxists in Russia all agreed that the coming revolution would start as a "bourgeois" one**

■ **The Mensheviks believed that the overthrow of the Tsar and the democratic republic could be achieved in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie**

■ **The Bolsheviks were convinced the bourgeoisie would shy away from any revolutionary struggle. The workers had to seek an alliance with the peasantry instead – but still the revolution would be limited to a radical democratic one**

■ **Trotsky rejected the notion that the revolution would be limited to bourgeois tasks – the coming revolution would be socialist, he said. And in 1917 he was proved right.**

Fifty years later, the Russian socialists were locked in debate about what this meant.

By the eve of the 1905 revolution in Russia there were two strategies for the Russian revolution within the workers' movement. One was held by Plekhanov and the Mensheviks which saw the main task of the Russian Social Democrats as prodding and encouraging the liberal bourgeoisie into establishing a democratic republic, a regime that would develop a capitalist economy. This meant, above all, not "driving the bourgeoisie into the camp of reaction" with talk of socialism and the arming of the workers. The other conception was developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

Instead of saying, "we have to wait for a bourgeois revolution, made in alliance with the liberal politicians", Lenin – the leader of the Bolshevik faction – argued: we can't wait for the liberals, we can't refrain from struggle for fear of frightening them. If revolution breaks out we fight for a provisional government of workers and peasant parties, and we make the revolution as democratic as possible – even if that means fighting against the so-called liberal bourgeoisie.

Like Plekhanov, Lenin stuck to the idea that Russia could not jump over the bourgeois revolution. He wrote in 1905:

"The Marxists are thoroughly convinced of the bourgeois character of the Russian revolution...We cannot jump out of the bourgeois-democratic framework of the Russian revolution but we can considerably broaden that framework, create within the bourgeois society more favourable conditions for the further struggle of the proletariat."

But for Lenin there was no question of believing that the cowardly Russian bourgeoisie would take on the Tsar and consummate their own revolution. Lenin recognised that the proletariat would have to look for other allies to break the power of the autocracy and its army. For Lenin this meant a fighting alliance with the peasantry.

Lenin correctly recognised the agrarian question as "the crux of the Russian revolution". The demand for the nationalisation of the land, a bourgeois measure, which would allow the development of capitalist agriculture on the American model, with peasants leasing their lands from the state, had the potential to destroy the landed aristocracy and the monarchy that headed it. Lenin knew the bourgeoisie would have no truck with such a measure because of their links to the landed gentry and their fear of the revolutionary masses.

So, in contrast to the Mensheviks' perspective of an alliance with the bourgeoisie, Lenin counterposed an alliance with the peasantry. This could take the form, Lenin believed, of the "democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants". The new regime would establish a democratic republic, bring about a radical redistribution of land, end despotism and oppression in village and factory, improve the conditions of the workers and carry the revolution to Germany and the rest of Europe. On this basis – crucially with economic aid from a socialist Germany – the revolution could rapidly move on to a socialist stage in Russia.

Trotsky, in the cauldron of the 1905 revolution itself,

advanced a third alternative to the two strategies of the principal factions of Russian Social Democracy. He argued that the Russian revolution would start as a proletarian revolution, with a workers' government carrying out not only bourgeois democratic tasks but "socialistic tasks" as well. It was Trotsky's strategy that, in the end proved right.

Trotsky confronted the weakest point of Lenin's strategy: how could two different classes share power together? The peasantry as a class was not intrinsically socialist, as Lenin knew well. "We support the peasant movement," wrote Lenin in 1905 "in so far as it is revolutionary democratic. We are preparing to fight against it in so far as it asserts itself as a reactionary anti-proletarian movement. The whole essence of Marxism is in that two fold task."

In so far as the dictatorship remained on the ground of democracy, Trotsky argued, it implied that the workers would be obliged to postpone socialist measures – for example the modernisation of agriculture into big farms and co-operatives. As he described it later in *Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution*, Lenin's strategy could have led to a "dictatorship of the peasantry" with the workers participating.

But as Trotsky pointed out, the peasantry, especially in Russia, was incapable of assuming the reins of power. Only the working class had the coherence and the class interest to do that. This was the lesson of the struggles of 1905, with their massive general strikes and their workers' councils: these embryonic workers' governments came into existence before any liberal democratic government. Indeed their appearance was one of the reasons the liberals stopped fighting the Tsar.

Trotsky did not underestimate the importance of the peasantry in the revolution, nor did he disagree with Lenin's programme for winning the peasants to the side of the workers. But for Trotsky the dictatorship had to be one of "the proletariat leaning on the peasantry", a workers' government committed to carrying out both democratic and socialist tasks in the context of turning the Russian revolution into a European one.

Trotsky was to develop this third perspective for the Russian revolution in jail after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, writing the pamphlet *Result and Prospects*. He called the strategy "Permanent Revolution". It was not until April 1917 when the living revolution exploded the contradictions within the "democratic dictatorship" slogan that Lenin finally abandoned his old concept of the Russian revolution.

In his characteristically forthright way Lenin took to task the Bolsheviks who still clung to the old slogan. "Whoever speaks now of a 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' only, is behind the times, has consequently in effect gone over to the side of the petty bourgeoisie and is against the proletarian class struggle. He deserves to be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques."

■ **A future article in this series will look at the development of the strategy of Permanent Revolution**

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION?

"Bourgeois" is the French word for the capitalist class: the factory and share owners who own most of the property. So it is difficult to think of a "bourgeois revolution".

However, before the year 1600 political power belonged to the feudal aristocracy, who owned all the land and had a monopoly on armed force and political power. The bankers, merchants and factory owners who formed the rising bourgeoisie had to fight for political power – often employing the "mob" of the towns as shock troops.

The French Revolution (1789), the American Revolution (1776) and the English Revolution and civil war (1642) are examples of classic "bourgeois revolutions".

During the nineteenth century, however, the "mob" was replaced by the working class – and the bourgeoisie became less keen on revolutions altogether.

# Workers' party must smash Mugabe's corrupt regime

**ZIMBABWE**

Next year Zimbabwe will be celebrating twenty years of majority rule, but President Robert Mugabe and his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) are in deep trouble. The government stands accused of corruption and mismanagement. Living standards are declining, the economy is in a mess and opposition has been growing across all sectors of society. Mugabe's insistence on sending troops to the Congo created an acute crisis: the war is costly and unpopular and the attendant fuel price hikes have sent inflation spiralling.

Now the first steps have been taken in the formation of a new workers' party. The main trade union federation, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), with a membership of 350,000, has joined together with church, students and women's groups to form the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). A 20,000 strong rally last month launched the new party after pressure grew from rank and file workers. The new party is led by ZCTU General Secretary and miners' leader, Morgan Tsvangirai.

But will the new party be able to provide answers to Zimbabwe's problems? The economy has been led close to disaster by Mugabe's government, with inflation running at over 60%, high interest rates and unemployment over 50%. The free market reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have meant swingeing cuts to public services, slashing the education and health budgets and pricing basic education and healthcare out of the reach of the majority.

Key health indicators such as maternal mortality have fallen below the old Rhodesian levels – whereas the early years of majority rule saw substantial improvements. But at the same time these "reforms" have failed to produce the promised economic recovery. The corruption and cronyism that has lined the pockets of sections of both the white and black elites is now a barrier to economic development.

Workers have resisted the attempts by bosses and government to make them pay for either the IMF's demands or the economic crisis. The last two years have seen a series of strikes, including general strikes against the cutbacks and for

wage rises to meet inflation. On the very weekend of the launch of the new party, hotel and catering workers were on strike for a 50% rise. There is no doubt that the new party can draw support from the working class, both unionised workers and the urban poor. Workers will expect pay and jobs to improve and a restoration of services along with an end to repression.

But there will be other pressures on the new party. Business leaders and international investors would now like to see a more "modern" democratic system which will bring stability and keep profits rolling. They will be quite prepared to countenance a new workers' party – as long as it keeps Zimbabwe safe for capitalism. And this seems to be what the MDC leadership wants to do.

Their hymn sheet sounds suspiciously like that of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Rejecting "ideological straightjackets" in favour of pragmatism, Tsvangirai told the Zimbabwe Independent: "Our main thrust would be to achieve fiscal prudence, low taxation, and eliminate wasteful expenditure in government."

MDC leaders have already been in talks with both business and government over a "social contract". The ZCTU proposals are close to those of bosses' bodies like the Bankers Association. The ZCTU position paper proposes a wage freeze and price hikes on key goods – in return for price controls to stop uncontrollable inflation and increased government spending on social sectors. If this is a taste of Tsvangirai's political programme, then workers should start fighting against it now and for an alternative strategy.

Other key problems facing the Zimbabwean masses are land reform and civil rights. These will both be vital issues in the run up to the legislative elections next April. White commercial farmers still control the most fertile land while the black majority find it difficult to produce even subsistence levels of food.

Mugabe's programme of land redistribution has been both a farce and a tragedy, with many "resettlement" farms falling into the hands of ZANU cronies. Where peasants have been resettled they have received little assistance to make the land productive.

Last January Mugabe did an about-face. In an attempt to divert attention

from his own problems, especially growing opposition to the military intervention into the Congo, he launched an attack on white farmers including the seizure of 841 farms. This backfired when the IMF immediately cancelled a promised loan. But this radical posturing does allow ZANU-PF to pose as the more radical party on the land question.

Unless the MDC comes out unequivocally for land redistribution, then the ZANU supporting press will be able to continue to accuse it of "parroted what the IMF and World Bank say". However, if the MDC leadership take a progressive position they risk losing the backing of bourgeois coalition forces. Workers and the rural poor will have to demand that the MDC leaders open up the party for a full debate on the political programme on this and other questions.

The questions of constitutional and civil rights are major issues. The government has come under fire from both workers' organisations and bourgeois critics over its handling of constitutional reform.

The existing constitution, a product in part of the transitional arrangements to majority rule worked out under British supervision, gives substantial powers to the President. Mugabe has used these to manipulate parliament and trample on civil rights. Oppositionists have been jailed or worse, like the two journalists imprisoned and tortured for exposing a coup attempt earlier this year.

Students in the forefront of defiance of the regime have been expelled from their courses. When the regime could not stop the turmoil in the University of Zimbabwe they shut it down.

Mugabe has also run campaigns against homosexuals and begun to stir up ethnic tensions.

ZANU-PF has been the overwhelming political force for two decades, trading on its radical credentials and past popular support, but also relying on corrupt manipulation of the political process. It receives \$1.1m a year under the political parties finance act but others get nothing. Much of the media, including both broadcasting and press, are ZANU controlled. Rigged elections enabled it to capture 147 out of 150 seats in the 1997 election.

Not surprisingly, the government appointed Constitutional Commission

is discredited and boycotted. ZCTU has, along with the churches, built the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) as an alternative body, convening a "Peoples Convention" last June.

