

NEW FORCES JOIN DOCKERS

Support Hillingdon strikers

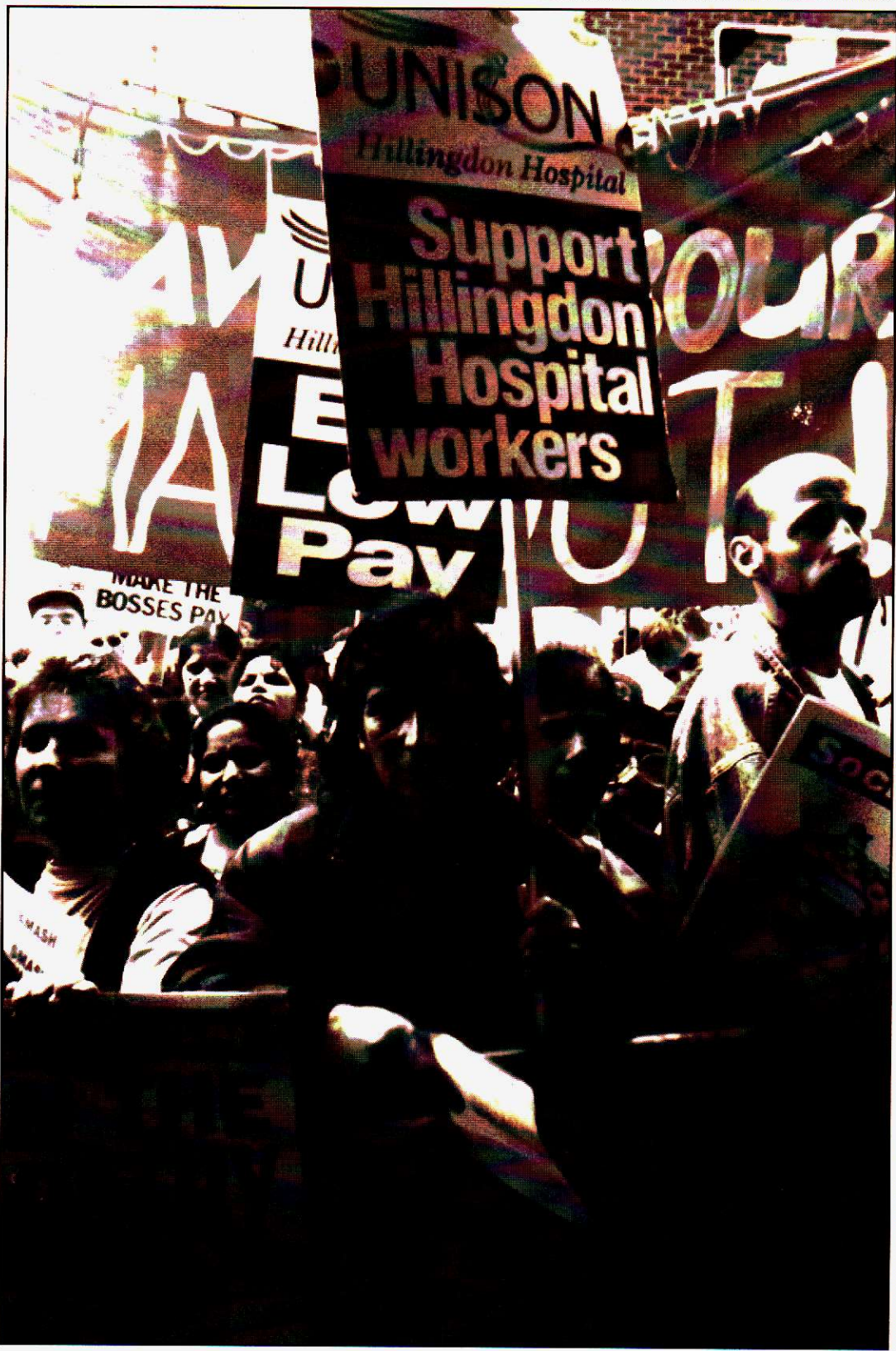
WORKERS PRESS sends its greetings to the Hillingdon strikers whose struggle against slave wages and conditions is now 12 months old.

The first anniversary of the start of their picket will be Tuesday 1 October (7-8am outside Hillingdon hospital) and there will be a march and rally in their support on Saturday 5 October, assembling 12noon at Uxbridge civic centre.

The strike started when Pall Mall tried, without discussion, to slash wages, to scrap the former NHS sick-pay scheme, to abolish lieu days for bank holidays, and to end the London weighting allowance.

The strikers, mainly Asian women, have had to endure racist attacks, and a lack of support from many of the trade union leaders. Their courageous fight deserves the support of every trade unionist and activist in the Labour movement.

► Finance and messages of support should be sent to Unison, Civic House, 8 Aberdeen Terrace, London SE3 0QY. Cheques payable to 'Greater London Industrial Action Fund'.



TODAY marks an important turning point in the struggle of the working class and millions of ordinary people in Britain.

This is the anniversary of the Liverpool dockers' strike. When the strike started the port bosses — who had deliberately provoked the strike — boasted that it would last only a few short weeks.

How wrong these arrogant people were!

How they underestimated the determination of the working class to defend organisations and rights that it had won over decades of struggle!

The port bosses wanted to smash the unions and replace organised labour with workers slaving for peanuts and denied all rights.

For 12 long months the Labour leaders have maintained a conspiracy of silence against the strike. They have been under instructions from Blair and his circle to keep their mouths shut, hoping the strike would crumble.

No wonder millions of young people have no interest in the Labour Party or have complete contempt for it.

The union leaders have been little better. They have refused to mobilise the strength of the working class behind the dockers. Like Blair they hoped the dispute would curl up and die.

Yet the dockers have rallied tremendous support for their cause.

■ They have received magnificent backing from dockers and other workers throughout the world.

■ They have been supported in collections and meetings by thousands of ordinary workers in this country.

Without this support they could not have kept going.

Now a new element has entered this magnificent fight.

BY GEOFF PILLING

Hundreds of young people, fighting against the destruction of the environment, have joined hands with the dockers in this weekend's activities.

This coming together is no accident. For the system under which we live understands only one language. The language of profit.

It is the drive of the greedy bosses for profit that is forcing workers to work in inhuman conditions, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and now increasingly in Britain.

Thirst

And it is this same thirst for profit that threatens the world in which we live.

That is what has brought the forces on this demonstration together.

The discussions planned for the weekend must consider how this can be the start of something more permanent.

■ This weekend's events in support of the Liverpool dockers are:

Saturday 28 September, march and rally, from Myrtle Parade to Pier Head, starting at 1pm.

Sunday 29 September, 'Reclaim the future' workshops and chill, Liverpool (info lines, 0181-450 6929, 0171-582 3474, 0151-207 3388, 0171-281 4621).

