

TUBE WORKERS LEAD FIGHT IN LONDON

LONDON Underground workers, members of the largest rail union, RMT, have voted two to one for industrial action in support of the union's claim for improved pay and conditions.

They rejected an offer of a 3-per-cent pay increase with reductions in working hours because it meant the increasing use of part-time staff.

In a separate ballot maintenance workers also voted for strike action in a dispute over job security arising from threatened privatisation.

This is the third time that London Underground workers have voted overwhelmingly for strike action. Many workers decided to join the union after the first ballot resulted in a three-to-one vote to strike.

The present massive strike vote is remarkable at this time in the run-up to Christmas when money is tight and families have big expectations.

Workers are fed up with their trade union rights being trampled in legal actions. The two previous ballots were challenged in the courts.

■ The first resulted in an injunction against the other rail union, ASLEF, over the wording in their ballot paper.

■ The second led to a High Court ruling that only those members who had taken part in the original ballot could strike — new members were banned.

Although the RMT successfully appealed, 244 members remained under the original Court Order and the RMT decided to ballot all members for the third time.

During the dispute RMT members have held three 24-hour strikes which severely disrupted services but were largely supported by the travelling public. London Underground workers are not alone in experiencing attacks on jobs, wages and working conditions.

Unemployment, attacks on social and public services, closures of mines and factories, part-time and casual work have left millions of people near to destitution.

It is now openly admitted that poor people are more likely to suffer ill health than the rich (page 6).

There is growing realisation among workers in a wide range of industries that there is a need

BY THE EDITOR

for trade union protection.

This can be seen by the mood among London Underground workers, by the support for the Liverpool dockers, by the 10-week strike of Liverpool care workers, and by the strike of the Hillingdon hospital cleaners (see page 6).

That is why, despite a mass of anti-union legislation removing all the rights which the trade unions won in the last 100 years, and despite the threat of unemployment, unions report a growing number of new recruits.

The RMT reported 700 new members who joined specifically to take part in the fight over wages and conditions.

Similarly the Transport and General Workers' Union has increased membership in every section.

Plans

These new members do not come as a result of 'closed shop' agreements. On the contrary parliamentary legislation encourages and gives protection to non-trade unionists.

There is no doubt that we are in for a 'winter of discontent'. According to the London Evening Standard, London Underground management have plans ready to deal with any strike.

They intend to use white-collar staff as scab labour, switching them to station signalling duties. This threatens to be a bitter dispute.

Full support must be mobilised for the London Underground workers who are now leading the fight in the capital.



Tube workers' banner on an RMT-organised march against low pay earlier this year

Photo: Marg Nicol

A conference sponsored by Workers Press

Crisis in the labour movement The need for a new socialist party

Manchester Town Hall

24 February

11.30am-5.30pm

Please send me further details of the 'Crisis in the labour movement' conference.

Name

Address

Photocopy and send to Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.

Conference on Bosnia for UNISON members

Saturday 11 November, 1.30-4.30pm, 1A Centre, 1A Rosebery Avenue, London EC1. Chancery Lane tube. £2.50 donation. Write to Jackie Bailey, Camden UNISON, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE.

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Rail betrayal

CLARE SHORT distinguished herself at the Labour Party conference with a vicious platform attack on Liz Davies which helped make sure that Davies would be rejected as Labour candidate for North East Leeds. She was immediately rewarded with the job of opposition speaker on transport after being elected to Labour's shadow cabinet by MPs.

She has quickly repaid her debts by reneging on Labour's pledge that the rail industry would be renationalised when they form a government. For she now refuses to commit Labour to a fully publicly-owned railway system. Instead she says that Labour would 'regulate enormously tightly' the rail system — whatever that means. Of course it means anything that you want it to mean — or, better, nothing you want it to mean.

Michael Meacher, who until the latest re-shuffle of the shadow cabinet was Labour transport spokesperson, pledged at its Brighton conference that Labour would honour its commitment to renationalise the rail industry. His 'reward'? Demotion to the junior post of deputy to education and employment spokesperson David Blunkett.

Despite the fact that the government's plans for rail privatisation have already hit great problems, Transport Secretary Sir George Young repeated the pledge at the Tory conference that half the industry would be in private hands by the time of the next election.

Labour leader Tony Blair has set up a sub-committee under his deputy John Prescott to work out details of what should be done about the railways. The only purpose of this committee is to avoid the renationalisation of the rail system.

Short's talk about regulation under Labour being a deterrent to City speculators is a fraud. The regulation of the formerly nationalised industries has been a sick joke. Millions have been made by the directors and large shareholders of such companies while thousands have been sacked or seen their work casualised and their conditions seriously eroded.

There is a simple way to halt Tory privatisation plans dead in their tracks. If Labour pledged that all assets privatised would be taken back into public ownership with no compensation paid to their current privatised 'owners' — plunderers would be a better term — not a penny would be put up for rail privatisation.

Naturally should Labour make such a pledge they would come into direct collision with the City of London — the last thing that Blair and his new-found friend Clare Short want.

Bleak outlook for students

STUDENTS have no prospect of any improvement in their conditions under a Labour government. Indeed there is every chance that conditions will get even worse.

Labour cannot afford the promises it has made for the expansion of higher education, and should say so now. This was the blunt message from Brian Roper, a vice-chancellor who in the past has been a leading advocate of such expansion, speaking at a Labour Party conference on higher education held in Skegness last weekend.

The same conference heard of mounting poverty among students, so bad that they smelled of poverty, according to Paul Coathrup, a GP based at the University of East Anglia.

'There is a characteristic smell made up of damp, unwashed clothes and body odour, fried food and cabbage . . . increasingly, a number of students have that smell, because they are living in hovels and they can't wash their clothes and they cannot afford the heating costs to run a bath,' Coathrup said.

Labour education spokesperson David Blunkett is studying an Australian system whereby students pay back money for their studies through an additional national insurance charge over the first 20 years of employment after graduation. In other words Labour is getting ready finally to go even further than the Tories and scrap completely the right to free university education.

Blunkett made no mention of the scheme at the Skegness conference but said he wanted everybody aged between 16 and 24 to do nine months of 'citizen service' which would form part of their accreditation for further and higher education.

'No unity with pro-Bosnian Islamicists'

CHARLIE POTTINS's rejoinder (Letters, 30 September) has only just reached me in Australia, but I must ask for a few column inches to pursue the debate.

1. *Krajina*. Pottins does not dispute that Workers Press did not criticise Croatia's anti-Serb purge in the Krajina until three weeks after the conquest. He puts the delay down to waiting for 'reports from Croatia'. But reports in the ordinary bourgeois media gave us a pretty clear picture long before that.

What was the startling new evidence coming three weeks later? I remain convinced that Simon Pirani's political arguments, rather than any new facts, shifted Workers Press on this issue.

2. *'Anti-Serb'*. Workers Press's record on the Krajina is adequate evidence of the dangers of seeing the Bosnian-Serb, or Croat-Serb rebels, only as 'fascists'. Fascists have to be crushed: disaffected communities have to be conciliated.

Yes, Workers Press applauds pro-Bosnian Serbs, and quite right too; but in the same way as it can applaud anti-Israeli Jews and still support crushing Israel ('Zionism equals fascism').

3. *Muslim Solidarity Committee*. Pottins is still cross with me for mentioning the MSC leaflet

backing Islamic terror in Sudan, not with the MSC for doing the leaflet.

'What's Workers' Liberty's angle?', Pottins asks indignantly, as if only some special 'angle' could make us object to this leaflet.

Solidarity against 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia cannot properly be organised jointly with those who back 'religious cleansing' in Sudan. A rally for a *multi-cultural* Bosnia, as hospitable to the Orthodox, Catholic, Jew or atheist as to the Muslim, should not be opened and closed with Muslim prayers.

The Muslim Solidarity Committee should not be invited in as sponsors, despite their hypocritical speeches about multi-culturalism.

So Workers' Liberty runs

debates with Islamic fundamentalists? But we debate with Thatcherites like Roger Scruton and Kenneth Minogue too. We educate and arm ourselves to fight their ideas.

We would no more invite pro-Bosnia Tories to join us in a pro-Bosnia rally than Workers Press should invite pro-Bosnia Islamicists.

I note that Pottins does not contest my report that 'there was no speech [on 22 July] opposing the Bosnian government or raising the idea of Muslim-Serb-Croat workers' unity across the war frontlines'.

Chris Reynolds
Brisbane, Australia
Editor's note: Charlie Pottins is currently in Tuzla, Bosnia, but I am sure he will answer these criticisms on his return.

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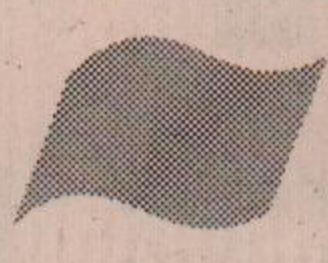
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Memorial meeting for Maire O'Shea
Irish republican, communist and fighter
Speaker: Bernadette McAlliskey
Saturday 18 November, 2pm-4pm (to be followed by a social)
At the Mechanics' Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 (opposite Chorlton Street bus station, side entrance)

Maire O'Shea died on 6 March 1995. She represented a tradition of Irish republicanism that was both radical and secular. Her active struggle for a united Ireland made her reject all deals with the British state. Maire became nationally-known in this country when she was arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and charged with conspiracy. After a major campaign, which was supported by her trade union and in which she repeated her politics to the jury in court, Maire was acquitted.