The MDC presents itself as a broad front to win over a number of the forces involved in the NCA. Certainly it is right to ensure that both Shona and Ndebele workers' leaders are prominent in the new party. Their stress on the participation of women is also progressive. But for the MDC leaders a "broad coalition" could be an excuse to hitch up permanently with bourgeois forces who may share the same aims on some aspects of civil rights, but would run a mile at the sight of real workers' democracy.

Neither the social and economic problems nor the democratic ones facing Zimbabwe can be resolved in favour of the vast majority if the new workers' party shackles up with the liberal bourgeoisie and promises to run the country like a "responsible" labour party.

Workers taking action must not hold back for the elections in April 2000. They need to take action now to defend their rights and living standards. Strikes and occupations could bring down this weak but vicious regime. If workers can form or build their own factory organisations then these should convene a genuine, revolutionary Constituent Assembly to decide the future constitution and to address the burning social and economic questions in the interests of the masses, rather than leaving it to a committee of experts.

And the new workers' party needs to be a real workers' party, pressing forward the interests of the working class and poor peasants: for an end to corruption through the establishment of workers' control; against IMF-inspired privatisations and cut-backs; for taking the banks and big business into working class hands and for redistributing the land to the peasants without compensation to the white settlers and Mugabe's cronies.

In short, it needs to have a revolutionary programme for ending capitalism, not for running it better for the international bosses. Whether it can be transformed in this direction is a question of struggle – and revolutionaries in Zimbabwe need to take up that struggle now before the current leaders carry through their own project of building a fully fledged reformist party.

# UN s

After the Indonesian army finished ravaging East Timor the west moved in to ensure that the Timorese people pay a high price for independence

**EAST TIMOR**

Having watched for months as the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) terrorised the people of East Timor in the run up to the referendum on independence, the imperialists who run the United Nations finally decided to intervene.

On 20 September a military force of several thousand, led by the Australians, landed in Dili. By this time the capital city of East Timor was a burning ruin. The country had been laid waste by the TNI and their anti-independence militias. In the weeks after the vote for independence these forces, who the UN had left in charge of "security", pursued a scorched earth policy. Out of a population of 850,000, some 700,000 people had been driven from their homes.

Towns and villages had been torched. Hundreds, if not thousands, of pro-independence Timorese had been hunted down and massacred. Many were forced onto ships only to be thrown to their deaths as the army scoured for anyone suspected of supporting independence. Now, 200,000 are being held as hostages in camps in West Timor under the guns of the pro-Jakarta militias.

It is clear that the 5 May agreement on the referendum, brokered by the UN with Indonesia, Portugal and the East Timorese resistance, the CNRT, was a deadly trap that the TNI was allowed to spring. The decision to let loose the militias, with the support of the army, was taken as long ago as last February at a meeting of militia commanders and top generals.

The imperialists, through their massive intelligence gathering and monitoring operations based in Darwin, knew the details of the plan and of the involvement of the commander in chief, General Wiranto, back in June. No attempt was made to protect the population or arm the resistance forces. Indeed the imperialists insisted that Falintil, the pro-independence guerrilla movement, remained disarmed in its "cantons", as decreed in the May agreement, throughout the massacres.

Even at the height of the killing and destruction the imperialists sat back and applauded when President Habi-

# Stop the executions of student leaders!

**IRAN**

The new academic year in Iran has started just as the last one finished: with pro-democracy students lining up for a confrontation with the reactionary Islamic government. The latest excuse for the Islamists to continue their reign of terror on the campuses is a satirical play which mocks the 12th Imam.

Leading clerical judge, Ayatollah Hossein Mazaheeri, immediately called for the authors to be executed, while Ansaar, the military wing of the clerical fascist Hezbollah movement, told a rally on 28 September, "These people are Rushdie clones", effectively an incitement to murder.

President Mohammed Khatami had the cheek to call on students to, "stand strong against all attempts to create crisis and tensions". Yet the beleaguered leader is directly responsible for the crisis in Iran. Elected – with mass student support – in 1997 on a promise to liberalise the regime and grant freedom of association and speech, Khatami gave the green

light for a wave of repression in July, when students took to the streets to demand he keep his word.

The full extent of that clampdown is only just beginning to emerge. On 12 September, Gholamhossein Rahbarpur, President of Tehran Revolutionary Court, pronounced the death sentence on four leading student activists. A further 45 have been sentenced to prison, where they will be tortured. Those condemned to death have not been named but are thought to include Manuchehr Mohammadi, Gholamreza Mohari-Nezhad and Maryam Shansi. The only evidence against them were "confessions" beaten out of them.

The right wing Islamists now have Khatami in their sights and are, through their control of the judicial system, prepared to execute many more student and worker militants in order to crush the democracy movement, topple the President and reinstate a hardline leadership.

But such an outcome is far from assured. The pro-democracy students have widespread support, particularly among the workers who have launched a record number of strikes this year, successfully fought

off neo-liberal labour legislation and held the biggest May Day rallies since the early 1980s. If the students can forge councils of action with the workers and organise self-defence of their demonstrations and sit-ins, Khatami could be brought down from the left.

Students and workers all over the world can help them in this task by supporting the International Campaign in Defence of Iranian Students.

Already MPs Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn and union leaders John Foster (NUJ) and Joe Marino (Bakers Union) have lent their support. Union branches and student unions must join up.

- Stop the executions of Iranian students!
- Release all political prisoners and drop all charges!
- Support the students' and workers' struggle against the Islamic Republic!

**Messages of support to: ICDIS c/o Workers Power.**

*Letters of protest to: His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammed Khatami, The Presidency, Palestine Ave. Azerbaijan Intersection,*



# ets a deadly trap



Joy at referendum result turned to horror as Australian trained death squads burned Dili

bie declared "martial law" on the island. They had good reason. As one official in the State Department asked in an unattributable briefing: "What is an island of 800,000 compared to a nation of 200 million?" The US, Britain and Japan have billions of dollars invested in Indonesia. This is far more important to them than a few thousand lives. They have spent the last 25 years training and building up the Indonesian army to do just what they are doing in East Timor.

It is not just the British Governments, Tory and Labour, who have been selling Hawk fighters, water-cannon, CS gas, sniper rifles and much more to the Indonesian army. The Australian government, who now claim to be the saviours of East Timor, have probably had the closest relations with the regiments based in Timor. The Security Treaty of 1995 signed with the dictator Suharto led to many joint exercises with the Indonesian armed forces. Over 2,000 military personnel have been trained by Australia. Particularly close links existed by the Australian SAS and Kopassus, one of the most brutal and repressive sections of the army. They even trained together in anti-guerrilla operations in Timor!

Australia sold ground attack aircraft, patrol boats, Nomad aircraft for military surveillance and much more to their "allies". Their reward was the 1989 Timor Gap Treaty, which allowed for the joint exploitation of one of the largest oil and gas fields in the world, lying between Timor and Australia.

The problem the imperialists faced was that they could not ignore the slaughter. In the years after the 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor the West played a despicable role in helping to conceal the deaths of at least 200,000 people, massacred and starved by an Indonesian army determined to crush resistance. But the August referendum had concentrated the world's attention on this tiny island, and the UN's "credibility" was at stake.

Even worse for the Australian government their own labour movement, increasingly aware of the rotten collaboration with the dictatorship, rose

in revolt at the do-nothing response to the massacres. They imposed their own workers' sanctions on the murderous Indonesian regime. (see box)

With the breathtaking hypocrisy that imperialist politicians excel at, the Australian government, in alliance with their British and US backers, decided to intervene "to save the East Timorese". It should be obvious, given the role that these predators have long played in the region, that there was absolutely nothing progressive in this decision.

If these governments had really wanted to help the East Timorese, they would have sent them unlimited arms and aided their struggle against the militias and TNI. Instead they stood by while the poorly armed resistance forces in the towns were destroyed.

To the very many people who supported the East Timorese people but who felt there was no alternative to imperialist troops going in, we say that these troops will soon demonstrate that they are not saviours (except of the fake "human rights" credentials of the imperialist politicians) – they are the oppressors who will continue to enslave East Timor.

The alternative to the troops was to help the East Timorese masses organise themselves so that they could resist the militias and TNI. How could this be done? By a massive extension of workers' sanctions against the Indonesian regime, by active support for the pro-democracy activists and fighters in Indonesia itself and by a mass campaign in every imperialist country to demand the governments to give arms and aid, without conditions, to all forces fighting the TNI and its militias. Workers and socialists should have opposed the imperialist intervention for what it was, the grabbing of East Timor as their own semi-colony.

But it was not just the Labour and trade union bureaucracy in Britain and Australia that sowed illusions in the "humanitarian intervention" by the imperialist force, Interfet, fronted by the UN. Some of the so-called far left became cheer leaders for the intervention. The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of Australia, the largest far left group, called on its own bourgeoisie to

send in the army. A statement from its National Executive in early September declared:

"If the UN Security Council continues to argue that an international military force cannot be sent to East Timor without the Indonesian government's agreement, then the Australian government should act unilaterally and send its armed forces into east Timor to end the NT/Polar-organised terror campaign."

The French LCR and various other sections of the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" quickly followed suit.

Even the Socialist Workers Party in Britain could not bring itself to openly utter the words, "No to UN/Imperialist intervention" during the many lobbies and pickets in Britain which were dominated by those calling for UN inter-

vention. To do so would have threatened their bloc with left Labourites like Tony Benn and the Stalinists around the Morning Star, who both claim the UN is a force for world peace and stability.

The SWP had to back-pedal on its criticisms of Benn and the Stalinists. Its paper warns of the dangers of previous UN interventions but cannot bring itself to make the necessary and clear call: "UN/Interfet troops out".

Yet this is exactly what revolutionaries must say if any steps towards real East Timorese independence are to be taken. Every imperialist intervention in the last ten years – under the guise of either the UN or Nato – has led to the creation of imperialist protectorates, not independent nations.

For the terrorised and scattered population of East Timor, any respite from the massacres perpetrated by the TNI and militias is welcome. It is no wonder they greet the Interfet forces as friends. Yet it was these same governments and armies that aided and abetted the repression and exploitation of their country.

The East Timorese leadership, the CNRT/Falintil has contributed to the disaster by sticking with the May agreement. Their most experienced fighters remained inactive throughout the massacres, so keen was the CNRT to prove to the imperialists that it could be trusted.

Even now as the killings continue, and when the knowledge and experience of the Falintil would be invaluable in tracking down and neutralising the militias, its forces remain inactive. The deputy commander of Falintil, Lere Anan Timor, recently declared that "although well armed, Falintil would fight only if asked by the international force, Interfet." This was because they were "determined to honour the peace signed last May". The May agreement tied the resistance forces hand and foot, while giving complete freedom to the Indonesian military to destroy the country and yet the leadership of the CNRT continues to abide by it in the hope of being rewarded by the imperialists with a share in the spoils of office.

If the imperialist are allowed to dig in, this will be a long time coming. The UN spokesperson for East Timor has

already declared that for "a fairly long period" the country will be a "non-self-governing territory": democratic self-government will continue to be denied to the people of East Timor. Meanwhile those in charge, the imperialists, will organise "reconstruction" through IMF and World Bank loans. The debts will be paid by giving the multinationals the rights to extract oil and gas, making vast profits for themselves.