Monday 30 September, mass action, Seaforth dock, Liverpool, 10am.

DOCKERS CHARTER

LATEST ISSUE OUT NOW!

Available from the Liverpool Docks Shop Stewards' Committee, c/o 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. Money to 'Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Appeal'. Price 50p (20p unwaged). Add postage. Also send donations. Bulk orders tel: 0151-207 3388.

Cable Street commemoration Demonstration, Sunday 6 October

Called by Cable Street '96 Commemoration Committee, Cable Street Group and Tower Hamlets Trade Union Council

Assemble 10am for rally at Altab Ali Park, near Gardiner's Corner. March 11am to St George's Town Hall, Cable Street. Speakers and festival, 12 noon. Bring your banners! Bring your friends!

■ Tower Hamlets Trade Union Council: 0181-555 7045.

CRISIS IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT — THE NEED FOR A NEW SOCIALIST PARTY

RECALL CONFERENCE:

Saturday 23 November
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
(Holborn tube)

For more information contact the co-ordinator
Steve Ballard, 0181-889 7255

Workers Press

Lib-Lab split

IN a recent article in the Observer (15 September) Tony Blair bemoaned the 'division in radical politics at the end of the last century and the beginning of this between Liberals and the Labour Party'.

This was no doubt a thinly-disguised offer by Blair of seats in a Labour cabinet for Ashdown and other Liberal Party leaders should Labour win the coming election. A similar proposal was floated by notorious Gang of Four member Lord (Bill) Rogers at the Liberal Party conference in Brighton last Monday.

Blair wants the support of the Liberal Party to deal with any opposition there may be on the back-benches against the measures a Labour government will take against the working class.

Leaving aside Blair's confusion or sheer ignorance about the circumstances that led to the formation of the Labour Party (1906), this is nonetheless an important episode in the history of the British working class movement which has considerable lessons for today, not least in the week of the Labour Party conference.

* * * * *

WHY was the Labour Party formed? It came into being to safeguard the legal position of the trade unions. It was the Taff Vale decision of 1901, making strikes in effect impossible, that gave a powerful impetus to the formation of a separate party in the House of Commons.

Up to that point those workers with the vote had tended to support the Liberal Party. But the 1890s had shown that this Party was increasingly turning explicitly against the working class and supporting judgements in the courts that more and more restricted the rights of the unions.

The working class found that it could no longer defend its interests, let alone extend the gains it had made in struggle against the employers without the turn to a new political party. The establishment of the Labour Party marked a historic turning point in the working class's development.

* * * * *

TODAY the working class is once more at the crossroads. The party that it formed 90 years ago has now declared flatly that there will be no repeal of the anti-union laws; that there will be no increased government spending for the homeless, the sick, the unemployed, the pensioners, for schools, hospitals, etc.

As was clear from employment spokesperson David Blunkett's speech at the recent TUC, Labour plans compulsory arbitration in disputes involving workers in the public sector, measures that even the Tories have not yet felt confident to introduce.

The fact that the Labour leaders prepare to attack the standard of living and rights of workers has nothing to do with the personalities of Blair and company. Here is reflected the fact that the crisis of capitalism, internationally and in Britain, is now so deep that the ruling class is obliged to attack the working class head on, and the next Labour government will be a willing instrument of that attack.

This will be the last Labour Party conference before the election. Whatever deals the trade union leaders try and stitch up with Blair, and in spite of the fact that millions of workers still see in a Labour government some solution to their mounting problems, the working class finds itself once again at the crossroads.

That is why we have raised the issue of the need for a new party of the working class. That is why we cordially invite you to the conference at which this issue will be further discussed (see front page).

Letters

WE WELCOME LETTERS

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PO BOX 735, LONDON SW8 1YB
— OR PHONE 0171-387 0564

Letters longer
than 500 words
WILL be cut

An act o treason

WORKERS PRESS readers may like to know that the 'Reclaim the Future — Stop the Clampdown' events in Liverpool from 28 to 30 September are being advertised in Scotland with the following poem:

*let us then commit an act o
treason
let us bring buckie n blaw tae
thi war machine
let us loe waeoot askin per-
mission
let us sing waw neither rhyme
nor reason
steal diamonds fae thi very
gates o heaven
live simply tae enjoy thi fact o
livin
ti bi gallus n braw n still n
forgivin
let us commit an act o treason
let us commit an act o
treason.'*

For those in need, Scottish dictionaries are available from the better bookshops in Charing Cross Road.

Terry Brotherstone
Edinburgh

Invasion of the body-snatchers at Workers Press?

SEVERAL recent issues of Workers Press have been to some extent dominated by contributions from 'New Force' Dr. Chris Knight and those associated with him in the 'Radical Anthropology Group' (RAG).

Dr. Knight and his supporters first appeared as cheer leaders for the new turn — to 'Marxists for a New Party' — at the party conference.

There their enthusiasm for the new line and the secretary of the Workers International [Dot Gibson] was effusive to say the least.

The articles continue this 'over the top' enthusiasm and as a result it appears that comrade Knight is now on the editorial board of the paper and is given front page status for his 'populist' outpourings on the oxymoronic 'Reclaim the Future' campaign (Workers Press, 31 August).

Do we really need to have the dockers' dispute lauded as 'one of the greatest international labour movement struggles in history'. The Liverpool dockers must win in embarrassment.

What they surely need is a sober assessment of their struggle rather than such journalistic excesses.

Similarly there is no assessment of the 'Reclaim the Streets' movement. What it is (anarchistic and anti-authoritarian) and what it is not (a movement of the working class).

In fact any such assessment is precluded in advance by comrade Knight as the intervention of 'cynics' — a good pre-emptive strike against any criticism, worthy of the worst type of bourgeois or Stalinist hack.

Yes comrade Knight, you are correct: 'a street party is not a revolutionary party; a few hundred cyclists are not the organised working class'. But please tell us what you think they are and what you think we should do.

The guidance we have from Comrade Knight, who has been around the labour movement and the 'Marxist' left in the Labour Party for 30 years, is to be part of 'whatever anti-capitalist action is actually taking place' and that if we are to start somewhere 'the streets seem as good a place as any'.

I thought I was reading *Socialist Worker*.

If this is not a turn away from Marxism and towards spontaneity and petty-bourgeois anti-authoritarianism then I await with trepidation an explanation of how these 'new forces'

can be won to the 'class struggle and Marxism' — if this is still what Workers Press wants to do.

I cannot really blame Chris Knight, he has been on this particular tack for years along with his fetishisation of 'the picket line'. But for the Workers Press to publish his outpourings not as a contribution to the discussion but as a front page leader is unforgivable.

In the words of comrade Knight himself there is a 'vast alien threat to life on this planet'. Unfortunately the body-snatchers have started with the editorial board of Workers Press.

Mike Howgate
North London

10p for your thoughts

TWO years ago I was 'made redundant' by Texaco along with many other workers.