Irish politics, the politics for a free and united Ireland, were central to Maire's life. However she was a fighter against injustice wherever she saw it and she saw it everywhere. In particular her professional life as a psychiatrist was also deeply political. For many years she fought against a system that defines and drives people mad and then imprisons them for life in top-security mental hospitals. She understood the connections between racism and mental health and established in Birmingham a therapeutic centre for black people. In Manchester she offered her professional help to black people hounded and distressed by immigration laws.

Maire was a supporter of all struggles by working people and was an active member of her own union ASTMS (MSP).

► Come to the memorial meeting. Honour Maire O'Shea and discuss how we can take forward those causes for which she fought.

Organised by the Maire O'Shea Memorial Committee, c/o 1 Newton Street, Department 95, Manchester M1 1HW.

There is also a memorial concert being organised by the Troops Out Movement at 8pm, 16 September at the Trade Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Birmingham.

'Crisis in the labour movement' conference

'Should unions pay for Labour to mug them?'

KEITH STANDRING was a member of the Labour Party for almost 30 years until he resigned earlier this year in disgust at the Blair leadership. For much of that time he worked as a full-time trade union official in the general union GMB.

He now believes that it is necessary to build a new socialist party in the working class. He will be coming to the Manchester 'Crisis in the labour movement' conference called for next February to discuss this question (see front page). He tells Workers Press why.

WP: Can you tell me something about yourself — your trade union and political history?

Well I've been a committed socialist since my early youth. In the early sixties, especially in the north West, I was active in the various campaigns taking place here among young people, in support of the pensioners and the Liverpool dockers.

At that time I was working for Pills Royce motors in their purchase department at Crewe. In 1970, I became a full-time trade union official in Preston. But only months later I was appointed a national officer in the union and moved to London.

From there I moved to Manchester for about eight years and became the deputy general secretary of the Apex clerical union. I then played a key part in the amalgamation with the GMB and afterwards became responsible for the process industries — chemicals, pharmaceuticals, rubber, glass in the merged union. This is the job I now hold.

WP: What were your political experiences over these years?

I had been active in the Young Socialists in the 1960s and later joined the Labour Party, around 1968. I remained in the party until May Day this year, when I decided to resign on the ground that the politics of the party were distinguishable from those of the Tory Party.

I saw Blair as preparing a monumental betrayal of the working class. I wrote to my constituency party, Epsom and well, in Surrey, saying this.

WP: What effect did your deci-

sion have in the Labour Party?

This had a big effect because I had for a short period been the constituency party chair.

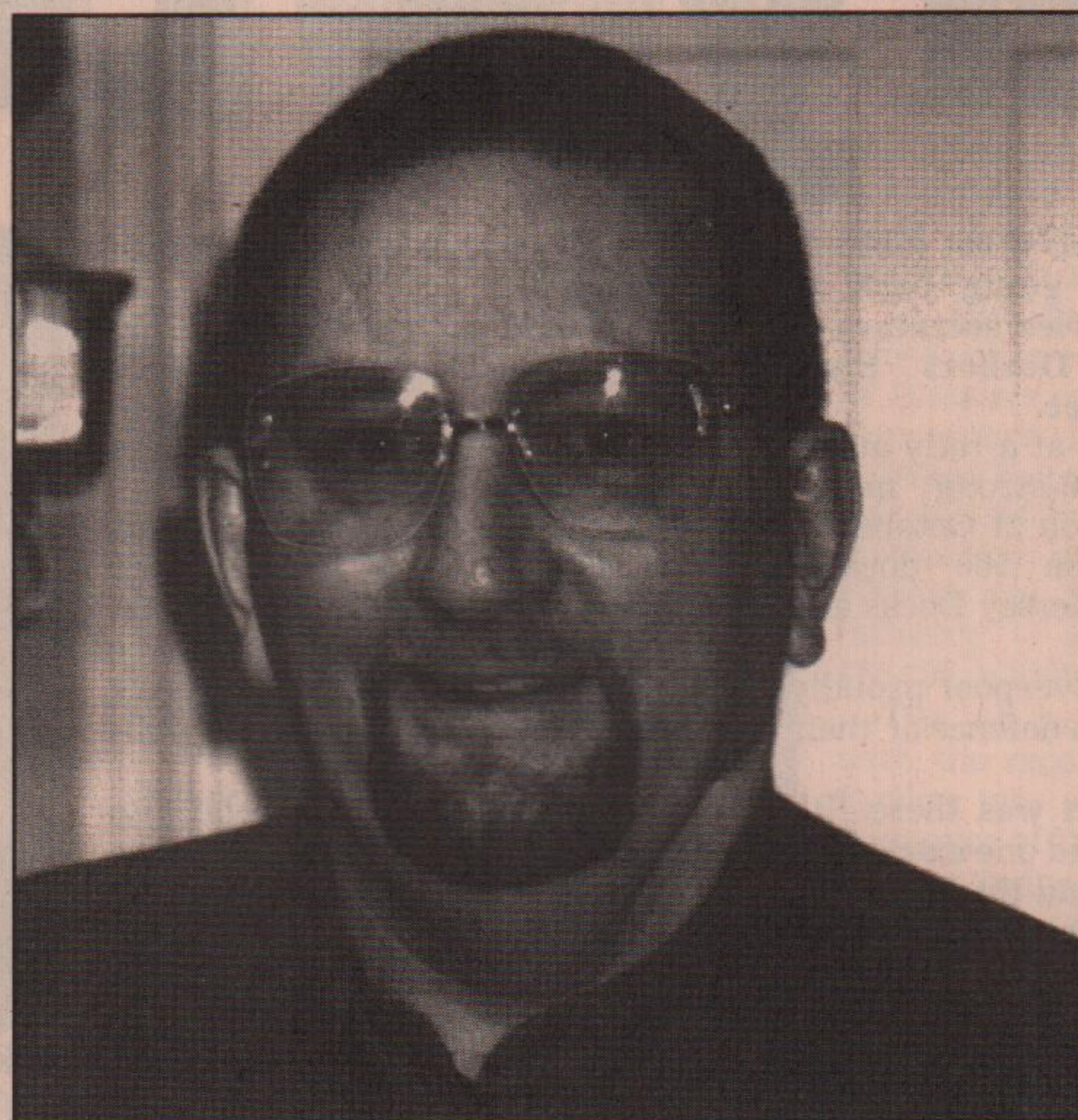
I was immediately contacted by three members of the local party executive who declared that they felt exactly the same, but were not at that moment prepared to take the same step that I had taken. They know that I respect their decision and they want to be kept informed of developments, about the Manchester conference, for example. My decision was taken because I could no longer see the Labour Party providing even the modest sort of reformist leadership that it set out to achieve in the days when I first joined it.

It seemed at that time a reasonable tool for the move towards socialism, but under Blair it has transformed itself completely into an apologist for capitalism, to the point where in the space of a few hours the party prevents a socialist from standing as a candidate and yet accepts into membership a right-wing Tory.

WP: Did anything in particular bring you to this decision?

It became clearer to me as the Blair leadership moved towards a centralised party structure, with substantial power being vested in the leader, with the elimination of even the modest forms of democracy that had previously existed, that it was necessary for the working class to found and build another party.

In order to make myself politically available for that, and because I was not prepared to fly under false colours, I resigned from the Labour Party. By accident this co-incided with the



Keith Standing

offer of voluntary early retirement for all GMB officials.

I decided to take the offer and will be retiring on 31 October. I will then be able to devote my time to work with any socialist or trade unionist — a member of the Labour Party or not — who is perturbed by developments in the Labour Party and wants to consider building a new socialist party.

WP: Can we go back to this sharp lurch to the right by the Labour Party leaders? How do you see this? Why has it happened?

Only history will reveal the complete facts, but from my own experience I would say that the ruling class, recognising the universal unpopularity of the Tories, found it necessary to vest influence and power in some political body that would better represent their interests.

In Tony Blair, they found a willing and useful tool, a man of little political depth or background, but somebody with deep antipathy to socialism. His leadership campaign in the Labour Party was assisted by the ruling class and its media. He immediately set his stall out to ensure that the universal detestation of the Tory government was used to

the fullest extent to convert the Labour Party from its original reformist stance into one which is a direct apologist for capitalism.

WP: Do you see any significance in the use of the term 'New Labour'?

Blair and his cohorts want to distance themselves from any social-democratic, let alone socialist past. It seems that over the past period, while there have been 112,000 brand new members joining, some 38,000 old members have left.

That means, in a real sense, that the membership has a quite different character. In real terms it is a different party. The new members rarely meet the existing membership.

WP: When you speak of a new socialist party, what do you have in mind?

I have only one criterion about such a party: it must be a party aiming not simply to defeat the Tories at elections. It should be seeking to remove the system that Toryism represents politically and replace it with a socialist system.

How this is to be achieved, the form of such a party and its programme are matters that I think must be discussed as widely as possible by all socialists and trade unionists.

I am delighted with the initiative launched by Workers Press to hold the conference.