That result can only be prevented if the masses, together with rank and file supporters of the CNRT/Falintil, stop the collaboration with imperialism. The soldiers of Falintil should immediately enter the towns and help build self-defence organisations.

They should agitate among the rank and file troops of Interfet to persuade them to hand over weapons so they can effectively take on and destroy the militias. Together with the workers and peasants they should establish democratic councils which can convene a national revolutionary constituent assembly to re-establish an independent state free of Indonesian or UN control.

They should appeal to the international labour movement to aid their struggle – sending money and material support and taking solidarity action, blocking shipments of weapons and supplies to their enemies.

Above all they should forge a common struggle with the Indonesian student and workers' movement, proving in action that together they can defeat their common enemy, the Indonesian army and the forces of reaction. The masses of East Timor and Indonesia, not imperialism and Interfet, hold the key to the real liberation of East Timor.

- Arms and aid without conditions to the East Timorese resistance
- All TNI forces out of East Timor – disarm the militias
- Re-impose workers sanctions against Indonesia until all troops are removed
- Immediate recognition of East Timor as an independent state
- For a revolutionary constituent assembly and a workers and peasants government
- UN/Interfet forces out of East Timor

## Aussie workers deliver solidarity

**The actions by workers in Australia contrasted dramatically with those of their Tory government. Prime Minister Howard's government stood by while the Timorese were being slaughtered. The Australian trade unions took the lead in imposing workers' sanctions on the Indonesian regime.**

**The Maritime Union of Australia estimates that 31 vessels were boycotted tying up \$80 million worth of cargo. The Services Union banned all air-freighted goods to and from Indonesia. The oil workers refused to process newly purchased Indonesian crude oil. The Indonesian diplomatic missions had their postal services cut while other workers refused to take their rubbish away.**

**The unions also played a leading role in the massive demonstrations called to protest at the massacres. Over 100,000 came onto the streets of Melbourne and other cities during the crises with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) playing a key role in the mobilisations.**

**The CFMEU also helped organise attempts to blockade the Indonesian airline Garuda, as the trade unions who organised the check-in workers retreated from action fearing the**

**Australian government's anti-union laws.**

**This wave of workers' action showed the enormous power of the working class in delivering practical solidarity. The workers' sanctions, which were also taken by workers on the West Coast of the USA and in Canada, put considerable economic pressure on the regime.**

**Unfortunately the movement was rapidly diverted into calls for military intervention by the UN and Australia.**

**Immediately it became apparent that a force was going to be sent the Australian TUC called off the actions in mid-September. This was despite Howard's comments justifying the intervention in terms of "Australia's national interest" and agreeing with one interviewer that they were now the USA's "peacekeeping deputy" in the region.**

**The Australian section of the LRCI, Workers Power Australia, participated in the demonstrations arguing for the workers' sanctions to be extended not called off. They countered calls for UN/imperialist intervention with demands for immediate military aid to be sent to the Timorese resistance, without conditions, to aid their fight against the TNI and militias.**

# Blair's German twin in trouble

## GERMANY

The last few months have been an unhappy time for the Red-Green coalition government in Germany. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its middle class coalition partner, the Green Party, have lost every election.

In the regional elections in Hessen, Brandenburg, Saarland, Thüringen, Sachsen, and the municipal elections in Nordrhein Westfalia, the SPD lost between 5 and 15 per cent of its previous vote. In east Germany it is now the third party in many regions with a vote just above 10 per cent.

The Green Party did even worse. In the east German regions the Greens are about to be completely destroyed.

The reasons for the government's defeats are obvious. Schröder, the SPD leader and Chancellor, and Eichel, his new finance minister, have relentlessly attacked the working class that elected them to office.

■ Soon after the election, left SPD leader Oscar Lafontaine was kicked out of the government, removing the main ally of the trade unions

■ German troops fought the first war since 1945 in the Nato attack on Serbia. German imperialism has been diplomatically strengthened and stands well placed to benefit from the post war economic and political order in the Balkans

■ The government wants to introduce a £20 billion austerity package, which will hit welfare services particularly hard. This is a conscious attempt to reverse the modest reforms that had been introduced by Lafontaine

■ The government has frozen pensions for the next two years

■ On the environment, it has given in to the demands of the nuclear power lobby and the car industry

■ It has continued the racist immigration policies of the CDU/CSU, the state repression against Kurds and watered down the introduction of dual citizenship for the hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers who have no political rights.

No wonder the bosses organisations applauded Schröder: he is doing just what they want and just what Tory leader Helmut Kohl failed to do for fear of arousing working class opposition.

The CDU/CSU, formerly led by Kohl, is now posing as a "caring, social" party. It has done so with a mixture of racism and demagoguery – denouncing cuts that Kohl himself tried to make a few years earlier.

The former Communist Party, the PDS, has strengthened its position in most of the elections. It has gained in all elections this year in the east, but also in the West (albeit from a very low starting point). In opinion polls in early October its support stood at about seven per cent nationally, much higher than at any time before. In east Germany the PDS is equal to or ahead of the SPD.

In the run up to the European elections a minority of west German left trade union officials came out in favour of the PDS. At the end of September an SPD MP left the party and is now considering joining the PDS.

Clearly, the SPD is in deep crisis, probably the deepest since the reshaping of the party after the Second World

War. Its grass roots supporters haven't yet gone over to the PDS in their majority, but in the elections they are abstaining in droves.

Schröder is at a turning point. He and his advisers had calculated for defeats at the beginning of the government's term. He is even using the latest defeats to demand more "modernisation". This means a purge of its "traditionalists" who support the "old" ideals of full employment, shorter hours and higher wages.

The "opposition" within the party is unlikely to fight Schröder. Eichel said he expects the SPD-left to give in, as it always does, and he is probably right. Its cowardliness is a tremendous weapon for the advocates of the "Third Way" in the party.

Schröder wants to use the current crisis to turn the party around, to get control over it, to make it more like Blair's New Labour.

Unlike Blair, Schröder faces a number of challenges not only in the party and at the polls, but also with regard to the class struggle.

Blair stood on the "achievements" of Thatcher and Major – notably the anti-union laws, the defeat and decimation of the union militants and the wholesale privatisation of industry. Schröder has not even passed first base compared to Blair.

Because of this Schröder's programme includes a number of tripartite forums – for example the pact for work, which is very much an example of "traditional" class collaboration between management, unions and the government. It is quite possible he may use the current losses in the elections to shift towards a Grand Coalition with the CDU.

There is an urgent need to fight Schröder and his goings-ernment on all fronts: inside the SPD and the unions – and on the streets and in the factories. The current crisis of the SPD, its massive inner conflicts, are also opening tremendous possibilities for revolutionary intervention into the crisis of leadership at the base.

If the PDS had fought the SPD seriously, it could have benefited in terms of membership and in terms of influence in the unions. But the PDS is itself a typical reformist party whose strategic objective is to become the coalition partner of the SPD, albeit without Schröder as leader. So instead of mobilising against the government, the PDS simply tries to strengthen the hand of the SPD left through "pressure".

Revolutionaries have a completely different starting point. We don't want to save the SPD for a future "left" government. We want to destroy its influence over the working class. That is why we support trade unionists, workers and youth when they fight Schröder, outside or inside the party.

But we do so in order to further the fight for a new revolutionary workers' party in Germany that can put a stop to Schröder's attacks and turn the fight to defend working class gains into a fight for working class power.

■ For a full analysis of the "New Centre" in European social democracy read *Trotskyist International* 26, available from 14 October, price £1.50, from Workers Power



Schröder: Losing support



Russian troops prepare to invade Chechnya

# No to Yeltsin's Chechen war!

## CHECHNYA

Last month the new Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin launched a ferocious attack on the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Around 50,000 refugees from Chechnya are estimated to have flooded across the border into neighbouring Ingushetia, which appealed for help to the international community.

Protest in the West at this second attack on the Chechens in a decade has been muted in the extreme. No wonder: Russia's generals say they are taking their cue from Nato's tactics in the Balkans. Indeed they give daily briefings, with videos of destruction wrought by cruise missiles and "smart bombs".

Putin said that the justification for the invasion was the wave of bomb outrages which killed more than 300 people in Moscow and other cities. These were despicable attacks on working class housing estates. But the government has produced no concrete evidence linking the bombs to the Chechen Islamist guerrillas headed by Shamil Basayev.

Basayev, who has openly claimed previous military attacks on Russian territory, said: "We had nothing to do with the explosion in Moscow. We never kill civilians. This is not our style."

In the absence of evidence the ancient principle for assessing such events is the best: who benefits? Many Russians and foreign commentators answer this question with the names Putin and Yeltsin. Others think the bombings are the work of the military and the secret services (the FSB), aimed at provoking chaos and allowing for the occupation of Chechnya as well as providing a pretext for draconian measures at home.

Moscow's Russian nationalist mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, has already used the bombings to launch a witch-hunt against Chechens in the capital, deporting several hundred. On 24 September the Duma passed a law granting further powers to the FSB. This extends its jurisdiction and powers of arrest in the occupation of properties and houses and dur-

ing vehicle searches. It can restrict citizens' freedom of movement if necessary, enforce house arrest, or make them hand over their property and houses to the FSB.

The naked economic reasons for occupying Chechnya lie in the lucrative annual oil production of 835,000 tons from 1,500 oil wells, as well as the 120,000 tons passing through the republic in the Russian pipeline from Azerbaijan. Minister of the Interior Vladimir Rushailo claimed:

"Criminals have established control over one of the federal states. Their target consists of the most important geo-strategic region of the country."

There are conflicting reports on whom the Russians intend to install in power in Grozny, if they take it. Such a regime will be seen by all Chechens for the puppet it is. Russia – even if it wins this battle – will face continuous unrest in the northern Caucasus region for the foreseeable future.

Russia has recently seen repeated governmental crises. In 1998 Yeltsin replaced Chernomyrdin with Kiriyenko. Then he too was replaced – after the August crash of the rouble – by Primakov. Then, this spring, Primakov was replaced by Stepashin. A few months later Stepashin was replaced by Putin!

These figures represented different cliques within the Kremlin, or in Primakov's case an outside imposition on Yeltsin from the security forces and the Duma. But it is not fully clear who Putin really represents. What is sure is that he is an ex-KGB high-flyer and close to the FSB.

His installation means that what we are witnessing is a "cold" coup by the security forces. It is "cold" – i.e. concealed – because they do not wish to provoke a hostile reaction from the forces expecting to gain from the upcoming elections.

Yeltsin's dying regime is awash with corruption. Since the crash of the rouble in August 1998, a stream of reports have appeared on the staggering scale of corruption and money laundering in Russia. In recent months the wave of exposures has intensified.

The Italian *Corriere della Sera* reported the transfer of millions of dollars by a Swiss company, Mabetex, to Boris Yeltsin and his daughters. Mabetex received \$335 million worth of contracts for the restoration of the Kremlin and other government buildings.

Then reports appeared in Switzerland about how Boris Beresovski, the corrupt millionaire close to Yeltsin's daughters, defrauded the Russian airline, Aeroflot, of \$250 million.