Recently I heard that, having completed their 'modernisation' programme (until the next time!) the company is ready to take on more staff.

I applied for a job. I found out they are offering £2.90 an hour! But not to worry, a good worker who manages to keep the job for six months can get a raise — of 10p an hour. Well I suppose I could make a phone call.

I told them where to put their job!

M. Alombo
SW London

Save immigrants and asylum seekers

WE CALL for support for 'Save Immigrants and Asylum Seekers' (SIAS).

Immediately we are trying to stop the deportation of Miss Aminata N'Diaye, from south west London.

She was an active member of the banned Federation Etudiante et Scolaire de Cote D'Ivoire (Students' Union of the Ivory Coast).

Amnesty International supports SIAS, saying that all members of this organisation, exiled around the world, should be protected because they have evidence that under the dictatorial regime in the Ivory Coast they face ill-treatment and torture.

Aminata was booked on a flight from Gatwick airport at 6am on 21 September.

On her behalf, SIAS demanded her right to be allowed to take her defence of political asylum to the High Court, and she was given two days extra before being put on a flight from Heathrow — sent 'home' to face this brutal regime.

Aminata is one of thousands of asylum seekers. This attack on basic rights must be stopped!

Our campaign has a growing number of people who have no benefits, no legal aid and no means to engage solicitors. They now find themselves completely at the mercy of the British state's anti-asylum laws.

Even when it is possible for asylum seekers to pay a solicitor, they often find that their case is taken by people with very little knowledge in this field.

SIAS has stepped forward to take up this fight. They have no funds. Can you help?

SIAS,
498a New Cross Road,
London, SE14, 6TJ.
Telephone number 0181 692 9536
— Mobile 589 484 261.

Toure M. Zeguan
Chair, SIAS

(Workers Press will publish regular reports of this campaign — editor)

Lucky or naive

IN ANSWER to Bob Sempel's letter in Workers Press (21 September), as an underpaid and undervalued Benefits Agency trade union activist, I would like to raise awareness of the problems of being one of 'them behind the desk'.

Bob, as a long term benefit claimant you have been either very lucky or very naive. Not a week goes by in my office without some sort of trouble breaking out in the reception area — usually tempers flaring up between 'claimants' (our chief executive's expression not mine).

At Benefits Agency offices at present (where Income Support and other benefits are administered), we do have protective screens (without bars I might add). These have been necessary on various occasions.

Like yourself, I would in an ideal world prefer a more humane environment where screens were not necessary. Alas, some of the people that come to us, deprived of a decent livelihood or suffering from mental or emotional instability are not always willing to listen no matter how excellent the level of staff training.

Despite receiving low pay for a highly stressful, target-oriented, inadequately staffed job, it is easy for 'claimants' to regard us as 'the authority'. The provision of screens protects us from the more excessive physical assaults at least but we still have to cope with verbal abuse and aggression in the course of performing our duties.

When the Job Seekers' Allowance is introduced into un-screened employment service offices, we can guarantee that this devious deterioration of benefit for the unemployed will anger claimants and give too much responsibility to junior staff.

No matter how sympathetic we may feel towards our customers, (and many of us have suffered unemployment ourselves) we will still be expected to deliver another of this government's cynical attempts to disenfranchise the poor and underprivileged.

I urge all workers, whether in employment or not, to unite against the capitalist system and fight together for decent secure jobs and welfare services.

Benefits Agency worker
North London

Gilgit Baltistan

[The following letter was sent to five ambassadors in Islamabad, Pakistan — USA, Britain, Russia, France and China]

WE WOULD like to draw your attention towards the paradise of the world.

Gilgit Baltistan, where 1.5 million people are deprived of basic human, democratic and economic rights, when the world is at the threshold of the 21st century. Gilgit Baltistan, in spite of being an important part of Kashmir, has neither the rights enjoyed by Indian and Pakistani-held Kashmir, nor are the people given a chance to express their view, or opinion by any means.

Three prominent leaders of human rights activist parties of Gilgit Baltistan were invited by the UN sub-commission on human rights to attend its meeting in Geneva since 5 August 1996.

All necessary arrangements were made. In spite of all this the Swiss Embassy of Islamabad refused to issue visas, giving no reason. We consider this

strengthens the human rights violation policy of Pakistan in an underhand way.

Before this we were refused visas by the British Embassy in Islamabad on 17 November 1994.

We regret to say that a country like Switzerland, which claims to be the champion of human rights and protector of minorities, to be a free and independent country, has failed in practice to prove the credibility of her claim.

Is it not against her prestige to refuse visas to the representatives of a people who are the last colony on this earth? Is it not discrimination that a freedom-advocating country on the one hand allows the UN sub-commission on human rights to establish its offices on her soil and on the other hand refuses to allow the most downtrodden people of Gilgit Baltistan to attend the meeting?

You are a permanent member of the Security Council and have your influence over Pakistan.

We would request you to put pressure on Pakistan to stop humiliating the 1.5 million people of Gilgit Baltistan, and give them universally-admitted rights of franchise and self-rule as agreed by India and Pakistan both in the UN.

Had we been allowed to attend the meeting, we would have informed the world community about state atrocities against us by the rulers of Pakistan. A few examples out of many are mentioned as below:

■ We as a people have been crippled by pathans (mafia) of North West Frontier, Pakistan (NWFP). Our historical memorials have been converted into commercial markets.

■ Drugs and weapon-pathans have flooded our drug-free area with drugs and weapons. This mafia is carrying drugs to Europe, America and Asia.

■ The government of Pakistan is trying to settle people from NWFP in Gilgit Baltistan with an intention of dispossessing the locals. To achieve this nefarious aim, the government causes bloody sectarian clashes resulting in loss of human life and property.

■ The government of Pakistan is bent upon destroying our people completely by dividing us into different segments, throwing us in the laps of different countries.

These are a few glimpses of the atrocities committed by the rulers of Pakistan against the people of Gilgit Baltistan.

We hope and pray that you as custodians of human rights would not hesitate to use your influence to emancipate us from the agony we are undergoing for the last half century and would suffer further to unknown period if not helped in time.

Lastly we pray that we should be considered as human beings and given the rights enjoyed by all peoples of the world without any discrimination to enable us to live an honourable life.

We should be given self-rule as part of the state Jammu and Kashmir as committed by India and Pakistan in the UN until there is a settlement of the Kashmir issue.

According to the UN resolution of 13 August 1948 we should also be given an opportunity to vote for our independent state.

Amir Hamza
Ex-senior Superintendent
of Police
Abdul Hamid Khan
Chair, Balawaristan
National Front

A look back — in anger — at TUC

ONE of the most controversial issues discussed at the Trades Union Congress this year was the minimum wage. Journalists and TV presenters buzzed around the ranks of grey-suited trade union leaders asking:

- Should a figure be set?
- Should it be left to a low pay commission?
- Should the boat be rocked before a general election?
- What would this do to the relationship with the Labour Party?