I first came into contact with your paper when I became interested in Workers Aid for Bosnia and think that the conference you are sponsoring will provide a good opportunity for socialists and trade unionists to discuss this matter seriously. They will each bring their ideas to that conference.

I don't see the new party as being any of the existing groups writ large, certainly not a cover or a front for some other force. It has to be a genuinely socialist party that draws its membership chiefly from the working class, because I do accept that only the working class can emancipate itself.

Working-class organisations are pretty fed up with people being parachuted in to every demonstration and so on, with the sole intention of hi-jacking it to force it behind a 'line'. This is anathema to genuine socialists.

WP: Do you see any possibility of any members who are still in the Labour Party and who might remain in the Labour Party, taking part in these discussions and participating in the coming conference?

Absolutely. This was the right decision for me. But there are those real socialists in the Labour Party who still believe that it is possible to change the policy and stance of New Labour.

I am sure that comrades in the Labour Party, who are feeling grave disquiet but think that the direction of the Party can still be changed, will be more than welcome at this conference. I hope many will come along.

WP: As you know, there is a great feeling to get rid of the Tory government. What would you say to such people, many of whom are opposed to Blair and might well share your views about the need for a new party?

I am sure that the people associated with the conference have no doubt about the need to get rid of the Tories at the next election.

But the question is: what will happen when Labour forms the next government? It is clear that capitalism in this country is in a serious state of decline, if not decay. Reforms are not going to be available to it. If such reforms were available they would have been carried out by the Major government.

Blair sees his role as being a policeman on behalf of the ruling class, whose main task is to ensure that organised labour is ultimately destroyed.

He has made his position on

trade unionism clear: he accepts the vast bulk of anti-union laws, which he needs in place to carry out this punitive expedition for the ruling class.

WP: After many years of experience in the trade unions, how do you see the present situation there?

Just over 100 years ago, finding that their industrial gains were being removed by political action in the courts, the unions found that neither the Tory nor the Liberal Party represented their interests. They founded the Labour Party to defend their interests politically.

Well, they did it once. They now have to ask the question: is Labour fulfilling this objective?

Unions will have to decide as collective bodies: what do we do with our political funds? Does it make any sense to go on funding a body that acts in a manner inimical to our own interests? I think our answer has to be: no it doesn't make sense. You don't pay people to mug you.

WP: Should the unions stop raising a political levy?

I don't think that this is a justification for ending the political levy. Today it is more vital than it was 100 years ago that the unions be represented politically. I believe that the unions have to begin the task of building a new socialist party.

WP: How do you see the international aspects of this discussion? It's clear that the Labour Party is not the only reformist party in crisis: France, Spain, Germany for example. You presumably have had contacts with trade unions in other countries?

It is clear that capitalism is international. This is seen in the industries for which I was responsible as a trade union official. These are very international industries, with corporate giants having great financial clout. The Spanish government has recently been required by an international chemical company to change over 20 of its labour laws in return for the opening a new plant in Spain, where of course you have a social-democratic government.

Even at a very basic level, organised labour has to have an international character and it must also have practical links with fellow workers world-wide. This is what interested me in Workers Aid for Bosnia. I'm lucky in having been able to be involved with a number of such organisations.

Looking at it politically, the working class is international in character and I've for a long time believed that a socialist party to be effective must be an international party, with in our case a British section. This is well understood by workers.

Future of Marxism: a vital preparation

HERE'S six lectures left in the Future of Marxism series before Christmas.

These are a vital part of the build-up to the 'Crisis in the labour movement' conference in February and everyone who can get to them is urged to attend.

At the lectures, there is plenty of time to ask questions about things you aren't sure about and contribute to the discussion on the topic.

Next January there is to be a Future of Marxism conference in London.

The four lectures that have already taken place have given insights into the fight for a new party for the working class.

Geoff Pilling's lecture on Frederick Engels discussed his famous work *Condition of the Working Class in England 1844* and the current conditions in the working-class movement.

Pilling talked of the recent changes by the Blair Labour Party

leadership and what it means for the relations between the working class and that party.

Quintin Hoare gave the lecture on *Why Did Yugoslavia Fall Apart?*, in place of Branka Magas who was unable to attend.

From his 35-year acquaintance with former Yugoslavia, he traced the development of the struggles in the Balkans from the beginning of the last century.

He described how the two 'unifications' of the Balkan peoples in 'Yugoslavia', before and after World War II, contained the clash of two ideas: a centralised and militarised state and a federal state.

Under the Austrian empire, Croatia had become economically advanced. Serbia, on the other hand, was militarily strong and had managed to break from the Ottoman Empire.

John Lea, like Pilling, also used Engels's work on the condition of the working class in Eng-

land to discuss questions of *Capitalism and Crime Today*.

He said it was hard to imagine that the progressive features of crime — the idea of crime as 'protest' mentioned by Engels — could any longer hold.

Whereas before, acts of burglary, for example, were carried out by members of the working class on members of the ruling class, they were now carried out against working-class homes. The tendency Engels saw last century for the classes in Manchester to geographically separate had gone even further.

Lea and Pilling have recently jointly edited a book to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Engels's work, to be published shortly by Pluto Press.

Last Thursday, **Steve Drury** continued the Engels theme with a lecture on his *Dialectics of Nature*.

Next Thursday (2 November), **Kofi Klu** of the Africa Liberation

Support Campaign will speak on *The Struggle for Socialism in Africa*. Klu was born in Ghana and studied for several years in Moscow.

In coming weeks, there will be the following lectures:

■ **Bill Hunter** on *Some Aspects of Trotskyism after 1945* (9 November);

■ **Keith Gibbard** on *The Crisis of Bourgeois Economics* (16 November);

■ **Terry Brotherstone** on *The historian's tale: the persistence of history and the necessity of Marxism* (23 November);

■ **Istvan Meszaros** on *Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition* (30 November); and, finally,

■ **Cliff Slaughter** on *What is to be Done? — Now!* (7 December).

The lectures take place at 7.30pm in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Holborn tube

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Inside left

Perry backs Bambi

ANYONE still wondering what a Labour government led by Tony Blair portends could have gained some insight from Peregrine Worsthorpe's column in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 15 October.

Looking back over the changes in Tory leadership since Sir Alec Douglas Home, Worsthorpe remarked that 'the active search for wealth creation' is an inadequate base for a political party, for 'during hard times' a party controlled by and geared to 'active wealth creators is unlikely to produce the political leaders who can make the consequential cuts in public expenditure acceptable' ('Blair better suited to axe the welfare state', *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 October).

In other words, the 'active wealth creators' by which Tory Worsthorpe means, not the real wealth creators, the working class, but the wealth appropriators, the capitalists — need somebody else to do their dirty work.

Worsthorpe reckons Lord Home was too patrician and 'racked with guilt about the 1930s slump', and Ted Heath 'lost his nerve'. Margaret Thatcher realised there was 'no more need to water down capitalism with a lot of crocodile tears for its victims', but 'even Mrs Thatcher dared not touch the welfare state'. (Oh no?)

'This problem is going to get worse as the economic crisis deepens,' Worsthorpe predicts. It will no longer be possible to fund 'the immense burden of old-age pensions'. Mr Major is 'too gentlemanly to turn really nasty', he goes on. But Labour's Tony Blair has taken 'the high ground'.

'One of his predecessors, Ramsay MacDonald, did flinch and panic when faced with the 1931 crisis, could not bear to administer the necessary medicine without relying on the Tories, in a national government, to hold his hand. Everything in Mr Blair's recent record suggests he is made of sterner stuff.'

'At times of capitalist crisis the great need is for a party that can transcend the blind greed of active wealth creators,' Worsthorpe explains. Unlike the modern Conservative Party, 'weighed down by a free market ideology', Mr Blair's new Labour Party has 'no ideology, either of the Left or the Right', to weigh it down. 'He will be much more able to gain consent for the necessary painful measures.'

That 'consent' bit apart, right-wing Tory Worsthorpe's expectations show why the Labour leadership is so determined to remove potential opposition, and why we need so urgently to build a powerful socialist alternative.

Now they tell us

WE may be nearer to understanding what's been happening to *Workers Power's* position on Bosnia. When we read Paul Morris's full-page article in the October issue, accusing *Workers Power*, *Socialist Outlook*, and Croatian socialist Branka Magas of being 'Judman's Trotskyists', we were annoyed, and a little curious.

Had *Workers Power*, itself announced by the Communist Party of Great Britain, 'decided to join the Stalinists, rather than beat them?', I asked. Morris's article seemed out of line with what he'd written before. Some comrades said it contradicted their experience of working with *Workers Power* supporters.

We now learn that *Workers Power* is split with some Latin American comrades who, having 'inherited a vulgar and demagogic "anti-imperialism" allied to Stalinophilia', steadfastly opposed support for Bosnia. The statement admits they may have been too indulgent with Villa, a 'conventional factionalist' who disrupted their work. Don't know what that but they shouldn't have

'These jobs says dockers

'Let's get it straight: those jobs are ours and we are going back to them,' said Jim Davies, secretary of the Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards Committee.

He was speaking at a rally at the end of the 10,000-strong march through Liverpool on 21 October in solidarity with the 500 dockers locked out by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company.