The *New York Times* has published reports on nine bank accounts with the Bank of New York, through which up to \$15 billion was laundered for the Russian Mafia, with Yeltsin's knowledge. Even IMF funds were alleged to have flowed into the pockets of the Russian Mafia. According to *USA Today* in addition to 12 former or current Russian cabinet members, Yeltsin and his daughters were involved.

US surprise at Yeltsin's corruption is a joke. The USA aided Yeltsin's campaign in the 1996 Russian presidential elections with substantial donations. The IMF flood of loans to Russia continues, with September's tranche of \$640 million being paid on time despite the corruption scandals.

The reasons are straightforward. The USA is prepared to pay the price of Russian corruption in return for its banks and multinationals being allowed to continue to loot the country and for support from the Kremlin for the US's policing of the New World Order. Yeltsin's dismissal of the more nationalistic Primakov, in the middle of the Kosovo War, was largely responsible for the collapse of Milosevic's resistance.

The victory of the nationalist Luzhkov-Primakov alliance in the coming Duma elections and Luzhkov's victory in the presidential elections next year strike fear into the Clinton Administration for just these reasons. They do not want to see Russian military and diplomatic assertiveness again.

Thus, despite warning against an invasion of Chechnya, the imperialists will stand back and let the Russian military rape and murder its way through the Caucasus.

# The sash Matgamna wore...

"IN THE negotiations at the end of June and early July, the New Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, turned himself into an auxiliary of Sinn Fein/IRA, twisting Unionist arms for them, publicly lying that he had got assurances from Sinn Fein/IRA that they would disarm, trying to persuade the Unionist leaders to do a deal with them – one which the Unionist leaders could not possibly have sold to their own supporters. It would probably have meant the end for the left liberal Unionist leader David Trimble, and the collapse of the Good Friday Agreement for lack of enough Protestant support in the Assembly."

The authors of this pro-Unionist outburst are the editorial board of *Workers' Liberty*. According to the magazine this unsigned editorial "Where is Republicanism going?" in the September 1999 issue, reflects the majority view of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL). It also represents yet another, deeper shift by the AWL into pro-imperialist politics.

The editorial goes on to blame Blair for reneging on a promise to the Unionists "that prisoners would not be released without the surrender of guns". Labour are now, it seems, Republican stooges and they, both are now guilty of threatening the peace process. According to the AWL:

"The stumbling block was Sinn Fein/IRA's unwillingness to do even token decommissioning."

This article is designed to evoke hostility among British workers to the plight of the oppressed nationalist community in Northern Ireland. Why else use the Unionists' phrase, "Sinn Fein/IRA"? Of course the two organisations are parts of the same Republican movement, but do we ever hear about the "British government/SAS death squads" or the "Unionists/UVF"? No. The only possible reason for the use of this phrase is to reinforce the British media's position that Sinn Fein should not be allowed into the Assembly.

The truth is very different from the picture painted by *Workers' Liberty* and its bourgeois media bedfellows. It is the Loyalist death squads, backed by the security forces, who pose a real and daily threat to the half a million strong nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

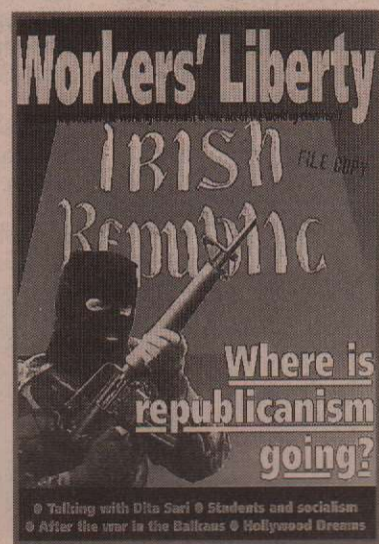
There have been over 100 pipe bomb and arson attacks this year on Catholic homes. In April, a prominent nationalist lawyer, Rosemary Nelson, was murdered by a car bomb which could only have been planted with RUC complicity. And throughout this period the nationalist Garvaghy Road has been under siege by baying Orange bigots demanding their ancient right to terrorise the Catholics when and where they feel like it.

The twisted logic of the AWL takes all of these examples of the oppression of the nationalist community to conclude that it is the heavily armed Unionist community (the RUC, the RIR, the Loyalist paramilitaries and the British army have more guns and bombs between them than the IRA has ever possessed in its entire history) who are the saints. The nationalist community and their one and only existing means of self defence, the IRA, are the sinners.

Socialists – especially in Britain, the country responsible for partitioning Ireland – have a duty to stand with those oppressed by imperialism and its agents. This means supporting the right of Ireland as a whole to self-determination, demanding the immediate withdrawal of all British troops from Ireland and supporting the oppressed in every conflict – armed or otherwise – with their oppressors.

The AWL have junked all of this. Instead it uses the language of the imperialists because it is now an apologist for imperialism and Ireland is not the only example of this.

The AWL supports the Zionist Israeli state's right to exist over and above the right of Palestinians to equality despite the fact that Israel denies nearly four million Arab refugees citizenship and



The Alliance for Workers Liberty has blamed Tony Blair for "giving in" to Sinn Fein and alienating the Orange bigots in Northern Ireland.

**Jeremy Dewar** charts the AWL's path from Trotskyism to left Unionism

residency rights and is now trying to cheat them out of the tiny bantustans accorded them by the Oslo and Wye River accords.

In the war with Serbia, *Workers' Liberty* refused to call on NATO to stop their bombing of apartments, hospitals, factories and elderly peoples' homes.

Now, in East Timor they refuse to demand the Australian-led troops get out of the country, putting their faith in an imperialist armed force that has long colluded with the Indonesian military.

A common thread runs through the AWL's politics today: hostility to the struggles of oppressed peoples against imperialism and neutrality when it

unprincipled alliances it made with Labour Zionists in the student unions (where it branded pro-Palestinian groups anti-Semitic).

The AWL's evolution from an opportunist left group to today's rabid "Foreign Office socialists" was hastened by the internal political degeneration of its unaccountable leadership clique around Sean Matgamna. When he decided to abandon the Trotskyist analysis of the USSR Matgamna borrowed the ideas developed in the 1950s by the US ex-Trotskyist Max Shachtman, who claimed Russia was a new form of class society. Shachtman, under the impact of the cold war, decided that the USSR

We need to ask what is the political motive for the nationalists' desire for a united Ireland, for the Unionists' wish to maintain the partition of Ireland. In particular, socialists must seek to uncover the national and class interests that the two opposing solutions serve if we are going to give an independent working class lead in the conflict. And to do this, we need to understand the history of the national struggle in Ireland.

The fight for national sovereignty – the right for a nation to freely determine its own affairs – is, historically, a task of the bourgeois revolution. As long as this does not infringe on another nation's right to self-determination and does not involve the establishment of privileges for certain ethnic groups or religious communities, the working class supports this struggle because it will aid the development of the forces of production, including the development of the working class itself. That is, it will break down the artificial barriers dividing workers and hasten the day when our class can unite to overthrow the bourgeois order.

In a 12 page article by John O'Mahony in the same issue of *Workers' Liberty* ("What is Irish Republicanism?"), the AWL seeks to prove that the Irish national struggle today does not fit these criteria for socialist support.

The key to this revision is the assertion that a "thoroughgoing" Irish bourgeois revolution was completed in the years 1869-1903. A series of land reforms – the right of tenants not to be evicted, to obtain a fair rent, to buy their small-holdings even, along with the disestablishment of the Protestant church – apparently dissolved national oppression.

Where the Republicans had failed, the British Tory Party succeeded:

"This was the Irish bourgeois revolution – for the achievement of which the republican Fenians had wanted to seize power – carried out by the British bourgeoisie."

But if this renders the Irish national struggle redundant since 1903 what

does this mean for future generations of republican fighters?

O'Mahony treats the heroic 1916 Easter Rising like a comic opera performed by a few isolated madmen. Similarly, the Irish civil war which followed the 1919-1921 war of independence (a war which O'Mahony strangely does not explain, given that Britain had granted the Irish a "thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution" 20 years earlier) is portrayed as a battle fuelled by mad ideas:

"Rationally, [Michael] Collins [who agreed to the British partition of Ireland] was right and has been proved right by subsequent history."

Unfortunately for O'Mahony, the facts of Irish history do not prove Collins right. Far from being a staging post on the road to independence, partition imprisoned half a million Catholics in "a Protestant state for a Protestant people" where they were openly and systematically discriminated against in jobs, democratic rights, housing and services.

Straight after partition, the Ulster Volunteer Force was converted wholesale into the new statelet's police service: pogroms increased as a result. Britain was so fearful of the Irish workers' republic that they created, armed and placed in permanent power a Protestant ascendancy in the Six Counties. That is the class content of the Unionists' desire to remain part of the British Empire; while the Republicans' aspirations for equality have a clear, progressive and anti-imperialist content.

The AWL's attempt to pass off the solution of the land question as the successful solution of the bourgeois revolution conveniently forgets the question of the right to self-determination. In fact, O'Mahony's analysis of the Easter Rising is remarkably similar to a Karl Radek article, which Lenin savaged:

"In this article the Irish rebellion was declared to be neither more nor less than a 'putsch', for, as the author argued, the 'Irish question was an agrarian question', the peasants had been appeased by reforms and the nationalist movement remained only as a 'purely urban petty bourgeois movement which, notwithstanding the sensation it caused, had not much social backing.' It is not surprising that this monstrously doctrinaire and pedantic opinion should coincide with the opinion of a Russian national-liberal Cadet ... Comrades who failed to realise the morass they are sinking into by repudiating 'self-determination' and by treating the national movements of small nations with disdain, will have their eyes opened by this 'accidental coincidence' in the opinion of a representative of the imperialist bourgeoisie and that of a Social-Democrat!"

Today there is a coincidence between the opinion of O'Mahony and that of the British imperialist bourgeoisie – but it is not accidental.

This is a systematic and gross adaptation to imperialism, dressed up in socialist verbiage in order to deceive workers and youth. It is what Lenin called, "social imperialism". Put simply it amounts to scabbing on the anti-imperialist struggle. Wherever British imperialism's interests are at stake around the world, the AWL will find a reason for not opposing them, even if they piously declare that they "give no political support".

The AWL in Britain poses as a radical alternative to Labour, to Stalinism and to the bureaucratic SWP. But it is "Foreign Office socialism" just as Shachtman's was "state department socialism".

Britain remains one of the most powerful imperialist nations on earth and is a bulwark of reaction against workers' unity and revolution from Ireland to Kosovo, from Palestine to Indonesia and East Timor.

As Marx wrote: "a nation that oppresses another forges its own chains." And a "socialist" organisation that colludes with that oppression, covers up for it, belittles the sufferings it causes, denounces those who fight against it – is part of the chain.

## *Socialists – especially in Britain – have a duty to stand with those oppressed by imperialism*

comes to semi-colonial states fighting back against imperialist armies.