Anticipation

There was even mild anticipation and excitement among rank-and-file TUC delegates who wondered how chair Margaret Prosser would have reacted if anyone had spoken or voted against a motion.

After each unanimous vote she would griggishly announce, 'jolly good', and move on. With the minimum wage issue, it looked as if finally there might be a real debate after several days of unanimous votes on everything.

The Unison motion on the

minimum wage had been initially agreed at the union's June conference. Following a card vote, and in spite of desperate pleading from the general secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe, Unison delegates to the TUC were instructed to put the motion and not to accept reference back or dilution.

The motion reaffirmed a commitment to a national minimum wage and reforms to the benefit system to help close the 'widening pay gap between the highest and lowest paid'. It demanded the introduction of a national statutory minimum wage based on the formula for half male median earnings, currently £4.26 an hour. It was seconded by the National Union of Mineworkers.

Motion

Another motion was supported by six unions and moved by the GMB. Both this motion and a special supplementary report from the general council opposed the Unison motion and instead called on the general council 'to develop a view' on

BY LIZ LEICESTER
Unison TUC delegate

low pay commission and 'ensure the TUC is in a position to submit a claim to the commission'. It declared that to fix a figure for a minimum wage before a general election 'would provide a target for opponents'. Moving the motion, GMB leader John Edmonds attacked, with unrestrained vitriol, Unison and the Socialist Labour Party led by Arthur Scargill.

In a heated delegation meeting before the start of the TUC, Unison delegates had been told by Rodney Bickerstaffe that they must abstain on the opposing motion and in the vote on the general council report in order to ensure support from the powerful Transport and General Workers' Union and GMB for the Unison motion. In spite of the clear mandate from the Unison conference, only eight Unison delegates voted against the leadership recommendation and the delegation duly abstained in the vote.

This effectively left the whole matter in the hands of the TUC general council who will pursue the course they always wanted and come into line behind the Labour Party in what their report calls 'the frenzied pre-election atmosphere'.

Unanimity on all questions was only broken to oppose motions seen by TUC general council members as influenced by the Socialist Labour Party — what John Edmonds called, 'Arthur's new and very exclusive political party'.

Repeal

In two of these, the NUM called on a Labour government to take back all industries and services into public ownership and to repeal all anti-trade union laws introduced since 1979. Another motion put by the Communication Workers Union called for the right of trade union members to determine their union rule book and take defensive action 'without legal obstruction'. These were overwhelmingly defeated.

In its attempts to stifle and

control the trade union movement and the whole working class, the trade union leaders clearly support sections of the anti-union laws.

Astounded

First-time delegates to the TUC elected by lay members and rank-and-file committees were astounded by the degree to which the whole affair was stitched up in advance.

A standard line when we met in the corridors and bars of the Winter Gardens was: 'Why are we here? Why do they bother to spend all this money when the whole thing was mapped out before we arrived?'

(Although TUC general council members were clearly surprised by the various bombs let off by Labour Party spokespeople during the week!)

More importantly, by the end of the week there were discussions taking place about how — and if — the iron grip of the trade union bureaucracy can be effectively challenged and shifted and plans were made for the future.

Brits told: 'Get out of EU'

KLAUS HAENSCH, the German president of the European parliament, has said Britain should leave the European Union unless it toes the line over the BSE crisis.

Haensch, a member of the Social-Democratic Party (SPD), said on Saarland Radio: 'If Britain abandons the inner solidarity of the union, if it fails to keep jointly-agreed decisions, then it doesn't belong in the union. It would be better for such a member state to leave the union.'

German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel called on Britain to carry out all measures agreed to eradicate BSE, including the timetable for slaughtering older cattle.

BASF invests DM7bn in China

GERMAN chemical giant BASF is to invest 7 billion deutschmarks in China. By the year 2010, Asia will contribute 20 per cent of the concern's turnover and profits.

A member of the supervisory board is to be stationed permanently in Singapore, according to BASF Asia head Volker Trautz, speaking in Shanghai. Trautz said by the year 2000, BASF would double its number of employees in the region from 10,000 to 20,000.

Another three plants are to be built in Mangalore (India), Kuantan (Malasia) and Nanking (China), representing a quarter of the firm's total investments in the period.

Last year, Germany's chemical workers accepted a miserable 2 per cent wage increase on the promise the employers would use their 'best efforts' to stop the erosion of jobs.

Stock market's record levels

A WEEK after the German government voted its biggest cuts package ever, the DAX stock market index has hit record levels. Vehicle builders and chemical companies led the way, while the performance of banking shares was mixed.

The Deutsche Bank's shares rose slightly, despite the huge losses at British subsidiary Deutsche Morgan Grenfell. Two out of three Germans have no confidence the cuts package, titled 'programme for growth and jobs', will lead to improved job prospects, according to a survey carried out for N-TV television.

Berlin police on trial

EIGHT Berlin police officers, including a woman sergeant, are accused of verbally abusing and punching various suspects between May and August 1994. The officers belonged to a unit in the mainly Turkish Kreuzberg borough.

On 21 May 1994 two suspects were allegedly put in a police vehicle, punched in the face and kicked by police officers. The senior officer present allegedly shouted: 'Stop it! They're going to an identity parade, they can't be knocked about!'

Some of the officers are said to have had illegal knuckledusters, flick-knives and converted starting-pistols. The charges arose when authorities sent an agent to work in the unit. Their trial in front of the Berlin regional court continues.

Boost for 'hang 'em high' crowd

BY PATRICK SLAUGHTER

INFAMOUS right-wing crime 'expert', James Q. Wilson delivered a paper at a conference on criminology in Edinburgh last week. It led to one speaker, David Garland, remarking that it was surely the missing appendix to Tory Home Secretary Michael Howard's theme that 'prison works'.

Although this remark was calculated more to provide laughs from the audience than serious reflection, it is undoubtedly the case that many of the disturbing developments in prison policy witnessed in both the US (which incarcerates more than 1.5 million people) and Britain can be attributed to Wilson and his followers.

Draconian

His 'realist' approach to crime and punishment was influential in shaping some of the more draconian legislation pas-

sed under the Reagan and Bush administrations, as well as being warmly received by 'hang 'em high' Tories.

It will come as no surprise to Workers Press readers that a copy of Wilson's latest poison is to be found at all times in Jack Straw's back pocket.

Of course the 'realism' that Wilson employs is nothing of the sort. By manipulating a range of statistical data relating to crime (the majority of which is partial and ambiguous) Wilson offers up a platter of half-truths dressed as scientific evidence. In Edinburgh he confidentially told the audience he could now prove that imprisoning greater numbers of 'lawbreakers' was beneficial to 'society as a whole'.