The people of Liverpool proudly took to the streets in defence of 'their dockers'.

Every generation was there. 'It's like the old days,' said one ex-docker, now marching behind the banner of the Merseyside Pensioners' Association.

Banners

This was one of 24 banners on the march. Behind the now well-known, well-used Mersey Dock Labourers banner came Transport and General Workers Union, Road Transport; the Litherland Labour Party and the Bootle Labour Party; Vauxhall Motors, Ellesmere Port TGWU Shop Stewards; Union of Communication Workers, Liverpool; AEEU, General Motors; Kirkby Unemployed Centre; MSF, NW Regional Council; Manchester Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union; Liverpool Division, National Union of Teachers; Kirkby TGWU 633 Retired Members Association; Merseyside Trade Union, Community and Unemployed Resource Centre; Vauxhall Motors AEEU Shop Stewards; Sefton UNISON; Civil and Public Service Union, Liverpool Centre and Wirral; Wirral Socialists with Labour Party badge; Wirral Trades Council; Merseyside Militant Labour; Merseyside Association of Trades Councils; Fire Brigades Union; AEEU Delco Electronics, Kirkby; UNISON Liverpool branch Residential Workers.

Generosity

With typical generosity the people of Merseyside have dug deep for the dockers' lock-out fund. Jimmy Nolan, chair of the Shop Stewards Committee thanked everybody and announced that Vauxhall Motor workers had brought a cheque for £2,300 and the Sefton council unions had given £2,000. 'The way things are

going we'll be able to buy the port of Liverpool!'

One docker carried a placard: 'My dad, 43 years a docker — £100. Myself, 22 years — I want my job.' Pinned to the poster were his father's proudly treasured trade union cards.

Another placard, using the initials of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company said: 'Make Dockers Homeless Company!' Together with the delegations behind the banners came thousands of men, women and children to give their support.

Looking down at the children grouped around the platform at the rally, Nolan opened the meeting by thanking 'the kids'.

'That's what it's all about,' he said. 'We've got to think about the future. With this fight we must guarantee that when they reach 18 there will be work with proper rates and conditions and trade unions.'

Slave contracts

Explaining that Drake International (the suppliers of part-time casual labour) want at least 150 of the dockers to sign the slave-labour contract, and that they have a list of the dockers to whom they have no intention of offering jobs, Nolan said:

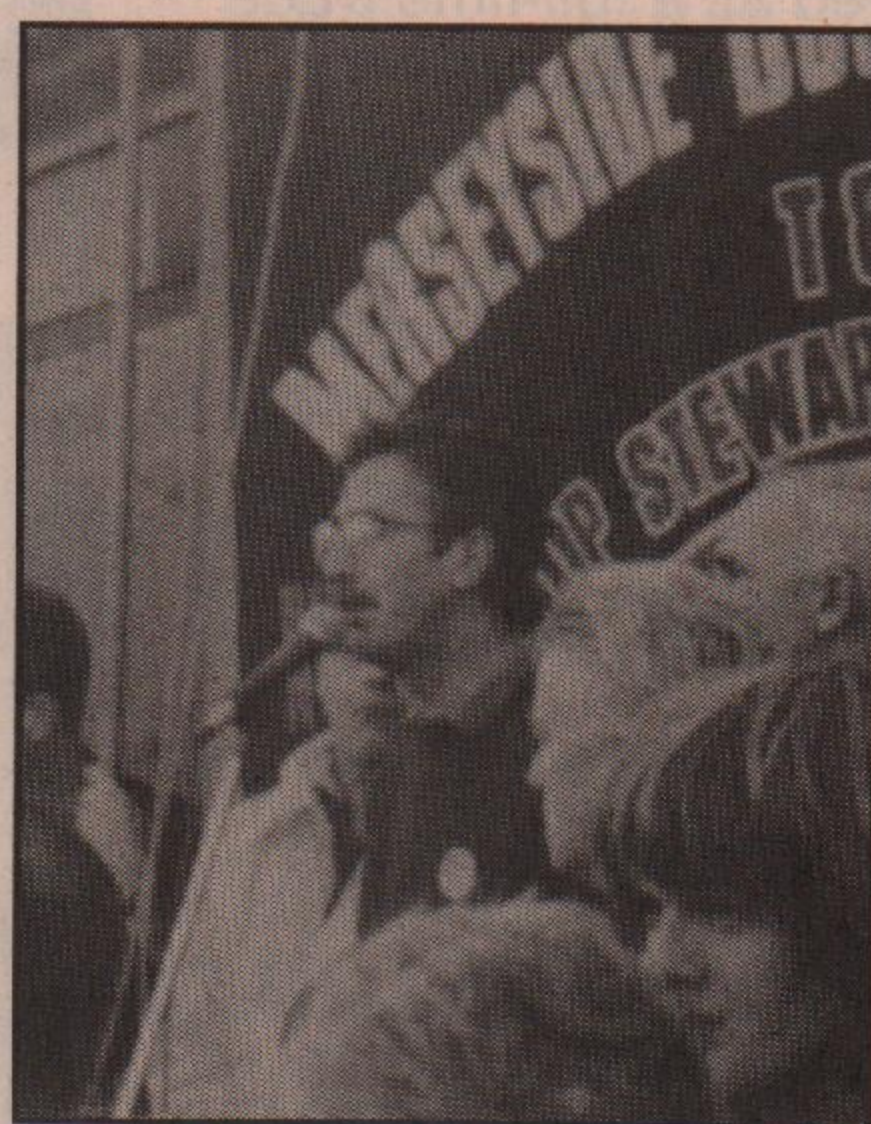
'We will not accept division. The 500 must be reinstated. They have offered £10,000 for our jobs! This is rejected. Drake International will not function here.'

Davies told the huge crowd: 'There are plenty of lessons we learn from our history. But unfortunately the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company is also going back in history — they want the casualisation forced on dockers in other ports in 1989.'

'And the agreement they forced on us at the Seaforth Container Terminal last year, which meant dockers losing between £5,000 and £6,000 a year, working 14 hours a day and being 'phoned to turn up to work when rostered off.'

Toxic waste

'We have heard that there is a billion pound contract for the port of Liverpool involving toxic waste from Japan. They know that they cannot get that sort of cargo handled in the port whilst we are there and organised. They want us out of the



Mike Carden

port. But with your help we can win this struggle.

'You can kick a dog, and it will run and cower in a corner. You can kick it again and again and get the same response. But one day it turns round and attacks you. Our crawling days are through.'

Echoed

This statement was echoed by **Irene Peebles**, a Liverpool residential care worker, on strike for ten weeks. 'Our strike is also about casual labour and attacking jobs and conditions,' she said.

'The issues at the heart of the strike have wakened people up and they'll never go to sleep again. We went out on strike with our heads held high and we can still hold our heads high. We've kept legal and we've gone to all the right bodies.'

'We've won the battle — no agency staff, but we haven't won the war. We know that we will have to fight future cuts. The war will not go away.'

Peebles explained that the care workers are going to collect for the dockers in every workplace, and she ended: 'The issues are not just for the dockers. Why can't we have a 24-hour city-wide strike for the dockers?'

Peter Clay, who works in Social Security said that he and his colleagues had spent the last couple of weeks explaining to the sacked dockers what their rights are:

'It is terrible the way old fellers

who have spent a lifetime on the docks are being treated. I am proud to be associated with them.'

'This fight isn't going to be won in the courts or in parliament, it will be won by the people of this city.'

Liverpool MPs Eddie Loyden, Bob Parry, Joe Benton, Eddie O'Hara and Angela Eagle, MP for Wallasey, explained that they had submitted an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons in support of the dockers.

When Loyden reported that 17 MPs had signed it somebody in the crowd shouted: 'What about the rest?' Parry said that some Liverpool Labour MPs had refused to sign. 'Name names!' shouted a section of the crowd.

Name names!

Loyden and other MPs recalled that in 1989 they had asked Norman Fowler whether repeal of the National Dock Labour Scheme meant that the employers and the government wanted to bring back casualisation.

Fowler had replied that such a suggestion was scaremongering! Loyden said that a Labour government must 'start doing away with the anti-trade union laws, and write the conditions of the National Dock Labour Scheme into future conditions of work'.

Thanking the MPs Nolan said that members of the Shop Stewards Committee would be in the House on 25 October to hear the debate.

Shop Steward **Mike Carden** said

This is

Comment by DOT GIBSON

MOST of us know the old story of the man in Limerick who asked his neighbour the way to Donegal. His neighbour told him 'It would be better if you started from Dublin, I could direct you from there!'

That's the way some notables in the trade union and labour movement see the situation of the 500 Liverpool dockers locked out by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company.

'If only the dockers had waited for a Labour government.' 'If only they had organised a ballot in accordance with the anti-trade union laws.' 'If only the 80 young Torside dockers had not fallen for the employer's provocation.'

'If only we had had more time to prepare.'

There is no perfect starting point for a fight.

Secretary of the Merseyside Dockers' Shop Stewards Committee Jim Davies said at the rally on 21 October: 'You can kick a dog and it will run and cower in a corner. You can kick it again and again and get the same response. But one day it turns round and attacks you. **Our crawling days are over!**'

That was the mood at last Saturday's march and rally in Liverpool. That is the mood of thousands of workers — employed and unemployed, the sick and the elderly — throughout the country.