This is logical, since for the AWL imperialism does not exist: there is no such thing as a "semi-colony" they say. They dress this as a "radical" claiming that it is simply a question of bosses versus workers, whatever the country. But while revolutionary socialists start from the interest of the working class against the bosses, we also recognise that the national struggle against imperialist oppression is a class question: we call for international workers' solidarity with the oppressed nation, whoever its military and political leaders are.

On Ireland, the AWL's latest denouncement of Blair as a tool of the IRA is just the end of a long process of degeneration. Years of unprincipled entry work in the Labour Party eroded its original formal commitment to support for the Irish national struggle against Britain. At the same time the AWL's pro-Zionism was shaped by the

was a new form of barbarism – a view which took him directly into the camp of the US imperialists, for example, on the question of the Korean war.

When it is not slagging off "Sinn Fein/IRA", *Workers' Liberty* is something of a fanzine for Max Shachtman, so it comes as no surprise that Matgamna has followed his hero into overt pro-imperialism.

Whereas Catholics in Northern Ireland have been oppressed and repressed throughout this century – and bitterly in the last 30 years – the AWL is sensitive mainly to the "oppression" of the Unionists. *Workers' Liberty* tells us: "Protestant-Unionists are entitled to self-rule where they are the majority (in north-east Ulster). The Catholics are entitled not to be held against their will in the Six Counties. The only solution is Protestant autonomy in a united Ireland that has close links with Britain, which the Unionists regard as their state."

# Education - it's a

Even before they were elected New Labour banged on about the importance of “education, education, education”. But what exactly is education for in capitalist society, and who is it designed to benefit? **Kate Foster** looks at the history of the school system in Britain in order to provide some of the answers

**P**RIOR TO the development of industrial capitalism and the urbanisation of society in the nineteenth century in Britain, formal education was restricted to a tiny minority within society. For the vast majority education meant little more than learning the skills of your father's trade or mother's work. In some countries universal free education still remains only an aspiration, in others it is severely under threat.

But the development of capitalism across the world led to a massive expansion of formal education and schooling, especially in the major imperialist countries. Why? The reason lies partly in the basic functions which formal education performs in capitalist society and partly in the demands of a growing and increasingly militant working class prepared to fight for access to education.

Education has always been the prerogative of and a requirement for the ruling class. The private education system – public schools in Britain – provides education for the ruling class. While fees are charged to parents, the private education system is subsidised by the rest of us.

The sons and daughters of the elite are taught a wide range of academic subjects and have access to sports and arts facilities unheard of in state schools. Rugby School, for example, has eight full time instrumental teachers; most state schools would be lucky to get a part timer with a broken violin coming in for a couple of hours a week. Class sizes in private/public schools are between 10 and 15, in state schools they can be 30 or more.

We subsidise this system through taxation. Private schools are granted tax loopholes, through charity status. Sending your child to private school does not come cheap, but even the £10,000 per year that rich parents spend on their offspring, does not cover the total cost of this highly privileged education. In countless hidden ways the state keeps these training camps for tomorrow's bosses solvent.

The government rarely interferes in the running of private schools. Unlike state schools, the private sector is relatively free to organise education in any way it sees fit. The old public schools are treated as national institutions, part of Britain's “heritage”. That is why drug dealing at Eton makes national news while the same activity at every inner city comprehensive you care to mention passes without comment.

The regime in public schools is frequently

highly regimented and hierarchical. The children are prepared academically and socially for their role as leaders in society. Of course, many describe the horrors of being separated from parents, being bullied and abused – life at public schools is not all ginger beer and scones for tea. Its purpose is to harden its pupils and instil in them the values of their class – values based on discipline, regimentation and cruelty. Public schools have been carrying out this function successfully for the past 150 years with very little change.

The state system has a very different function. Education for the vast majority of the population has always been more of a problem for capitalism. From its inception to the present day, formal, universal education has been an arena of class struggle.

For the capitalists education is necessary to fulfil two basic functions, one practical, the other ideological.

Capitalist production requires certain skills and special abilities from its workers. These change in different periods, reflecting different production techniques. Capitalism needs a flexible workforce and therefore a flexible education system. Teachers frequently complain about the endless changes in what they are required to do. Unlike private education, governments intervene directly in the curriculum and the organisation of schools.

Education Action Zones (EAZs) provide a good, modern example of this process. Educationally they have no rationale and yet they are at the heart of New Labour's plans for state schools. Modern capitalism requires cheap education but specialisation of the workforce.

The EAZ already established in Newham and the one planned for Hackney - two of the most impoverished areas of Britain - restrict the curriculum to basic skills: literacy and numeracy. They are expected to produce shop workers, catering staff and low skilled office workers. Why bother teaching these children history or art? EAZ schools in Liverpool are told to concentrate on music and the performing arts. After all the Beatles came from there and we all know Scousers are natural comedians!

The expansion of the service sector in London and the de-industrialisation of Merseyside and its re-invention as a cultural tourist centre are the real reasons for these learning priorities. In other words, getting workers ready to do the jobs the economy demands are at the core of this narrow vision of education for the masses.

Universal free education was first brought in by the 1870 Education Act. This move was influenced by the need for more skilled workers, literate and able to carry out more complex production techniques. But probably a more important factor was the widening of the franchise. The ruling class, pressurised into extending the vote to a section of the working class, was keen to ensure that the new voters carried on voting for the old ways.

At the heart of the new education system lay an emphasis on religion, regimentation and discipline, reflecting the ethos of the reformed public schools but with the discipline designed to instil submission to the system rather than an ability to run it. You might have to teach the workers to read, but you could also make sure they were taught their place – at the bottom of society.

Education has always been linked to ideology. Universal education became increasingly important for capitalism as the working class, propelled into class struggle, moved to challenge bourgeois ideology. The regime of uniforms, bells, standing up for teachers, registers and petty rules were integral to capitalism's ideological defence of its system. H. W. Hobart, a London printworker, describes state education in the 1890s:

“The elementary education given today in our Board Schools does no more than prepare the minds of the children for their patient obedience to the domination of a proud and haughty middle and upper class. The spirit of competition... is encouraged, the grab-all grasping idea of ‘profit’ is held up as an ideal to be striven for; the individual, personal, selfish doctrine of “get on, honestly if possible, but get on” is rammed and

jammed down the children's throats, but not a single word or hint of the advantage of co-operative association for the welfare of all is ever breathed.”

The children of the working class were being prepared for their working lives, turning up on time for repetitive and hard work and obeying the diktat of the foreman, or coping with the drudgery of housework.

The workers' movement quickly recognised that education is a double-edged sword. While the bosses can use it to perpetuate their values and discipline, the workers demand education to give themselves the chance of a better life and to understand and better challenge the existing system. The 1870 Act was also partly the result of pressure from the workers' movement.

As early as 1851, the Chartists called for free, compulsory education for all. This demand

## Comprehensive education has never been tried and yet is deemed to have failed

was one of the main planks of the original programme of the Social Democratic Federation. Education was also taken up by the trade unions. Resolutions were passed calling for a “truly national system of education”.

When the 1870 Act did not deliver what workers wanted, it galvanised the labour movement into taking up the issue of education more actively.

The ideal of education for all was contained within the 1870 Act but the reality was shaped by the limited resources capitalism provided. The schools were run by local School Boards. The Boards were dominated by the middle classes and money was diverted away from the elementary schools to subsidise fee-paying students from middle class families. The power of the Boards did, however, provide the possibility for intervention by the organised working class.

In 1888 the Central Democratic Committee was established to support progressive candidates for the London School Board Elections. The Committee was established by the Radical Federation, Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation.

The electoral manifestos and accompanying literature of the time reflects the breadth of the labour movement's concerns with education. They were not simply interested in expanding educational provision but also in what kind of education should be established. One area which attracted their attention was the nature of the curriculum. One historian of the struggle, B. Simon, noted:

“Socialists also carried into the Boards the long-standing working class demand for secular education. The election of Annie Besant, in particular, was a demonstration of support for secular principles, as a member of the London School Board, she advocated the teaching of science, criticised religious teaching, and questioned the position of the church schools and training colleges.”

Hobart's description of the classroom dominated by the requirements of teaching for a set examination in the 1880s will sound depressingly familiar to today's classroom teachers, struggling with the demands of the SATs tests and the latest diktat from Blunkett:

“...week by week, month by month, in the most barren and sterile ground, the teacher has to hammer and drive the course of education laid down by law. The children are urged, persuaded and coaxed into trying to become efficient for the so-called examination.”

In the late nineteenth century sections of the ruling class, who recognised the need to try

and win over a layer of workers to the side of the system, were also arguing for an expansion of education. In 1887 the National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education was established by some of the leading industrialists of the time.

The Association was primarily used to distribute propaganda material in support of the expansion of education, specifically scientific education. They were to play a part in the expansion of university education, away from Oxbridge, through the creation of many of the northern universities, for example, Leeds. Technical schools were also established in this period with local councils being prepared to levy a small extra rate (the “whisky tax” for instance in Birmingham) to ensure that local industry was supplied with the skilled craftsmen and technicians it now needed.

This movement was boosted by the realisation that Germany was outstripping British capitalism in its scientific and technical achievements. In 1902 Balfour's Education Act placed all the “board schools” under the control of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which were charged with developing the elementary schools and establishing secondary and technical schools, although secondary education was not compulsory at this stage.

Not all workers were fighting to extend education. For some sections of the working class formal education seemed irrelevant and oppressive. In rural areas children were still seen as an essential part of the agricultural production process. Families objected to their children being forced to go to school with little obvious purpose other than indoctrination.

School holidays became an area of struggle between school authorities, parents and children. At the end of the nineteenth century the authorities attempted to limit local holidays, cutting out traditional days for the wakes and local fairs. While they were largely successful in cutting down the holidays, such was the resistance that in Leicester, for example, the schools continued to close down for the summer holidays in the traditional holiday period of the first two weeks of July, unlike schools in the rest of the country which break up at the end of July.

Children are often seen as the passive consumers of education. Yet the history of education under capitalism is full of examples of pupils fighting back. This resistance was sometimes confined to individual rebellion and truancy but collective action did occur. It is evidence of the oppression of youth that these struggles, like those of women workers, has to a great extent become hidden from history.

Around the turn of the century waves of schools strikes occurred across Britain. The strikes were organised around demands for the abolition of corporal punishment, against increases in the school leaving age and increases in hours. Stephen Humphries, in his history of working class youth, *Hooligans or Rebels?*, quotes a letter from a Manchester school striker:

“Now when the boys went on strike, they demanded the abolition of the cane, and they also wanted a shilling a week to be paid to the monitors, because they were just used as lackeys. On the big day they met outside the school, over three hundred of them, and they marched to a field opposite the gaol walls of Strangeways. Then they marched along the main road, singing their battle parodies, and threw some stones at the school windows. The strike lasted for three days, but eventually they gave up and returned to school, and all the classes were lined up in the main hall to witness the punishment of the ringleaders as a lesson to them.”

In October 1889 school children in Kennington and Lambeth threatened strike action unless the following demands were met: free education, one free meal a day, no homework and no caning. In 1911 following the beating of a pupil for trying to organise a strike in South Wales, strikes took place in over sixty towns and cities throughout Britain.