Bombastic

Not only, he claimed, does the crime rate begin to fall when such a policy is adopted but also various economic benefits accrue. In his bombastic style he hurled statistic after statistic

at the audience, obviously keen to make sure nobody left thinking he had made the whole thing up.

Just for good measure, and to put things into context, he threw in his own theory for the causes of growing crime. Apparently everything started to go

evidence he illuminated the audience to the connections between single-parenthood, crack addiction, homelessness, crime etc. Of course this is what Wilson and his ilk are all about.

In blaming the 'immoral' individual and by refusing to ask wider and more difficult ques-

'Black youths in certain states in America are highly unlikely to reach the age of 30 without having seen the inside of a prison cell'

wrong just after the demise of Queen Victoria, and apart from a couple of incidents where her values briefly reappeared — both world wars and the depression — the human condition has been rapidly deteriorating ever since.

Citing yet more 'scientific'

tions about the society in which that person lives, it is quite possible to legitimise a punitive penal policy which in effect means that black youths in certain states in America are highly unlikely to reach the age of 30 without having seen the inside of a prison cell.

Protest for press freedom in Croatia

BOSNIA Solidarity Campaign demonstrates outside the Croatian embassy in London against the persecution of the editors of the satirical weekly 'Feral Tribune'.

Demonstrators were invited inside the embassy by a nervous ambassador, who told them that proceedings against the journalists had been 'shelved', but would be reactivated when the Croatian authorities saw fit.

The deputation raised other issues as well as the freedom of the press.

When asked why Tudjman had asked that non-white UN troops be removed from Croatia two years ago, the ambassador told us it wasn't racism — but he could see no reason why troops should come from Africa to keep law and order in Europe!



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Inside left

Robeson recorded

THE Washington DC Student Coalition Against Racism wants anti-racists around the world to commemorate black American singer, actor and political fighter Paul Robeson (1898-1976) with events from 19-26 October.

By coincidence, while I was reading about this in the September issue of *Marchlight*, the radio reported that an American plans to release some recordings previously hidden away in Soviet archives, including works by Soviet composers and a Paul Robeson concert.

Robeson, a loyal supporter of the Soviet Union, faced a storm in 1949 for reportedly saying black people had no use to fight for US imperialism against the Soviet Union or China. US Communist Party leaders asked him to drop it. Right-wing thugs and cops viciously attacked his two concerts at Peekskill, New York state. The US government took away his passport.

There was a world-wide campaign, 'Let Paul Robeson Sing! So why would Soviet authorities suppress recordings of a Robeson concert?

Martin Bauml Duberman's book on Robeson suggests the answer. In 1943, Robeson hosted actor-playwright Elia Kazan and poet Itzik Feffer, who came to New York for the Jewish People's Anti-Fascist Committee to raise support for the Soviet war effort.

In January 1948, Mikhöels' body was found in a car smash, staged by Stalin's secret police. On 24 December 1948, as Stalin's anti-Jewish purge unfolded, Feffer was arrested.

On 4 June 1949, arriving in Moscow for a concert tour, Robeson asked after Itzik Feffer, apparently unaware his friend was in secret police hands. Feffer brought to the singer's hotel, Feffer indicated to him by gestures that the room was bugged. While the two carried on a casual conversation, he told Robeson by notes and gestures that Mikhöels had been murdered, and others were being arrested.

At the end of his last Moscow concert, Robeson asked for quiet. He would sing one more encore, he said. He spoke about Jewish people in the Soviet Union and America, and his friends Mikhöels and Feffer. Then he sang, in Yiddish, the Partisans' Song — *Tsay Tsay Tsay keinmol* — 'Never say that for you this is the end...' His whole audience rose in a tremendous emotional ovation.

Back in the States, Robeson told his friends what he had heard, but swore him to silence. Publicly he continued to insist that unlike America, the Soviet Union was free of racism. 'Anti-Semitism? I met Jewish people all over the place... I heard no word about it. He lied for reporters from *Soviet Russia Today*. Soviet composer Shostakovich didn't forgive him.

When the Stalin-Tito split divided the US Progressive Party, Robeson sided with the Kremlin.

At a Bill of Rights conference in July 1949 he fiercely opposed a call for the release of 18 Socialist Workers Party members convicted in 1942 under the same reactionary Smith Act being employed against the Communist Party.

Trotskyists 'are the allies of fascism, who want to destroy the new democracies of the world,' declared Robeson. 'Don't get confused. They are the enemies of the working class.'

Robeson was a Stalinist, but he wasn't a hack. Determined not to be exploited by America's warmongers, he misguidedly defended Eastern Europe's bureaucratic repression.

Let's honour Paul Robeson's stand against imperialism and racism, and enjoy his music. But don't let anyone use his name to mislead militants.

Charlie Pottins

Liverpool dockers

Mersey portworkers to defend

Workers Press salutes the year-long struggle of the Mersey dockers and their families and community for reinstatement. Here WRP central committee member DOT GIBSON reflects on the lessons of that struggle and its relation to what dockers have fought for since the 'dockers' tanner' strike of 1889.

TODAY, Saturday 28 September, is one year since the 500 Liverpool dockers were sacked by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) for refusing to cross a picket line mounted by young dockers employed by Torside Limited fighting against casualisation.

The MDHC immediately offered the sacked men £10,000 redundancy money. They refused, demanding reinstatement. They again refused (by 87 per cent in a secret ballot) when the employers' offer was increased to £25,000.

The strike has won international support from dockers around the world facing similar attacks from governments and employers.

Foundations

TO UNDERSTAND this strike, its leadership and commitment, it is necessary to study the whole history of the dockers' fight since 1889 to build and defend trade unionism. It was the 'dockers' tanner' strike in that year that laid the foundations of the Transport and General Workers' Union. The dockers are second to none in their solidarity actions with other workers in struggle; they have supported workers in South Africa, Cuba and Namibia.

In this article, I want to especially look at the defeat of the 1989 dock strike — when the gains won over the previous 100 years were almost destroyed — in the light of the development of the present dispute.

Although the government and employers inflicted terrible damage on the dockers in 1989 because the TGWU leadership beheaded that strike, the Liverpool dockers remained unbowed. They returned to work together with their elected shop stewards. Trade union organisation on the job remained.

It was this defence of their unity, this championing of the right of workers to withdraw their labour, this continuity of union organisation and leadership, which enabled the Liverpool dockers to more clearly understand the defeat of the 1989 strike and withstand the daily struggle at work which followed.

The historic fight of the sacked Liverpool dockers over the past 12 months has taught us many lessons. Not least was that in defence of past gains and by building on tried and tested principles of its organisation and struggle, the working class can and will build and develop its own

independent leadership and new methods of struggle.

From this standpoint we take the occasion of this anniversary to look again at the statement made by Ron Todd, the then general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, on the day the general executive council of the union voted to end the 22-day strike in 1989 when Britain's dockers were stripped of their basic democratic rights. Todd said:

'It is not possible to defend trade unionism in Britain today.'