Liverpool demonstration in support of Merseyside dockers

'are ours' 's' leader

that the struggle was about 80 young lads sacked on the spot by bad employers.

'They say they feel guilty that we have been locked out,' he said 'But we've told them it's not their fault. We are big enough to stand up for our own rights, and when we refused to cross their picket line we knew exactly what we were doing.'

'There are more than 500 jobs in the port of Liverpool. It is more profitable than ever. The employer wants to take us back to 1926.'

'The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company has benefitted to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds. We are not just for organising mass pickets and other actions, we are for exposing the corruption. With your support and nobody else's we are going to win this struggle.'

Ken Stewart MEP reported that all the Labour Euro MPs support the dockers. 'Solidarity with working-class people is a principle,' he said. 'I am determined to stop the payment of the big grants to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. They are currently expecting another £5.5 million.'

'Over the years millions have been paid: £630 million paid to Merseyside was for jobs — proper jobs. The way the Mersey docks and Harbour Company is treating you is unbelievable.'

John Hendy QC, who represented 19 sacked Tilbury dockers at the Industrial Relations Tribunal following the 1989 strike, said he had been asked to give a lecture on Section 251 of the Industrial Relations Laws.

'I'm not going to do that! But it is worth pointing out that there are over 250 separate sections of these acts covering 120 pages.'

'That's just an indication of the extent of the laws introduced against the trade unions.'

Transformation

'Over a period of 16 years there has been the biggest transformation in history of the law at work. This is the only country in Europe where there is no right to be represented by a trade union on any aspect of rights at work.'

'The trade unions cannot spend their own money, union constitutions and rule books are overruled by parliament. There is no right to strike. All we've got are so-called immunities, and they have even whittled down the immunities. There is no right to strike in solidarity with workers at another workplace.'

'All these changes are not only unjust, unfair and undemocratic, they are also against international law — the United Nations and the European Community. They are against the conventions of the International Labour Organisation (the arm of the UN which sets legal minimum standards).'

'Britain has been criticised every year since 1989. Britain has been told that it is in breach of the rights of the sick, unemployed, OAPs. All their rights have been taken away.'

'In Tilbury there was the longest-

ever Industrial Tribunal hearing — 205 days in the case of 19 shop stewards. We won the case.'

'The Tribunal ruled that the employers must pay 40 per cent of the union's costs.'

'There was an order that the men should be reinstated. But the employers refused and they were right in law!'

'Now this lock-out is happening in 1995 in a civilised and one of the richest countries in the world. It demonstrates something we have known for many years. These rights are not won by lawyers.'

'The only people who will win this dispute are the people I'm looking at in front of me this morning. This is important. It is because of the stand taken in the history of our movement that rights have been won.'

'Many say that it is not possible to organise casual labour. The dockers proved such people wrong 100 years ago. In the 1880s the dockers proved that it is possible. In 1889 there was the strike over the "dockers' tanner".'

'In 1947, the National Dock Labour Scheme was an example of legislation which has been the basis for work laws in every country in Europe. The dockers achieved that.'

'In 1972, under the Industrial Relations Act, seven dockers were imprisoned.'

'It was the dockers themselves that got them out of prison — not lawyers.'

'I know that there are hundreds of thousands of people up and down the country who support you and depend on you.'

It cannot stop at the boundaries of Merseyside.

The dockers' message must be taken far and wide. Support groups must be set up. We must organise public meetings, high street and workplace collections.

The Transport and General Workers' Union could not be given a clearer message that they would receive the wholehearted support of their more than a million members and the whole working class if they act in defence of the dockers and in defiance of the anti-trade-union laws.

The Liverpool Labour MPs and others who support the dockers should take the obvious step and lead a campaign to compel a Labour government to repeal the anti-trade-union laws.

We must start the discussion about what sort of party the working class needs. Nobody denies that there is a crisis in the labour movement, but the working class is not defeated. Every struggle makes us clearer about the aims of the enemies and about the enemies in our midst.

It is in response to this that WRP/Workers Press has made a call for a conference on 24 February 1996 in Manchester.

We want this to be not 'our' conference, but one in which a number of trade unionists, members and ex-members of the Labour Party and other labour movement organisations come together to form a steering committee to organise it.

ist who will never ever cross a picket line. Nobody can make me do that. I am a trade unionist inspired and blessed with 500 heroes who, when faced with a picket line, made the principled decision not to cross. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and their world will never understand this.'

Moreton is right. In the interests of profit (theirs), the capitalists go through our world like a man with a flame thrower, destroying everything that gets in the way.

The fight starts here. We can and must defeat the lock-out.

Shop Steward Mike Carden said at the rally: 'We are big enough to stand up for our own rights, and when we refused to cross the picket line we knew exactly what we were doing.' Jimmy Nolan, referring to the children at the rally, told us 'We've got to think about the future.'

Together, we must build up the mass movement around all the issues at the heart of the dockers' struggle — casualisation, privatisation, unemployment, anti-trade union laws, the corruption of private companies and the cuts in social and public services, the huge salaries and hand-outs to the rich and the poverty of students, unemployed youth, the sick and the elderly.

The Liverpool dockers have made a tremendous start: regular public meetings, three marches and rallies in Liverpool. They have brought a wide layer of trade unionists and the community into action.

where we start our fight!

As John Hendy said 'all their rights have been taken away'.

Liverpool Dockers' Shop Steward Bobby Moreton told a public meeting on 12 October about the wave of shock and sadness that swept through the port of Liverpool at the end of the 1989 strike.

'We were first out and last back. We were drunk with the promises given to us by everyone — the government, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, our trade union and our general secretary, Ron Todd. We marched back — proud men.'

'And then it hit us. The most dehumanising methods were used against men with 30 to 35 years' on the docks. The employer set out to humiliate us and break our spirit. He had his heel on our necks. On the very first day back, men left the job and have never worked again.'

'Every time one of my mates was humiliated, I burst into tears. Every time a docker was ordered to clean the toilet rim or get on his knees with brush and pan, I burst into tears. This very human emotion of crying took me through the first weeks.'

'And then something incredible happened. We bonded together. We had nowhere to go and we bonded together. They never broke our spirit.'

'I am described in the Liverpool Echo as a militant. I thought about that a lot. What am I?'

'I am a man. A husband. A father. A provider. And I am a trade union-

City Lights

Banking and docking

WHEN I left school getting on for 40 years ago, one of the jobs that many working-class and middle-class parents were anxious to see their children take was in banking. Here there was a job for life.

No more. Changes in technology and growing merger-mania among the bankers threatens to wipe out most clerical and middle management jobs in banking.

In fact, we are now seeing the white collar equivalent of the closure of Britain's coalfields. Over the last four years 110,000 full-time bank workers have been sacked, with official figures from the British Bankers Association showing that only some 370,000 are now employed in the industry — down from a peak of 445,000 in 1990.

The job losses are far from over, with the recent warning that 10,000 further jobs will go after the Lloyds take-over of TSB.

In an industry where size is everything, where profit is the only word with any meaning, and where the only winners are the directors with their ever-growing pay packets and lucrative share option schemes, the future is grim for what were in the main traditional Tory voters.

Not least of the ironies of Lloyds grab for TSB is that the directors of both banks will now see the value of their shares soar because of the cost-benefit of getting rid of staff. And the latest merger will not be the last. The high street is still 'over-banked' says the City.

Anybody entering a bank today no longer has a career but a job. Technical change means that little training or skill is required. Indeed banks are on the look out for younger and cheaper recruits with 'work-experience' being offered to those still at school. Even the job of the traditional bank manager is rapidly shrinking as branches merge into chains, put under the control of a single finance director.

Bank workers are fighting the sort of casualisation of their work as are the dockers in Liverpool. Barclays alone has taken on 3,000 agency staff in the past year alone to replace more costly full-time workers.

Now the same trend is about to hit the 370,000-strong insurance sector. With technological change yet to hit this sector, a wave of mergers is now predicted with heavy job losses. Norwich Union's recently declared intention of considering a £2bn public quotation was immediately seized on as a parallel with the banking and building society movement.

The profits of death

AS a reader of this column you will no doubt have heard of the futures market and perhaps the derivatives market — this was the one that brought the merchant bank Barings down. But chances are you have not come across the 'viatical market'.

This is an activity aimed at people with incurable diseases who are desperate for immediate cash. They sell their life policies for a cash sum to fund their medical care, or simply to make their last days a little more comfortable.

Such arrangements are to be made available next month to the estimated 180,000 terminally-ill people in this country by a Guernsey-based company called Millenium Life. Millenium — backed by two of Europe's biggest reinsurance companies, Germany's Hanover Re and Italy's Unione Re — sees rich pickings in Britain as the cost of nursing-home care for the terminally ill soars.

Even the Association of British Insurers has questioned the ethical basis of trading life policies with people who might have only months, or even weeks, to live.

In a viatical settlement terminally ill people agree to sell their life policy to a company such as Millenium for a percentage of the lump sum that would become available on death. In such a case Millenium would become owner of the policy and receive the death benefit when the person dies. The size of the cash hand-out can range from 40 per cent to 80 per cent of the face value of the policy.