The response of the authorities was hysterical. In 1889 the *Educational News* wrote:

“Obedience is the first rule of school

# class question!

life...School strikes are therefore not merely acts of disobedience, but a reversal of the primary purpose of schools. They are on a par with a strike in the army or navy...The are manifestations of a serious deterioration in the moral fibre of the rising generation."

Some pupils and their parents also challenged the ideas propounded by the schools especially the gung-ho imperialism and militarism handed down in assemblies, in history teaching and patriotic celebrations. Many working class children would get an alternative view from family members and friends active in the labour movement. A number of working class parents, for instance, steadfastly refused to let their children participate in Empire Day ceremonies.

After the horrors of the First World War, many teachers too were influenced by the pacifist or socialist anti-war movements, and various alter-

class children were deliberately relegated to the secondary moderns (few technical schools survived), where they had a restricted curriculum, poor facilities and little chance of staying on. Besides the "basics", boys did metal work, wood-work and so forth, while girls had a heavy diet of "domestic science", another reflection of the ideological pressures of the time, as women were driven from work and back into the home in the aftermath of World War Two.

But in other ways the Education Act was a victory for the working class, opening up further education and the universities, through grants, to thousands of working class people. This generation was to play a vital part in the next great battle over education, the fight for comprehensive education.

It is a strange fact about comprehensive education that it is a system which has never been

meet a conjunctural need within capitalism. The late 1950s and 1960s saw a technological boom within advanced capitalism. The Labour government came to power in 1964 talking of the white heat of the technological revolution. Changes in production would require greater numbers of skilled workers. The school leaving age was raised to 16 in 1974. Labour promised to get rid of the Eleven Plus which led to the vast majority of children being written off at an early age and effectively excluded from higher education.

But the development of comprehensive education was not simply a move to meet a need within capitalism. In fact, many in the ruling class detested the whole concept of comprehensive education, and still do as Baker freely admits.

The push for comprehensive schooling also came from those already involved in education,

els went down significantly and the number of pupils gaining qualifications rose rapidly. In the 1930s 90 per cent of pupils left school with no qualifications, by the late 1980s only 10 per cent left with no qualifications.

The election of a Tory government in 1979 and the onset of recession led to a full scale offensive on comprehensive education. Local Management of Schools undermined co-operation between local schools and the Local Education Authorities who attempted to ensure a balanced intake across schools in one area. The Tories set up Grant Maintained and opted-out schools as well as City Technology Colleges under the pretence of extending choice but in fact funneling money and pupils away from comprehensive schools.

The National Curriculum was used not to guarantee the entitlement of pupils to study certain subjects, but to impose right wing ideas within subject areas. At the same time the Tories were insisting, hypocritically, that there was no place for "politics" in education. The history curriculum, for instance, became the site of intense struggle. The Tories demanded the elevation of "heroes" and key events in British history such as Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar, while progressive teachers continued attempts to develop skills of critical thinking and an awareness of alternative interpretations of historical events and people.

Under New Labour education has continued to be a vibrant area of class struggle. Blair and Blunkett are determined to continue the hatchet-job on teachers started by Baker. Rather than restoring negotiating rights, they intend to impose performance related pay.

The proposals within the recent green paper on teachers' pay emphasise the individual teacher, rather than the collective effort, and "professionalism" - longer hours, more responsibility for more pay - rather than workers' rights to decent pay and conditions. If pay is the carrot, they have plenty of sticks. Ofsted to police teachers, Fresh Start plans to scare them.

Within the curriculum the next phase of capitalist production is clearly being signalled. Every subject must now include some aspect of Information Technology. The Internet is being promoted as a magic talisman which will transform education - and incidentally get around the chronic shortage of teachers.

Resources are being increased but in a highly selective way. Two tier education is more evident now than at any time since the 1950s. Some schools are left to sink. Others, with a higher middle class intake, are allowed to prosper. The undermining of the comprehensive sector is well underway.

New Labour is skilled at packaging so schools are no longer labelled secondary modern and grammar and Blunkett can boast that there will be no return to selection but other indicators label schools clearly for parents and pupils - the position in the league table and the percentage of pupils on free school meals are sure guides for the middle classes. As Nick Davies correctly pointed out, poverty and class remain the primary factors in determining what kind of education a child receives.

Excellence in the Cities - the Blairite project to address inner city deprivation - shows the ideological and practical aspects of education under capitalism in the Year 2000.

There is money, but it is to be used to identify the more able and pull them out of the local state schools. Within schools cheap - i.e. low paid and untrained - learning assistants will be employed to police pupils who will have fewer and fewer teachers. Technology will be used to equip the majority with basic IT skills, so you can get a job in a call centre.

Blair and Blunkett can expect resistance from working class youth and the labour movement as a whole. We can look back at the history of education, recognise the proud role the working class has played and learn the lessons.

The kind of education system we have reflects the balance of class forces which exist. Unless we fight for the education system our kids need and deserve, capitalism will impose its own needs and ideology upon state education. ■



1911: School strike in London. Young pickets prepare to confront police and press at Bath Street School

native education projects and alternative schools emerged. But most were short-lived and the next great expansion in Britain came in 1944, towards the end of the second world war.

This expansion in education, like the welfare state, was the result of pressure from the working class as well as being a response by the state to the needs of capital. Post-war capitalism was becoming dramatically modernised and needed to equip workers with higher skills. An expanding banking and service sector required white collar workers. Secondary education was extended to all, but in a segregated form.

The justification for this was that "every child must have the education appropriate to his age, aptitude and ability". In fact children were to be sorted and processed into the kind of workers or homemakers capitalism needed. The Act originally envisaged a tripartite system of grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns. This time the universities were to be opened up to the working class.

At an ideological level the bourgeoisie were keen to promote their ideas through the new education system. Because a few working class children were able to get a grammar school education, by slipping past the guards at the checkpoint established by the notorious Eleven-Plus exam, the system was sold as "meritocratic". This is the era that Blair and Blunkett hark back to when they lecture us about how everyone can succeed so long as you work hard and get a decent education. The notion of a meritocracy, created through state education, is used to this day to deny that poverty and class are a factor in success at school.

The reality was that the majority of working

tried and yet is deemed to have failed.

The post war boom led to an expansion in employment. By the 1960s, the rough division of working class children at the age of 11 was no longer considered functional. The grammar schools were seen as out of date and the secondary moderns were tainted by the label of failure and deemed not sufficiently academically rigorous.

Comprehensive education is a system of education which is not selective, but inclusive. It should be based on equality of access for all and resourced so that the needs of all individuals can be addressed.

Such conditions never actually existed in education and it is a question as to whether capitalism could ever deliver comprehensive education.

The recent articles in the *Guardian* by Nick Davies, based on an interview with former Tory education minister Kenneth Baker, provided a good insight into the strength of the comprehensive ideal and its ability to inspire hatred among the ruling class. Baker admits that the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) and parental choice were designed to undermine comprehensive education but he did not feel able to take the comprehensives head on:

"I would have liked to bring back selection but I would have got into such controversy at an early stage that the other reforms would have been lost."

Davies asked him if he realised that his reforms would nonetheless kill off comprehensives. Baker replies "Oh, yes. That was deliberate."

Comprehensive education, while it is based on the "ideal" of equality, was still designed to

especially teachers. The opening of higher education post-1945 increased the number of working class students gaining a university degree. This, combined with the expansion of education in the 1960s, meant that a whole new layer of teachers, from working class backgrounds, were employed in state schools.

These new teachers saw education as a means of liberating the working class. These were the teachers who developed progressive, child-centred education, who fought for mixed ability teaching and for the expansion of the curriculum.

Again school students played a part in forging the new education system. The National Union of School Students was established in this period. School student strikes, influenced no doubt by the increase in strike activity across the working class in the 1960s and 1970s, took up demands which were remarkably similar to those of the students of the 1890s, such as no corporal punishment. But they also demanded more student democracy, a chance to have a say in how the schools were run. They even raised the demand of being paid to go to school.

Despite the high hopes and total commitment of many who worked within the new comprehensive schools, the British education system never became a comprehensive system. Grammar schools - as well as private schools - continued to exist and continued to be propped up by the state. The system as a whole remained multi-tiered not comprehensive.

From the beginning the comprehensive schools that were established came under attack. But despite the snarling of the Tory press, comprehensives were successful. Illiteracy lev-

# A workers' army built

To make a revolution we will have to smash the existing armed forces and build our own, democratic workers state.

"It can't be done", is the response we are often met with. But it can - it was. In this article on the Red Army, built during the Russian Revolution, **Colin Lloyd\*** shows how it was done, and how, against the odds, the armed power of the working class defeated a powerful counter-revolution

**I**N 1917 the Russian workers seized political power. The soldiers, mainly conscripted peasants, played a key role in the revolution. Millions of Russian soldiers had been sent to their deaths during the First World War. Now, the army was in revolt and disintegrating, with mutinies and mass desertion. The Bolshevik programme was against the standing army and in favour of a people's militia. And it called for an end to the war with Germany.

But the German high command did not want to end the war except on its own terms. Meanwhile, the old provisional government - which included the reformist socialists (Mensheviks) plus the right of the peasant party, the SRs, and a series of liberal politicians - appealed to the old Tsarist officers to lead a counter-revolution.

So the question, "what sort of army should a revolutionary state have?" was posed not as a theoretical question but a practical one. The story of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants - to give it its full title - is one of a struggle to bridge the gap between what the working class wanted, and what it needed.

That struggle ended with the transformation of the Red Army into a tool for the Stalinist bureaucracy - but this was not inevitable.

## What kind of army?

The Russian Civil War began only months after the soviets took power. There was a Cossack revolt in the Don region, plus an attempt to assemble an army of Tsarist "volunteers" in Southern Russia. The soviet government signed an armistice with Germany in December 1917, but by January 1918 the peace had disintegrated and a new German offensive swept into Russian territory.

Lacking a revolutionary army to defend soviet Russia, the government signed away large tracts of territory in return for peace, in the Treaty of Brest Litovsk.

All attempts to utilise the remnants of the Tsarist army to stop the rout failed. Any socialists who had entertained the idea of reforming the army into a "revolutionary" defence force were quickly disabused. But what should be put in its place?

The vast majority of revolutionaries presumed it would be workers' militia: based on the working class, recruited from volunteers, with workers' democracy in its ranks and led by communists. Instead, in the furnace of war, the Bolsheviks were obliged to forge a standing army, based on conscription, with the majority of soldiers drawn from the peasantry, and commanded by ex-Tsarist officers.

Once the Bolsheviks signed the peace with Germany, Allied troops - from Britain and France - invaded Russia from north and south. Meanwhile in May 1918, 40,000 Czech soldiers from the Tsarist army revolted.

Trotsky was appointed War Commissar, replacing a sub-committee that had attempted to organise resistance so far. The task was to form an army that could fight in the field and beat the "Whites" as the anti-soviet forces named themselves.