In 1995-96 the Liverpool dockers have proved, not only that it is possible to defend trade unionism today, but that this requires a fight to reconstruct trade union democracy and socialist principles and to rebuild internationalism.

It was Todd himself and the 'left' general executive council of the TGWU that organised the defeat of the 1989 dockers' strike, which smashed the union in every port except Liverpool. They refused to organise a fight to defend the dockers' national working agreement — the National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS) — when the Thatcher government announced its abolition.

It was they who, frightened of the anti-trade union laws and of calling a political action against the government, dragged the dockers through the courts and delayed action until abolition was going through parliament. It was they who called off the strike after only 22 days, telling the dockers' shop stewards that they 'must look reality in the face'.

Today, those who play that tune, especially new Labour leader Tony Blair, want to see the dockers' fight ditched in the name of 'common sense', a 'level-headed approach', a 'real' comprehension of today's problems. That was the situation at the TUC conference three weeks ago. The dockers had to fight all week even to get a mention.

Blair tells the Communication Workers' Union not to listen to their Royal Mail members — to get them back to work because they are not marching in step with 'our times'. When workers take such actions — especially where, as in the Liverpool dockers' case, this is all carried out independently of the official machinery — this worries the Labour and the TUC leaders. The question for these leaders is: How can these workers be controlled?

And the dockers have built an international campaign, which has



Banners at a Liverpool dockers' rally

led to a boycott of the port of Liverpool and a fall in the MDHC's share value. They maintain democracy with their weekly mass meetings. This is 'dangerous'. Somehow they must be brought back into the safety of officialdom — made to accept the discipline of the market.

It is not only the Labour and TUC bureaucracy that acts on the basis of this 'reality', there are many on the 'left' who likewise preach about having a 'balanced' view.

At a public meeting early in the dispute, someone in the audience warned: 'Shouldn't you be more aware of the reality, instead of giving us all this optimism? Surely we must start from the fact that Thatcher succeeded in destroying the unions in every other port in Britain; there is no solidarity in any other port; the leadership of your union is the same as it always was. You cannot trust this leadership.'

One of the shop stewards replied angrily: 'Please don't preach to us about the leadership of our union, please don't treat us like children — Thatcher has succeeded in imposing anti-trade-union laws precisely because the TUC has allowed that to happen. Do you think that we don't understand how we were betrayed in 1989? We must now change that reality. Are you for or against our stand? If you are for, then please feel free to join us — if against, then stand to one side!'

There are others, notably the Socialist Workers' Party and the *News Line* group who have consistently called upon the Liverpool dockers to direct their fight towards demanding that their union makes it official. Again, the dockers' shop stewards have said:

'To lead our men up and down to

union headquarters lobbying the general executive council, demanding that it breaks the union's decision to abide by the anti-trade-union laws, would frustrate and limit our fight for reinstatement and against casualisation.

'Instead we have independently organised an international campaign to blockade the scab port of Liverpool; we have spoken at almost 6,000 meetings throughout Britain; we can show that the working class can defeat the laws and build its own leadership.'

Background

WHAT was the background to Todd's conclusion that the unions cannot be defended today?

In 1989 to defend their wages and conditions and their trade union, Britain's dockers were faced with a fight to defeat the government, which had announced its intention to abolish the National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS or 'Scheme').

The Scheme was introduced in 1947 by a Labour Government. It set up a register of dockworkers giving them a legal guarantee of security of employment and forbidding the employment of men not on that register. It also guaranteed certain regular payments to each docker whether there was work for him or not.

The NDLS was administered by the National Dock Labour Board, jointly controlled by unions and port employers. Subsequent legislation meant that dockers were allocated to particular employers, while the 'surplus' were put on a 'temporary' unattached register where they received minimum fall-back pay each week, as well as the right to a job with any employer when a vacancy occurred



Dockers lobby Ron Todd at the 1989 TGWU conference

Liverpool dockers

Dockers prove it IS possible to have trade unionism today



Photo: Alan Clark

owing to retirement or voluntary redundancy.

Under the Scheme employers were deprived of their right to hire and fire. Therefore — as new technology was introduced into the ports, containerisation moved traditional dock work to inland bases, and container ports like Felixstowe were established outside the Scheme — the employers were forced to pay comparatively high compensation payments to get men out of the industry.

Over a period of 20 years up to 1989 the registered dock labour force had been reduced from over 80,000 to little more than 9,000. Despite this massive cut-back, the existence of the Scheme and the dockers' militancy frustrated the employers' desire to introduce more profitable shiftwork conditions and cuts in the gangs.

Between 1967 and 1972 the union was engaged in about 60 costly court cases over the definition of dock work, and the judges almost always came out on the side of the employers. In 1972 five London dockers were jailed in Pentonville for their part in organising industrial action in defence of their jobs. The government was forced to release them when millions of workers started solidarity strike actions under the historic banner: 'Arise Ye Workers'.

In the four years prior to 1989 the dockers were aware that the National Association of Port Employers and the Thatcher government were systematically preparing to abolish the Scheme. According to the National Dock Labour Board the number of man-days 'lost' was 10,663 in 24 strikes in 1988 and 6,616 in 41 strikes in 1987.

The employers issued writs

against shop stewards declaring them liable for losses arising from the need to direct ships to European ports as a result of strikes. Men on the unattached register were refused work in vacancies where others had taken voluntary redundancy.

In 1987 privatisation of the port authorities began. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board became the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company with the government as its largest shareholder.

Thatcher had put legislation on the Statute Book curbing the rights of trade unions. Now her government would abolish the Scheme, wipe off the employers' debts and make millions available for compulsory redundancy payments to sacked dockers.

Everything was set up for the employers to carry out their union-busting operation and bring 19th-century working conditions back to the docks.

In the face of this reality the trade union was split:

■ The dockers and their shop stewards were prepared to carry out a political struggle against the employers, the government and the state to defend the NDLS and their right to trade union organisation.

■ The TGWU leadership, with a 'Broad Left' majority, would not defend the NDLS because they would not challenge the anti-union laws. They reluctantly called a strike at a time when abolition of the NDLS was already going through parliament and then did everything they could to keep the dockers isolated from the rest of the membership and get them back to work.

On 31 July the union's general executive council voted by 18 to 12 to call off the strike. The union was de-

recognised, the dockers were forced into slave-labour contracts. The Liverpool dockers were the only ones in the whole country who returned to work with their trade union organisation undefeated.

Seven years later, Trevor Furlong, executive director of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company said: 'I suppose in hindsight we were too soft. We should have got rid of the lot in 1989' (*International Freight Weekly*, July 1996).

What dominated in 1989 was Todd's and the Broad Left's understanding of 'the reality'. But what has dominated the 1995-96 action led by the Mersey Port Shop Stewards' Committee is the opposite.