Millenium relies on the person concerned dying within the period predicted by the patient's doctor. 'We don't go back to the policyholder and say "Sorry you didn't die, we want our money back,"' says Millenium's spokesman, the warm-hearted David Barclay-Miller, one of the people responsible for marketing Millenium's policies.

Business for people such as Barclay-Miller is likely to boom as Britain follows the US pattern and the number of AIDS patients desperate for immediate cash rises.

Uruguay round

THE WORLD'S poorest countries may lose up to £400m a year in lost exports as a result of the Uruguay Round world trade agreements, according to recent estimates from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD says that the poorest countries will be hard hit by the erosion of preferential tariffs for their exports and by the rise in world prices for basic foodstuffs. Most of what UNCTAD calls the least developed countries (LDCs) are net importers of foodstuffs. As a whole these countries spend the equivalent of a quarter of their export earnings on importing food items such as cereals, edible oils and dairy products.

Africa in particular will see a serious drop in its export earnings following the Uruguay round.

A picture of disaster

BRITAIN'S major building firms are facing 'disaster'. Government spending cuts are largely to blame for this situation, says a report from the National Council of Building Material Producers which represents 2,000 firms with a combined annual turnover of £20bn.

Three-quarters of the firms questioned said that they were no longer working at satisfactory levels.

The Department of the Environment has warned of a serious drop in construction orders, down 8 per cent in the three months to the end of August, compared with the same period last year. Private housing orders were down a fifth over the period, with industrial and commercial work also sharply down.

Commenting on the report, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors said:

'These figures are bad news for those employed in the construction industry, but they also have serious implications for the economy as a whole.'

'If, as we predict, 100,000 jobs are to be lost from the industry over the next two or three years, the exchequer stands to lose as much as £1bn in increased social security payments and lost revenue.'

Paul Shephens, chairman of the Building Employers Confederation warned that a further 20,000 jobs could go in the industry by the coming spring, taking the total number of jobs lost to 500,000 since 1990.

Threadneedle

Starting hares and chasing 'grunts'

NOBODY who cares about spoken English and its infinitely varied riches will give a fig, or a sausage, or a tinker's cuss, or one jot or tittle, for Gillian Shephard's heavy-handed attempt to pour all these riches into one single snobbish mould.

This applies above all to English teachers, most of whom know what the education minister doesn't: that regional dialects are one of the language's strengths.

There may still be some educational backwaters where pupils are forbidden to speak as their parents do, and have imposed on them a pronunciation that aspires to, but never attains, the 'posh' vowels of 'Received Pronunciation'.

So that their speech is neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring but an 'over-correct' hotchpotch in which, for instance — as I will recall from my distant schooldays in Hull — 'put' becomes 'pat' and 'butter' becomes 'batter', and all for fear of talking 'broad'.

But such schools are now surely in the minority. And Mrs Shephard's uncharming reference to communication by 'grunt' — likening the speakers of some regional dialects, whose vowels she finds especially distressing, to apes or pigs — will cut no ice with enlightened educationists.

An education minister who genuinely wanted to bring about an improvement in the way English is used would stop spitting into the wind on this matter of regional accents, which can't be eliminated, and concentrate instead on an area where there really does seem to be cause for concern.

The government's chief curriculum adviser, Nicholas Tate, revealed last week that more than one boy in five, and one girl in six, are leaving school without the literacy of the average 10- or 11-year-old.

This means that approximately 18 per cent of school-leavers, at best, are able to tease some meaning out of a copy of the *Sun*.

At best, because this is the upward limit; these statistics include an unstated number of school-leavers who can't even manage the *Sun* or are unable to read or write at all.

So, after 125 years of compulsory schooling, there are roughly 140,000 young people a year whom the education system, and the capitalist system, have disastrously failed.

Something is clearly wrong. And an education secretary who was doing her job would be concerned to find out what was wrong, and put it right, instead of pandering to snobs by starting hares — and chasing 'grunts'.

Slovenly sentences

ALL this Tory hoo-ha about how children speak our language seems a waste of time and energy when set against the widespread tolerance of the slovenly writing of all too many adults.

I particularly have in mind journalists, who are supposed to write clear English but all too many of whom turn out sentences so turgid, so impenetrable, so filled with badly placed parentheses, so larded with 'in the case of', 'on a daily basis', and 'most importantly', that you wonder if they ever bother to read over what they've shovelled into their word-processors.

Since my booklet *Lucid, Vigorous and Brief* was published in 1993, based on pieces that first appeared in this column, I've been collecting further horrible examples of unclear writing. I now have a bulging file of cuttings ready for a second edition if I ever called for it.

In an average week, you don't have to look far for sentences that are so long you get past the end before you know where you are.

PERSONAL COLUMN

Guardian of 18 October, is one such sentence:

'What marks out the former director-general of the prison service's complaint — that his "operational independence" was daily compromised — as unusual is the sheer intensity of the demands made by an ever more media-conscious Home Secretary.'

This could be mended by transferring the awkwardly placed 'as unusual' so that it comes immediately after the words 'What marks out'. Better still, though, would be a complete recasting, as follows:

'The former director-general of the prison service complains that his "operational independence" was daily compromised. What marks out this complaint as unusual', etc.

Childe's play

THOSE of my generation who left school with a burning desire to educate ourselves, school having done precious little to educate us, turned greedily to such series as *Pelican Books* and *The Thinker's Library*.

Almost everything I know, for instance, about prehistory — at any rate, Old World prehistory — I owe to the writings of the Australia-born V. Gordon Childe, who in 1927 became Britain's first professor of prehistoric archaeology.

The first book of Childe's that I ever bought, the oddly titled *What Happened in History* (1942), takes the story of humanity from its emergence perhaps half a million years ago to the fall of the Roman Empire; in 1946 that enthralling *Pelican* cost me one shilling (5p).

In the 1940s and 1950s I added to it Childe's *The Bronze Age* (1930), the *Thinker's Library* edition of *Man Makes Himself* (1936), *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (1940), and the posthumously published *The Prehistory of European Society* (1958), which embodied revisions of some of his earlier views.

Childe was a thoroughgoing materialist, for whom scientific investigation of our ancestors' lives had to begin by examining their tools, weapons, houses, fields, and discarded food. He wrote scathingly of the 'golden age' approach to British history:

'The age of Elizabeth is "golden" primarily to a member of the Church of England. To a Roman Catholic periods when Protestants were burned inevitably seem preferable.'

I'd thought that Childe was more or less forgotten, even within his own profession. I'm glad to say I was wrong, as is shown by a generous review in last week's *Times Literary Supplement* of a collection of papers from a conference to mark the centenary of his birth in 1892.

Calling him 'still one of Europe's most revered prehistorians', this review says that 'reconsiderations of his work have continued to be largely laudatory'.

Before he left Australia, where he made a 'notable contribution to the history of the Australian Labor Party', his political views had 'led to constant censorship of his mail and a scandalous tale of political persecution'.

In 1957 he wrote, as a Marxist, an open letter to Soviet archaeologists, 'provoking nothing but official embarrassment and kept secret ever since'. Shortly afterwards he committed suicide by jumping from a cliff in the Blue Mountains near Sydney. One would dearly like to know what was in that open letter.

The reviewer attributes to 'shyness' his 'ostentatiously reading the *Daily Worker* in the Athenaeum'. Shyness? I should have thought this showed guts, and a certain playfulness.

Peter Fryer

Hospital cleaners strike against 'new contract' to drive wages lower

HILLINGDON hospital cleaners are being threatened with the sack if they don't sign a new contract reducing their pay from £3.19 to £2.70 an hour.

The 53 Asian women are on strike.

Their jobs were contracted out to Pall Mall Services. This scab outfit, describing itself as a 'market leader' in 'the healthcare market', pulled the same trick at both Orsett and Basildon hospitals in Essex.

The livelihoods of the strikers and many other workers and the health of thousands of people should not be controlled by a scab outfit whose only interest is profit.

Pall Mall is not a small concern. It employs over 12,000 people. Last year it made £3.1 million. Its highest paid director has a salary

of £74,652. The company's annual report features a picture of its employees at Hillingdon hospital with the caption:

'Members of the team providing a wide range of services to Hillingdon hospital — a new contract awarded to Pall Mall.'

Florence Portugal, UNISON branch secretary says: 'These "team" members are now being asked to take a whacking pay cut.'

Pall Mall has contracts covering domestics at Newmarket General, Enfield, Barnsley District General, South Ockendon, Royal South Hampshire, Poole, Orsett, St. Andrew hospitals; porters at Macclesfield Mental Illness, Law, Hairmyres, Crawley & Horsham, Mayflower, Warrington District, Ruchill & Lenzie and Gartnavel; and laundries at St. George's hospital, for Richmond,

Twickenham & Roehampton district, West Midlands RHA blood transfusion service and at Millbrook M1 unit.

Pall Mall is itself a subsidiary of Davis Service Group. In 1993 this company had sales of £279.99 million and made £21.79 million profit.

Profit

The average weekly pay of its workers in the same year was £123.79. Each worker made the company £1,287.23 in profit in 1993, and paid the salary of Davis's highest paid director — £178,156.