## The raw material

Trotsky wrote: "For our task of constructing the Red Army we had to exploit the Red Guard formations and regiments of the Tsarist Army, peasant leaders and Tsarist generals. In fact we created the army out of the historical materials at our disposal and did our work from the point of view of a proletarian state fighting for its existence"

The early Red Army was assembled from:

■ **Intact regiments:** a small number of regiments that maintained cohesion and went over en masse to the socialist revolution - notably the Latvian Division. One of its colonels, Vatsis, became the first commander of the Red Army

■ **Red Guards:** these originated out of the factory workers' defensive detachments, formed under the Provisional Government. They were part time and, by 1918, Bolshevik led.

■ **Guerrilla units:** mainly mounted infantry, based on poor and middle peasant communities. Their natural method was hit and run fighting in the countryside. They were rarely Bolshevik led in this early period - often led by Mensheviks, anarchists and left SRs.

■ **Tsarist officers:** on top of all this there were the officers. When the Tsarist Army was dissolved, the officers were not demobilised. They were ordered to support the soviet government. Eric Wollenberg's history of the Red Army describes a typical scene: an officer under arrest is marched by armed workers into a room, made to sign a pledge of loyalty to the revolution and put in a car and driven to the front to command a regiment. The worker previously holding a weapon to his head announces that he is the "commissar" of the regiment and that most of the socialist soldiers have threatened to shoot the new officer when he arrives.

■ **Communist detachments:** because the early formations of the Red Army proved almost as weak as the Tsarist army, the Bolsheviks resorted early on to rushing party members - particularly the under-20s - to the front in concentrated detachments, which were often decisive in turning the tide.

## Workers' control: from above or below?

At the base of the new army the soldiers' committees that had helped break up the Tsarist army were quickly recreated in the form of party cells. These were democratic and did what every good socialist would do: they elected leaders, formed regiment committees and, wherever they were stationed in the countryside, sent agitators to foment the class struggle among the peasants.

However the workers' government was also organising from above. Trotsky as War Minister worked alongside the high command that, apart from a few "proletarian officer cadres", was mainly co-opted from the Tsarist officers.

Transmitting the orders of the high command were the normal military hierarchy of corps, divi-

sion and regiment commanders - again ex-Tsarist officers in their majority. But transmitting the orders of the party was also the Political Department of the Red Army, which usually consisted of a small group of cadres attached to a particular front or division, often party members, sometimes non-party middle class radicals.

Between all these stood the "commissars". Commissars had been appointed to politically "check" the orders of Tsarist officers even under the Provisional Government - the Bolsheviks did not invent them.

But whereas the Mensheviks and Liberals had seen the commissars as tools to reform the bourgeois army, the Bolsheviks saw them as a form of workers' control over the decisions of the Tsarist military specialists - many of whom deliberately sabotaged the fight, went over to the enemy, or treated soldiers as cannon fodder.

The problem was that the worker communist membership of the Red Army saw the party cells as the main form of workers' control - not the commissars. The commissars, having predated the Red Army, were often drawn from the ranks of Mensheviks and SRs, and even from non-party vaguely radicalised sergeants from the old army.

Relations between Bolshevik Party cells, the Political Departments and the commissars were to form the basis of some fierce struggles within the working class during the Civil War.

## The military opposition

Between August and November 1918 the Red Army made gains against Kolchak in the east and withstood an advance up the Volga by Denikin's forces. By early 1919 it was poised to go on the offensive. But at this point, a simmering debate over the character of the Red Army exploded.

The Bolshevik programme had called for a workers' militia. At its foundation, the Red Army incorporated most of the workers' militia units that existed, as well as tens of thousands of armed communists. Over 600,000 soldiers volunteered for service. But what existed by early 1919 was not a workers' militia: it was a regular, conscript army. And although there had been 6,500 working class officers trained (39,000 were to pass through the Red military academies by 1921) the command structure was dominated by the 50,000 or so ex-Tsarist officers.

During the initial battles with the Whites the revolutionary army suffered not only from the "normal" indiscipline of raw troops. It suffered from the lack of a command structure and the conflict between military and political priorities.

Military priorities may demand the sacrifice of troops, or an orderly retreat, or a feint attack where lives are lost simply to confuse the enemy rather than gain ground. Workers' natural inclination is to question such priorities - and millions of Russian workers had four years of experience of doing just this.

One solution to this problem was "dual control" where the commissars had to countersign every order, and where the commissar was the officer responsible for the welfare of soldiers. The other solution was the imposition of strict military discipline, including the death penalty.

Many Bolshevik activists reluctantly accepted the reintroduction of the death penalty as a weapon to keep treacherous Tsarist officers in check. So they were stunned when - following a series of unauthorised retreats where communist cadres had decided to "save themselves" - Trotsky had them shot.

At the same time, military discipline demanded alterations to the normal form of party activity and workers' democracy. Gusev, a party leader in eastern Russia and a key player in Red Army politics wrote:

"Party organisation in the army remodels itself along military lines and, as with the army, democratic centralism is replaced by military centralism: instead of elections, appointment; in place of resolutions, orders and reports...Our army suffers not from an excess but from a lack of discipline."

The *Communist Soldiers Handbook*, issued in December 1918 makes the Red Army com-



Trotsky (left) opposed "offensive theory" of Red Army leader Tukachevsky (right)

\* Based on a talk given at the Workers Power Summer School, August 1999

# t from scratch



The Red Army arrives  
Vladivostok, 1920 - and the US  
army leaves in a hurry

munist's task clear:

"If your commander gives an order validated by a commissar your duty is to submit to it without question, however senseless it may seem to you. You occupy a small sector, you don't know what is happening on the whole of the front; to you...any order may seem senseless. Don't let yourself be taken in by such a state of mind. Don't question an order. Don't discuss whether it is good or bad, because that will set others discussing it too...Instead of carrying out an action, all you will have is disputes and disorders...Communist comrade! Wherever you are, whatever job of responsibility you are doing, you must be in the most conspicuous position. You must enter the battle first and emerge last."

At the Eighth Party Congress, a "military opposition" to the Bolshevik leadership line on the Red Army emerged. It had strong support, not only among the Red Army soldiers but in the workers' districts of Petrograd and Moscow, where many of them came from.

Three political tendencies came together to form the military opposition.

■ First, those with grievances against absence of workers' control from below in Red Army. This was a genuine expression of desire to transform the Red Army into a real militia as soon as conditions allowed.

■ Second, the traditional ultra-left of the Bolshevik party, around the Democratic Centralist tendency. They espoused the "theory of the offensive" - i.e. wooden adherence to offensive action both in the military and the class struggle - idealised guerrilla warfare as the best form of revolutionary war, and advocated the replacement of Tsarist officers by "Red commanders" drawn from the ranks.

■ Third, an embryonic bureaucratism was apparent within the military opposition. It insisted on the "rights of communists" within the Red Army. Trotsky at this stage referred to it as a "military economism". Notably, Stalin's allies Voroshilov and Budyenny were supporters of the opposition, while Stalin himself tacitly supported it.

Trotsky was the hardest opponent of the military opposition. But the party leadership, under Lenin, were keen to make what concessions they could to the genuine concerns of the rank and file. They acknowledged the contradiction between the Red Army and the ideal of a militia and pledged that it was a temporary compromise. The majority's resolution pledged a return to a militia based on working class volunteers only at the earliest opportunity. It clarified the line of command: from the Party, to political departments, to commissars. It pledged to speed up the training of the "proletarian officer cadres".

The opposition resolution contained a general attack on the danger of bureaucratism and "Bonapartism", called for the expulsion of all ex-Tsarist officers and for the election of all officers.

However it rejected "party syndicalism" i.e. the autonomy of party cells at the front and the right of party members to challenge orders. It accepted the need for conscription, but called for more workers, fewer peasants.

In the end a joint resolution was passed without opposition, with the main concession to the opposition being more power for commissars over officers. It is clear that Trotsky was against any concessions to the military opposition. As the architect of the Red Army he was clear that the alternative to strict military discipline would have been counter-revolution and defeat.

Trotsky tended to see the workers' objections to military discipline as the product of backward consciousness among non-party workers. He tended also to see the worker-peasant army as the concrete form of the dictatorship of the proletariat "leading the peasantry" - and hence the discipline of the workers' government over the peasant soldiers as logical and necessary. He accused the Red commanders of being inexperienced military leaders (which they were) and of hiding their mistakes by blaming the troops (which they sometimes did). He also saw a lack of ruthlessness in the Red commanders, and accused them of failing to exploit victories - again a product of bureaucratic conservatism noted within workers' organisations.

Whatever the truth of all this, Trotsky soon had to moderate his attacks on the military opposition and accept the compromise. However, when the open struggle against Stalin's bureaucratic counter-revolution took place, in 1923, many of Trotsky's allies regarded him with distrust because of the vehemence of his earlier attacks on them.

## Political education

What was it like to be in the Red Army? The first Red Army symbol was a hammer, a sickle, a rifle and a book. Five million soldiers passed through the ranks of the Red Army up to 1921. As well as defending the revolution, the Red Army was transforming the consciousness of millions of workers, peasants and youth.

The political departments carried out not just revolutionary propaganda but basic education. As usual, the urban intellectuals sent to do this had to overcome the hostility of the soldiers and their own preconceptions.

Despite many difficulties, millions of workers and peasants found their first taste of freedom in the Red Army: freedom from ignorance and, increasingly, freedom from pogroms, hunger and starvation as the newly disciplined fighting force began to wipe the floor with the White armies.

In the end it was this education and political development that proved more decisive than simple discipline in the Red Army's victory. Despite their unpopularity, the commissars played a major

role in this transformation.

And despite the discipline, the Red Army was more democratic and egalitarian than any bourgeois army before or since. A Corps commander got 150 roubles a month, the same as a skilled metal worker and 25 roubles less than the "party maximum". There was no officers' mess; off duty officers had no rights to command off duty soldiers. Officers servants were abolished and they had to clean their own boots. In fact cleaning an officer's boots became a punishable offence.

## Theory of the offensive

In 1919 the Red Army decisively turned the tide against the Whites. At the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, in January 1919, a new political struggle took place over the Army.

This time the party leadership and part of the former military opposition united around the pledge to demobilise workers as soon as possible and return to building a workers' militia:

"The transition period must effect a reorganisation of the armed forces which will give the workers the necessary military training while withdrawing them from productive labour as little as possible. Only a Militia of Red Workers and Peasants based on the territorial system can conform to these requirements," said the Congress resolution.

However a new opposition grew up, based around ex-Tsarist officer (but Bolshevik convert) Mikhail Tukachevsky. Tukachevsky's unorthodox military ideas (that were later to make him a pioneer of mechanised warfare and the inventor of parachute formations) stemmed from his allegiance to the ultra-left section of the former military opposition.

Tukachevsky advocated the revolutionary offensive as the only tactic proper to a revolutionary army. There was no need for logistics and no need for guerrillas to work behind the lines of the enemy because the workers of the imperialist countries would play both these roles.