From the outset they identified the political nature of the struggle. The British state owns a 'golden' shareholding, a controlling interest in the MDHC, and the government uses this position to support the company.

The company and its shareholders have inherited thousands of acres of land and property on the riverside through privatisation. They have received £312 million from state funds and £20 million in European grants. The company's profits rose from £8.3 million in 1989 to £36 million in 1995. Productivity from a vastly decreased workforce rose to a record level of 32 million tonnes a year.

Public inquiry

THE dockers demand a public inquiry into the workings of the MDHC. They say: 'Open the books! They ask: Why is such a profitable port sacking its 500 dockers? Why does such a profitable port want to use casual labour? On whose authority did the MDHC use 7 per cent of the government's shareholding to buy the port of Medway?

How could private shareholders 'inherit' land and property worth billions on both sides of the Mersey? How can such huge sums of taxpayers' money be handed to a company for the enhancement of its directors and shareholders, while dockers are sacked and the people of Liverpool are deprived of social and public services?

■ Right from the start the shop stewards said that the working class needs to take 'political/industrial' action because it is impossible to defend the labour contract without fighting against the state's anti-trade-union laws.

■ They are not in the business of organising a protest movement, or to pass resolutions condemning this and condemning that. They have organised their own independent fight to defeat the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company — to win reinstatement, to defeat casualisation, to defend the union.

■ They immediately turned to dockworkers internationally, won their support to take boycott actions against the shipping consortiums, organised two international conferences and are in the process of setting up an international alliance of dockworkers.

■ Through collections and donations they have sustained their dispute to the tune of an average £29,000 per week — almost £1.5 million over 12 months.

■ In the course of their campaigning they have championed the rights of others. Notably the Turkish and

Kurdish workers and political prisoners, and the Bosnian miners, and workers in Britain facing deportation under the anti-asylum laws.

■ They have held 19 union and community marches and rallies and two national conferences of support groups. Their wives and partners have built Women of the Waterfront which now takes a prominent part in all activities. They have addressed nearly 6,000 meetings throughout Britain.

And all this has been carried out in the teeth of a virtual media boycott, and with Blair's Labour Party leadership instructing members of the Parliamentary Labour Party not to support the dockers. At the TUC it became abundantly clear that a Labour government will continue the attacks on the working class. They will not repeal the anti-trade-union laws.

Orchestrated farce

THIS week the Labour Party is in conference. The orchestrated farce is set up to impress the banks, the financiers and big business from whom they are getting money for the general election campaign and other support on the basis of promises that they will control trade unionists and attack wages and conditions.

What is the next step for the dockers and the whole working class?

The dockers' action has decisively raised the necessity of the working class to have its own new party — a socialist party — not imposed from above, like the Socialist Labour Party, or a getting-together of all the left groups. A party arising out of the struggle of workers themselves, led

and controlled by them. It is in the practice and experience of the dockers and all their supporters over the last 12 months that this development has already begun.

In our (the WRP/Workers Press) congress resolution we say why we think this is so:

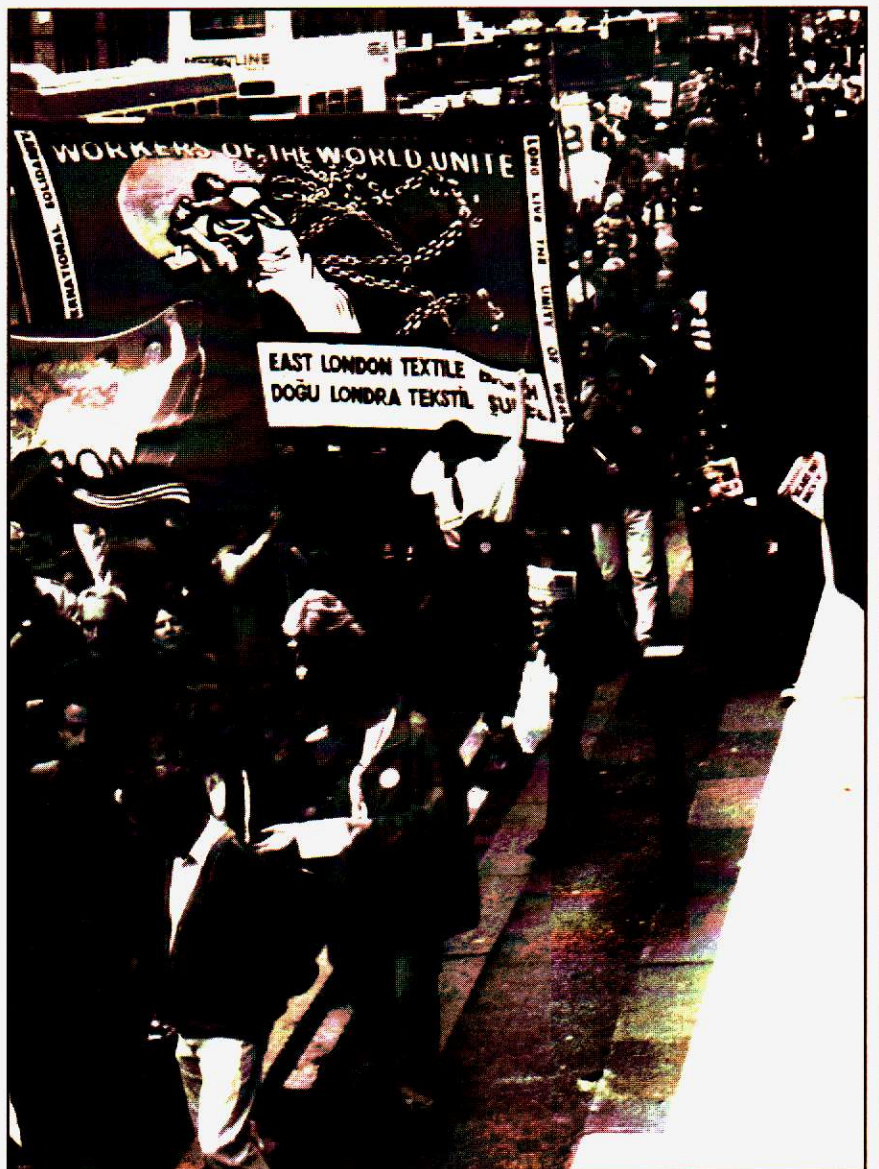
'First, because solidarity with other workers in struggle is an elementary principle which it is essential to reassert, as the working class reconstructs its class movement.

'Second: the kind of solidarity which grew up in the miners' support committees has to be continued, and, this time, not allowed to subside, so that there begins to be constructed a permanent network growing stronger with every stage of the struggle.

'This means that, in the build-up of support for the dockers and then for others who take the brunt of the fight, we do not only find the best forum for discussing the need for the new party, we are actually putting together the links and the modes of action which will make up that new party.