Portugal says: 'It is the women at Hillingdon hospital and the other Pall Mall workers who made those profits and pay these fat salaries to the directors.'

'How often have Pall Mall directors cleaned a patient's bed pan? Pall Mall's workers provide care, the directors coin the profits. Everyone who is concerned about the state of our National Health Service and every health worker should support the striking Hillingdon hospital cleaners.'

'If Pall Mall get away with this, other caring health workers will face similar attacks on their pay and conditions. More and more of our health services will be sold off to the likes of Pall Mall.'

For more information and requests for speakers and financial donations (payable to Hillingdon hospital UNISON): Florence Portugal — telephone 01802 180284 — UNISON branch secretary, Hillingdon Hospital, Field Health Road, Uxbridge,

DoH admits poverty bad for your health

THE Department of Health has now conceded something that most of us have known for some time: poor people are more likely to suffer ill health than the rich.

It will give the poor no comfort to know that the department has pledged £2.4 million to fund further research to clarify the causes of this 'variation' in health, when they know that this very department is closing down hospitals and breaking up the National Health Service.

A report, chaired by Jeremy Metters, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, was set up last year as part of the government's Health of the Nation targets.

However, the team was given a narrow remit to assess what the NHS could do instead of addressing the wider social question of poverty eradication.

The report states that 'In the last 20 years an extensive research literature has been published which has shown continu-

ing, and in some cases increasing, differentials in mortality and morbidity rates between socio-economic groups, men and women, regions of the country, and ethnic groups.'

Life expectancy at birth was seven years higher in social class one (professional) than social class five (manual).

Children in social class five are four times more likely to suffer accidental death than their peers in social class one.

Of 66 major causes of death in men, 62 were more common in social classes four and five combined than in other classes.

Of 70 major causes of death in women, 64 were more common in women married to men in social classes four and five.

The report says that although women in social class one had 1.5 times the incidence of breast cancer as women in social class five, most deaths occurred among the poorer women.



It is no comfort to the poor that the health department has pledged £2.4 million to clarify the causes of 'variation' in health, when they know that this very department is closing down hospitals and breaking up the NHS

Attack on civil service unions

BY PETER GIBSON

A RECENT secret Cabinet Office investigation for Michael Heseltine claims to have discovered that most government departments have fewer than 50 per cent trade union membership among staff. It claims membership is as low as 17 per cent in the Foreign Office. There is 81 per cent at the Inland Revenue.

The purpose of this research? The civil service unions believe that the publishing of these figures is the first step in a government campaign to drive through trade union derecognition in the civil service.

'We will fight against derecognition,' says National Union of Civil and Public Services general secretary John Sheldon. 'This is an issue that will unite all civil service trade unions.'

Unfortunately a Labour government would be no protection against the union busters.

The Labour Party has said that it would insist on employers recognising unions where there is 51-per-cent trade union membership.

But that leaves you up the Swanny without a paddle if you've 'only' got 49 per cent. Employers would use the 51 per cent as benchmark — if you're under, out would go the union.

Transport House up for sale?

BY MARY IDE

MAJOR rows are brewing at the Transport and General Workers' Union about Bill Morris's attempts to get the executive to agree to sell off its Transport House HQ in Smith Square.

The building dates from 1922 when the T&G was set up as the country's biggest union. For many years it was also the headquarters of both the TUC and the Labour Party.

Its historic background makes it a prestige building for the working class. However, under pressure from consultants and valuers, who would make a nice percentage from any sale, Bill

Morris has now put Transport House's future out for 'consultation' in the union regions.

Some months ago the executive was told the Smith Square site was worth £4 million. The latest consultants now put it at £8 or £9 million.

Could the sudden increase be based more on a desire to get the regions to agree the sale than on any upturn in the property market?

London region of the T&G has called for the inside of the building to be revamped to provide for better use of its space and for new information technology facilities. London region also wants any surplus space to be let out to pay for restructuring costs.

A successful experiment in independent socialist agitation

Lawrence Daly and the Fife Socialist League (1956-62)

THOUSANDS of workers in England, Scotland and Wales who consider themselves to be socialist must be wondering whether to continue to be members of, or even vote for, a Labour Party led by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

The Socialist Workers' Party and Militant Labour, to name two political groups outside Labour, are currently capable of attracting only a tiny minority of these working-class socialists.

In years to come, it is inevitable that independent experiments of a socialist nature will be given serious consideration by workers at elections. Can such experiments succeed?

The answer is already YES in local elections. The Somerset Community Defence Campaign has been conducting socialist agitation for the last ten years. Last May, our members decided to stand in the local areas where they are best known as independent socialists.

Alan Debenham stood as an 'Independent Green Socialist' in Bishop's Hull, a village near Taunton. He topped the poll.

Glen Burrows stood as chair of Eastover Residents Association. The association has a majority of Labour voters on its committee.

Glen is also secretary of Bridgwater trades council. She narrowly missed taking the seat from Labour with 42 per cent of the vote.

With these successes in mind we should look back 30 years to a time when rank-and-file miners and other workers rocked the labour movement and for a few years lit a socialist flame over

The following is a contribution to the discussion of the need for a new socialist party by postal worker and Communication Workers' Union activist DAVE CHAPPLE. It is based on an article which first appeared in the *Somerset Clarion* (June/July 1995). Chapple left the Labour Party in 1994 and is not a member of any national political party. He has been a reader of Workers Press for four years.

On the basis of recent successful attempts to stand independent socialist candidates in Somerset, Chapple looks back to the aftermath of the Khrushchev speech, the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the founding of the Fife Socialist League by ex-Communist Party member Lawrence Daly. Next week we will publish Chapple's assessment of why the FSL 'experiment' ended and its implications for socialists now

West Fife in Scotland with the Fife Socialist League.

By the mid-1950s West Fife was a coalfield in decline. It was a militant area with a Communist Party tradition in the National Union of Mineworkers. Between 1929 and 1936, it had been the heartland of the Communist-International-inspired breakaway from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, the United Mineworkers of Scotland. In 1935, and again in 1945, it elected one of the old 'Red Clydesiders', Willie Gallacher, as its Communist MP.

Pit village like Lumphinnans were called 'Little Moscows'.

Entrenched

But equally entrenched were the Labour Party and Co-op that ran the county and district councils and got the right-wing Willie Hamilton into Westminster in 1950 to replace Gallacher.

West Fife was a mining constituency dominated by small towns and villages. The large towns of Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath were outside the parliamentary boundary.

In June 1956, Lawrence Daly, a

miner at Glencraig pit, resigned publicly from the Communist Party in a letter to his local paper, the *Lochgelly and District Times*. He was at the time a member of the Communists' Scottish Youth Executive. Daly had been unhappy in the Communist Party for some time and had been reading the dissenting CP journal *New Reasoner*, edited by E.P. Thompson and John Saville.

Khrushchev's 1956 speech to 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party, denouncing Stalin's crimes, seemed to Daly both damning in the facts revealed and in the absurd about-face the speech itself represented. It repudiated any pretence at socialist sincerity.

Daly was well known — in the NUM and in the mining villages. He filled a hall in Lochore in August 1956 when he spoke at a miners' meeting he organised to discuss the issues raised by Khrushchev's speech.

Then came the Hungarian revolution with its bloody and vicious sequel — the Russian invasion. In December 1956, Daly organised a second meeting —

this time on Hungary. Chief speaker was Peter Fryer — the *Daily Worker's* correspondent in Budapest. Fryer's truthful accounts of events in Hungary were censored by the CP executive and Fryer was expelled from the party.

Hungary

To a packed audience of Scottish miners, friends and family, Fryer expounded the theme of his 1956 book *Hungarian Tragedy* and his pamphlet *Hungary and the Communist Party*. Fryer saw slaughtered Hungarian workers as socialist heroes and the Russian troops as counter-revolutionaries.

Throughout 1956 and early 1957, the debate about socialism and the role of the CP continued in the NUM lodges, and in the Lochgelly and *District Times* and all over West Fife.

Daly won the vital union post of Glencraig colliery pit delegate from the CP member Tommy Stewart. Daly continued his contacts with some of the labour historians who had left the CP shortly after himself and he read

and sold their journal the *New Reasoner*.

Unlike the CP, Daly began to advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain as a vital step in any socialist advance. He had thought long and hard about international diplomacy, the 'Cold War' and the threat of atomic weapons, in particular the hydrogen bomb.

The CP did not go unilateralist until 1960.

By February 1957, Daly had collected enough support in local NUM lodges and in the villages to launch the Fife Socialist League. Its purpose: to conduct local independent socialist education and agitation.

The league prospered. It stood for: militancy at work; extension of public ownership under workers' control; Scottish self-government; scrutiny and accountability of local Labour and Communist councillors and of local MP Willie Hamilton; and unilateral nuclear disarmament.

In May 1958, Daly stood as FSL candidate in the Ballingry Division to promote the new organisation and to test the electoral water with local workers. He gathered around himself experienced trade unionists, socialists, miners and other workers, including unemployed women with no previous political experience.

'Trained dialecticians cautiously forecast either a narrow defeat or (less likely) a narrow victory,' says Daly. 'Inexperienced' new recruits declared we would win comfortably. The result was astounding.