In 1920 Tukachevsky argued that since a workers' militia could not mechanise, and could not be used for the revolutionary war in Europe, there had to be a professional army based on the working class alone.

Though cloaked in ultra-left rhetoric, the 1920 opposition in fact betrayed the first signs of bureaucratism. Lenin and Trotsky were vehemently opposed to it and it was defeated - though not before gaining a resonance in the Comintern and tragically in the ultra-left leadership of the German Communist Party.

The debate was cut off prematurely, however, by the invasion of Russia by Poland, under the right wing dictator Pilsudsky. Tukachevsky commanded the armies that drove Pilsudsky back to the Polish border. Given a chance to invade

Poland, Tukachevsky proved in practice the one-sidedness of his theory. The Polish masses refused to support the Red Army, indeed the Red Army was smashed and driven back inside Russian territory - although this was in part due to the meddling of the Stalin and Voroshilov clique, it was also a political mistake by the party leadership.

## Unified doctrine or workers' militia?

By the autumn of 1920 the Polish war was over and Wrangel's armies on the retreat in the Caucasus.

The debate returned now to two questions:

■ How to transform the Red Army into a workers' militia?

■ What should be the military doctrine of the newly-stabilised soviet republic?

The debate over the "unified military doctrine" was conducted in a series of confrontations involving Trotsky, Tukachevsky and the general staff in 1921-22. Here Trotsky countered the idea that, just as each bourgeois state had a military doctrine, the proletarian army should have its own unique doctrine.

Military doctrines play a material role in allowing junior officers to act on their own initiative, knowing "what is required" without having to ask. At a higher level, however, they reflect the class forces within a given bourgeois state: Britain's reliance on sea power for 400 years was not just a "doctrine" dreamed up in the heads of the exploiters but reflected their colonial ambitions and their fear of a standing army drawn overwhelmingly from the working class.

In a series of documents (collected in the book *Military Writings*) Trotsky echoes what he was having to argue about art, science and culture in general: namely that the working class has to use bourgeois techniques and tools, placing them under its control. There is no specific proletarian military doctrine because the aim of the workers' government should be the abolition of the army and the creation of a militia, as the first stage of abolishing the state altogether.

Trotsky's opponents argued variously for guerrilla warfare, the theory of the offensive, mechanisation, the eclipse of trench warfare etc. as "the" military doctrine proper for a working class army. Tukachevsky, sticking to the offensive theory, even called for the Comintern to create an international general staff - not a metaphorical "general staff of revolutionary struggle" but a real general staff that was to command the insurrection across Europe from Moscow.

As can be seen from the debate over demobilisation versus a professional army in 1920, there was a clear link between the demand for a "unified military doctrine" and resistance to a return to the workers' militia.

This debate over the military doctrine took place in a changed landscape within the Red Army. The military doctrine group - Tukachevsky, Frunze and Voroshilov - were by now representative of the type of officer commanding the Red Army. There were now thousands more trained Bolshevik and worker officers in higher commands. Also a younger layer of the ex-Tsarists, who joined the party and became Bolsheviks but with little grasp of Marxism, was now more in evidence.

Tukachevsky himself was a good example of the social roots of the new bureaucracy. A junior officer under Tsarism, he could have never attained high rank until the revolution. But having thrown in his lot with the revolution he had a class interest in defending it. But he had no sympathy for the working class and no understanding of Marxism. Austere in his own way (his wife was ordered to commit suicide after being found with illicit extra rations at the front) he also stood in a privileged position by virtue of his rank and party membership. While the absence of real workers' democracy worried Lenin and Trotsky, it was never likely to enter the calculations of people like Tukachevsky.

It was in these conditions that the struggle against bureaucratism was fought in the Red Army between 1922 and 1924. This fight was lost - just as it was in the party and state. Stalin emerged as the eventual victor and the army that had defended the revolution became a tool for the defence of the bureaucracy - transformed into a bourgeois type army with a new privileged officer corp and without a shred of workers' democracy.

But in the civil war itself the Red Army showed what the working class can achieve. If the soviets proved that workers could rule for themselves, the Red Army of Trotsky's day proved that they could also furnish themselves with the means to defend that rule. ■

**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!

# INDONESIA ERUPTS

**Students lashed  
by water cannon  
and coshes –  
made in Britain**

THE INDONESIAN students have once again taken centre stage in the revolution. In mid-September they blocked the military's attempt to push through a draconian Security Bill which would have given the army wide powers of arrest and detention.

The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) – whose brutality was exposed to the world in East Timor – tried to force through the law in the dying days of old stooge parliament. Counting on a nationalist and right wing backlash following the "loss" of East Timor and the UN sponsored intervention, army chief General Wiranto attempted to give the military the power to take emergency measures to crush opposition in any province where the Security laws were invoked.

The plans provoked wide scale student opposition in the days leading up to the Bill's passage. Thousands demonstrated in Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Medan and other areas. The major protests took place in the capital where the parliament was the target.

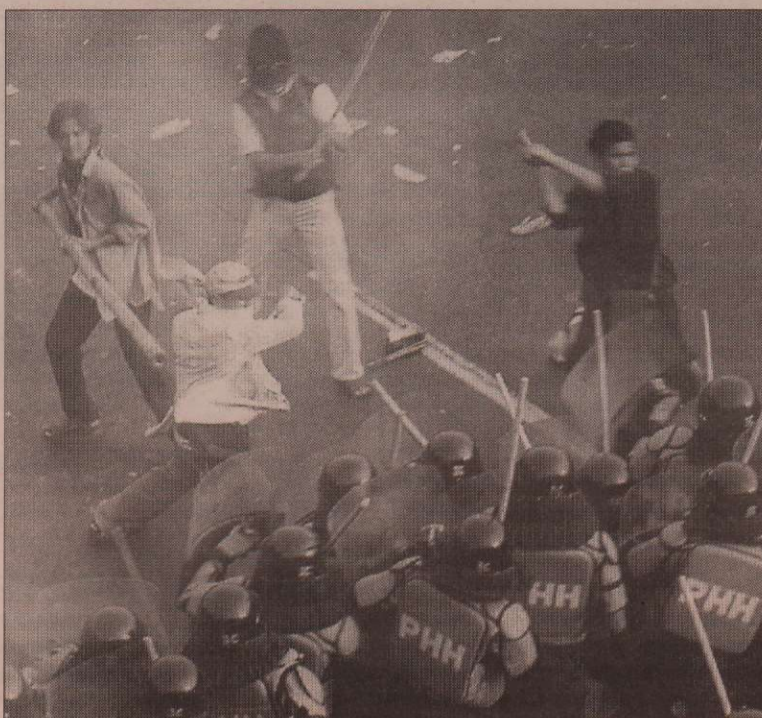
After two days of being attacked and gassed by the military the students returned to the streets with their own marshals, armed with staves, bars and molotov cocktails.

On the Friday, the last day of the old parliament, the students were joined by the workers and urban poor of Jakarta. Tens of thousands took to the streets and the main boulevard became the scene of barricade fighting. The stock exchange was closed early and the Indonesian currency plummeted.

By the end of the day six students lay dead, some killed by sniper fire, others shot outside a hospital by troops. One policeman was also killed. But the students had been victorious. Habibie's government announced that it was "suspending" the measure because of the opposition. The leaders of the main parties in the new parliament promised to revoke the bill.

The military has been thrown onto the back foot. Almost immediately the students were demanding the resignation and trial of Wiranto and Habibie. Further demonstrations are still taking place. In Lampung in South Sumatra, at least one other student, a member of the radical PRD, has been killed.

The Indonesian revolution is approaching a decisive turning point. The struggle in East Timor has shown, despite the great cost to the Timorese



### WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

- **Smash the power of the military and its dual functions**
- **Expropriate the wealth and businesses of Suharto and all his cronies who profited under the dictatorship**
- **Down with the IMF austerity agreement, expropriate all imperialist holdings and place them under workers' control**
- **Land to the peasants, expropriate the big landlords**
- **For the right of self-determination for all the peoples of Indonesia who want it; down with anti-Chinese racism.**
- **A socialist federation of the Indonesian archipelago and of South East Asia**

people, that the TNI is not invincible. It has been forced out with its tail between its legs after 25 years of bloody struggle. The impact is already being felt elsewhere in the country.

The loss of face for the military in Timor followed by its humiliation over the Security Bill shows the interlinked nature of the struggle. Every defeat for the TNI strengthens the revolutionary and democratic forces still battling to vanquish military control over society – the army's so-called "dual function". Conversely every victory for the military over the national minorities strengthens the possibility of a further dictatorship being installed to carry through a bloody counter-revolution.

The events in the last month have undoubtedly weakened Wiranto and his generals, but they have many resources

at their disposal to derail the revolution. Most importantly they have the new "Peoples Consultative Assembly" (MPR) which elects the new President in November.

The MPR was elected but has considerable numbers of appointees, both military and civilian. There are six major parties, none of which has an overall majority. Habibie and the military have been manoeuvring to keep power but their position is now much weaker. An attempt to bribe or bully the MPR to elect Habibie or Wiranto could lead to a massive social explosion.

A real danger to the revolutionary movement lies in the possibility that the bourgeoisie will adopt Megawati Sukarnoputri as the Presidential candidate best able to demobilise the masses and swindle them out of any real

change. Megawati has popular support, especially amongst the urban poor, dating from the time that Suharto tried to crush her party. But she poses no threat to the big business interests, the landowners or the IMF and has good relations with the military and few objections to their dual function.

Already Wiranto has convened a meeting of the leaders of all the major parties and some other "influential" figures. They agreed not to go onto the streets but to settle the spoils of leadership within the walls of the MPR. The aim is to isolate the militant students whose leaders, of course, received no invitation to the caucus.

It is vital that the students continue to demonstrate and mobilise on the streets. Only this way will the masses be fully drawn into the struggle against the military.

But more is needed. A revolutionary workers' party needs to be forged in the struggle. It must champion the cause of the oppressed national minorities, of the workers, the peasants and the urban poor.

A workers' party would immediately be warning of the dangers of Megawati, denouncing her support for the IMF austerity package, her collaboration with the military and her own publicly declared opposition to self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of Indonesia and her willingness to betray the democratic aspirations of those who voted for her in exchange for the presidency.

The students urgently need to turn their organisations of struggle into broader councils that can draw in the workers, urban poor and in the rural areas the poor peasants and rural labourers. Action councils can become the organising centres for the struggle against the military and its "dual function" and build their own organised militias – not the militias of reaction that were let loose in East Timor, but militias capable of crushing reaction and breaking up the TNI.

Action councils can become the basis for convening a genuinely democratic Constituent Assembly, a revolutionary one which would tear up the old constitution and start to address the social and economic crisis of the country through establishing a workers' and peasants' government.

■ **UN Hypocrisy over East Timor, pages 8-9**

## FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 0181 981 0602

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### FUND

Last month we launched a fund drive to raise money urgently needed to cover the cost of new technology. Our target is £3000 by May next year. In the first month we received £1019.28. Thanks to readers in London, Leicester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Cardiff and Coventry. Cheques payable to Workers Power marked "Fund" on the back

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