Result: Daly 1,085 votes, Labour 525, and the CP 197. This was a major step forward.

Daly immediately took steps to implement parts of the FSL manifesto, including a twice-yearly bulletin to all households on the affairs and voting record of the council, before meetings in Ballingry to report on his own council work.

Soon there was a second FSL councillor: George MacDonald.

Links

At the same time, Daly strengthened links with other independent socialists to see if the FSL could affiliate nationally to a new and viable socialist organisation.

In 1958, he was an active participant at both the April Wortley Hall conference and the November *Newsletter* industrial conference sponsored by 'The Group'.

'The Group' were Trotskyists led by Gerry Healy who eventually formed the Socialist Labour League in 1959.

Later, the FSL participated in three national conferences called by the *New Left Review*.

All these events failed to set up a large socialist organisation with strong trade union links, which Daly believed necessary both for itself and to ensure the

growth and survival of the FSL. Fife remained isolated.

In 1959, the FSL nominated Daly for the West Fife parliamentary constituency. He was supported by John Saville in the *New Reasoner* (No. 10): 'We should work for Lawrence Daly in Fife and for official Labour elsewhere.'

Many members of local Socialist Forums (later New Left Clubs), including E.P. Thompson, came to Daly's public meetings and to canvass for him.

Votes

The sitting MP, Willie Hamilton, got 25,000 votes, Daly came second with 4,886 and the CP third with 3,826.

This was a good result for the following reasons:

■ Willie Hamilton had a Tory rival, so thousands of workers were keen to inflict the worst possible defeat on the government representative.

■ Cowdenbeath, the largest town in the Fife coalfield, was outside the constituency.

■ The FSL had outvoted the CP in an overwhelmingly working-class constituency that had returned a Communist MP until 1950.

By the end of 1959, the FSL had joined the list of New Left Clubs affiliated to the *New Left Review* of Stuart Hall, E.P. Thompson and John Saville. Educational meetings continued alongside council reports.

Daly spoke to the Edinburgh New Left Club that year on 'A Socialist Scotland'.

Later in 1959, Willie Thompson says the FSL was 'approached at this point by the newly created Socialist Labour League, whose journal, the *Newsletter*, Peter Fryer edited at that time, but rejected a formal compact' ('The New Left in Scotland', in *Essays in Scottish Labour History*, J. Donald, 1978).

[Peter Fryer commented on this in his 'Personal Column' on 16 and 23 September.]

Was it the SLL's open Trotskyism that put Daly off, or was it the SLL's entryist attitude to the British Labour Party?

At this time, Daly was advocating, on behalf of the FSL, a new socialist party/organisation.

Daly also found the time — as a working miner as well as an active socialist and local councillor — to write several articles for the *New Left Review*, including a short history of the FSL (NLR, 4) and a valuable review of the Communist NUM general secretary Arthur Horner's autobiography 'Incorrigible Rebel'.

Another FSL member, John Keenan, wrote to criticise E.P. Thompson's notion of a British revolution in 'Out of Apathy'.

During all this time, Daly didn't neglect socialist agitation in the NUM, locally in Fife, regionally in the Scottish NUM and at national NUM conferences.

To be continued

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Chetniks to demand access to Adriatic

THE assembly of the self-styled Bosnian Serb Republic has called for the division of Sarejevo and access to the Adriatic sea as part of its platform of demands for the US-sponsored peace talks, due to start this coming week at a US airforce base in Ohio.

At a session in Bijelina, close to the Serbian border, the assembly also demanded that the strip of land in the north linking Chetnik-held areas in the east and west be widened and called for the return of territory in the north west taken by the Bosnian-Croat forces in their recent offensive.

It is not clear how much weight such demands will have, since the Bosnian Serb leadership has been sidelined by Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian president, who has taken over negotiations on its behalf. But a Serb official in Belgrade reported to The Times in London that they had been cleared.

The parliament had earlier agreed to accept international troops on its borders to police any 'peace accord', but only from Russia 'and other friendly nations'.

Access to the Adriatic Sea for the landlocked 'Bosnian Serb Republic' would require Croatia to cede a strip of its territory on the coast and both the Bosnian

and Croat governments are likely to resist such a demand.

Russian leader Boris Yeltsin last week came to a vague agreement with US President Bill Clinton about the role of Russian troops in the division of Bosnia.

The two leaders, meeting at the celebrations in New York to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, agreed in principle to incorporate Russian soldiers in any 'peace-keeping' force in Bosnia, but it was not clear whether the Russians would allow their troops to fall under the command of NATO.

Yeltsin appeared to be sticking to his position that they would operate only under UN control. The matter is now to be referred to Russian and US defence experts.



The Serb-nationalist Chetnik forces led by Radovan Karadzic want to permanently divide Sarajevo

Defend 164 Iranian refugees in Turkey

FOR over two months 164 Iranian refugees, including 63 children, have been sitting-in at the central office of the United Socialist Party in Ankara.

They are protesting against the treatment of asylum seekers in Turkey by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Turkish government.

Lack of food and sufficient sanitary and hygienic facilities, together with the pressure exerted by the Turkish authorities, have made unbearable conditions for them.

Under a new 'Security Pact' between Iran and Turkey, the Turkish authorities are in the

process of arresting some of the refugees and deporting them to Iran. This would certainly mean long term imprisonment or execution. The UNHCR has recently rejected demands for their cases to be reconsidered and arrangements made for their safe transfer to a third country.

A solidarity picket was held on 26 October at the Turkish embassy. A continuous campaign is necessary.

Please raise the matter in your trade union branch or other organisation and send protest letters and resolutions to: The Turkish Ambassador, Turkish Embassy, 43 Belgrave Square, London SW1.

Okinawa demands: US troops out!

THE Japanese prime minister Tomichi Muromlichi held emergency talks with the coalition partners in his government about how to defuse the surge of anger against US forces in Japan.

The talks came after a rally by 58,000 residents of Okinawa in protest against the alleged rape of a schoolgirl by three UN servicemen in September. This was

the largest demonstration against US troops during the 50 years they have been stationed in Japan. The southern island of Okinawa hosts three-quarters of US facilities in Japan.

The demonstration was given added significance because it was joined by delegates from the three government parties, the traditionally pro-US Liberal

Democratic party, the Social Democratic party and the New Harbinger party.

Murayama said he was anxious to reach agreement with residents, who want the troops moved to Japan's mainland, before he meets with President Bill Clinton on 20 November.

There was already likely to be tension at the summit as a result

of allegations that the CIA was bugging the Japanese delegation at the recent Geneva talks on access to the Japanese car market.

The coalition is considering a petition from Okinawa residents calling for a reduction in bases, stricter control over US forces and compensation for the rape victim but stopping short of complete withdrawal of US troops.

Italian crisis

THE LIRA tumbled last week as Lamberto Dini, Italy's prime minister faced a political crisis that threatens to undermine the impending Italian chairmanship of the European Union.

A vote of no confidence in Dini's government was expected to be a close call. It was to be moved by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, the Forza Italia ('Up Italy') party leader and media tycoon.

A second no-confidence motion was due to be moved by the remnants of the Italian Communist Party, now grouped in the 'Rifondazione Comunista' which Berlusconi was expected to support if his own motion failed to win a majority.

Berlusconi hopes to force a general election before he goes on trial on corruption charges.

Italy's political crisis reached a new intensity when, last week, the Senate passed a motion of no confidence in Filippo Mancuso, the Justice Minister, over his

alleged harassment of anti-corruption magistrates.

Mancuso was sacked, and a court was due to hear his appeal last week.

German dole cut planned

GERMANY's trade union leaders have warned that millions face impoverishment if government intentions to cut unemployment benefit are implemented.

A document leaked to the unions shows that the government is planning to cut unemployment payments by 5 per cent each year for the next several years.

It aims to tie unemployment benefit to the lowest pay levels rather than the present system where benefit is linked to the claimant's last wage.

Jobs scorn

Europe's finance ministers have poured scorn on a European

Commission report that it will be possible to halve the continent's unemployment by the end of the decade.

The report is part of a campaign by the EU bureaucracy to persuade people that the short-term pain of budget cuts required by the terms of the Maastricht Treaty is worth the goal of longer-term monetary union.

Attacking this optimism, new French finance minister, Jean Arthuis, said that the French public was beginning to understand the price that it would have to pay for joining monetary union.

SPD slump

THE SPD, Germany's main opposition party has suffered its worst election results for 50 years in state polls in Berlin held last weekend.

The SPD slumped to 23 per cent of the vote, against 37.4 per cent for the Christian Democrats. The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the former Stalinist

party in eastern Germany won almost 15 per cent of the vote concentrated in the eastern part of the city.

The future of SPD leader Rudolph Scharping is now in grave doubt.

French housing scandal

THE French government faces its second housing scandal in two weeks when it was reported that President Chirac could face prosecution for allegedly using his influence when Mayor of Paris to continue renting a luxury flat in the fashionable Rue de Bac on the Left Bank at less than half the market rate.

This comes only two weeks after Alain Juppé narrowly avoided prosecution for renting himself a flat at a reduced rent while deputy mayor. The Paris prosecutor, Bruno Cotte ruled that Juppé was guilty of a conflict of interest but chose not to prosecute.

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