'But third, and most important: the dockers' fight (and this will be true of all the struggles now coming up) has come about on issues which not just dockers but the working class as a whole now must take up.'

Our congress decided that our members must take part in these developments. We will dissolve our party on the basis of a proposal to take part, with others, in a transitional form of organisation based on Marxism, dedicated to the new party which the working class itself must build. We intend to put this proposition to the 23 November conference in London (see front page advert).



Turkish and Kurdish workers have joined the marches

Learning from false starts

PERSONAL COLUMN

It would, I thought, mildly amuse readers of this paper; but they, like me, would soon realise that hidden within this joke, and not all that deeply, was a profound truth about the tragic history of the Soviet Union. And about the future that we face.

Within the workers' movement we can have, and certainly shall have, heated arguments about this or that mistake made by the Bolsheviks. Within the new socialist party whose founding we are at present discussing there will, I hope, be room for both critics and defenders of such hard decisions as the suppression of the anarchist-led insurrection at the Kronstadt naval fortress in 1921.

But, even as we debate such matters, we must never lose sight of what Bolshevism, when it came to power in Russia in November 1917, meant to the masses of poor and dispossessed throughout the world. It was the overthrow somewhere in the world, by workers like them, of corruption and tyranny. For them it was a beacon of hope.

And even after the dark decades of Stalinism, there still clings to the word Bolshevism something of its pristine meaning: in part at least it stands for a victory, however temporary and however ultimately betrayed, for the working class over the capitalist class.

Trotsky's followers, refusing to surrender either term to the Stalinists, called themselves 'Bolshevik-Leninists'. This has always seemed to me an awkward locution, and it's hardly surprising that it never really caught on.

So when I say yes, in a sense the Bolsheviks will come back, this doesn't mean that they will so call themselves. Like 'Communist' before it, the word 'Bolshevik' now belongs to history.

What inevitably will come back on the world stage — to the discomfiture of all corrupt and greedy rulers and of those lying politicians who, desperately seeking election, pretend that a heart attack is a mere cold — is the international working class, led by its most conscious and forward-looking elements.

Like the Paris Commune of 1871, the October Revolution of 1917 turned out to be a false start.

The working-class struggle to save the world from barbarism is a long, complex, and essential piece of social surgery; and, as in far more modest surgical operations, much can be learnt from false starts.

Ex-believer

IT WAS a diverting coincidence that Douglas Hyde, my news editor on the *Daily Worker* for several months, died last week at the very height of a major scandal engulfing the Catholic Church in whose bosom he took refuge when he fled from the Communist Party in 1948.

Hyde's book *I Believed* (1951) was spiced with lurid stories about, of all things, sexual goings-on among the *Worker* staff. Unlike the grubby picture now unfolding of the sex lives and hypocrisies of 'celibate' priests, those stories had little connection with reality.

But Hyde's occasional mentions of me in his weekly *Catholic Herald* column portrayed me, all too accurately, as an arrogant young man.

Like me, Hyde seems to have learnt something in later years. According to his obituarist in the *Guardian*, he found himself 'increasingly alienated from the Catholic Church'.

Back in the ward, I had four

Back in the ward, I had four

Video review

Beating media distortion

IF THE old maxim that a picture paints a thousand words is true how much more can be said by the moving image?

The first issue of *Video News* — available now — kicks off with a series of labour movement stories that will excite readers with their potential for bypassing media distortions. This new video journal neatly complements the variety and scope of *Undercurrents* video journal (reviewed previously in *Workers Press*) by dealing with fewer issues, but in greater detail.

THE Blair project to destroy the Labour Party's socialist roots is dealt with extensively.

The tactics of the media in promoting Blair, launched within hours of John Smith's death, reveal the cynicism of this campaign. The treatment of Liz Davies is given as an example of New Labour's tactics.

Tony Benn compares it with Stalin's murder of Trotsky. Claire Short's disgusting role in this witch hunt is exposed clearly — and now she has had a taste of this medicine for herself.

Arguments for staying in the Labour Party and for launching an alternative — the Socialist Labour Party — are both aired. The Labour left are hoping that a revival of radical feeling will enable them to rebuild their support in the party.

Scargill's project is based on



A fairly common view of 'New Labour'

the hope that proportional representation will give minority parties more hope of parliamentary seats.

THE Tories' attack on housing associations and the fight back by tenants and employees is perhaps the most significant story. A drive to commercial housing associations by introducing private capital is being strongly pushed by the government.

The disgraceful role of some leading Labour bureaucrats in actively organising the attacks on tenant's and employee's rights

that follow in the wake of privatisation paints a clear picture of what New Labour means — effectively old Tory.

Protests against rapidly rising rents have been met by closing down tenant's democratic representation. Again the Labour Party has played a prominent role. The most notorious attacks have been on Circle 33 housing association whose chair is Margaret Hodge.

But now tenants and employees are fighting back. The Campaign for Accountability to Tenants and Staff has been formed to campaign for democratic rights.

Launched in July 1996 with the support of tenants from over 45 housing associations, it has decided to work with private and local authority social housing tenants to achieve full tenants

rights. CATS can be contacted via TGWU, 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DS. Tel: 0171 272 6546 or 01580 480783.

A REVIEW of Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* gives an opportunity for a re-examination of this important aspect of 20th century history. Both criticisms and defences of the role of the Soviet Union are aired, reflecting the debate that the film has generated.

The West's tolerance of the growth of fascism is exposed, reminding the reviewer of recent events in Bosnia.

A FINAL story on the growth of trade unions in South Korea demonstrates how the working class of that 'Asian Tiger' has exploded onto the scene in recent years after years of oppression.

Fierce battles with police, state murder of union activists, even vicious raids on injured demonstrators as they lie in hospital beds have not blunted this movement.

Capitalism may think that relocating industries to developing countries run by authoritarian regimes may make the working class easier to control — this film shows that they are going to be disappointed.

Daniel Robertson

VIDEO NEWS can be contacted at PO Box 10395, London N7 9DN, Tel: 0171 700 7660. Issue 2 will be available in late September. Individual issues are £10, an annual subscription (4 issues) is £30.

Book review

A rattling good read

THE French novelist Stendhal wrote 'politics in the novel is like a gunshot in a dark room'.

The political novel has been eschewed by English writers and their compatriots, the literary critics. Curiously, unlike the poets, they have come to a consensus that politics may have a whiff of cordite or at worst a tediousness.

Except for some tendentious drama and whatever can be got past the gatekeepers of the television and film industries, politics and political art seems to be left in the hands of Tory ex-ministers making money out of the pulp market.

So for it is refreshing to read a riveting and masterly political novel. Eduardo's *The Truth about the Savolta Case* is a detective thriller, a political and social novel and a rattling good read.

The novel is set in Barcelona between 1917 and 1924. It is a period of political upheaval when the city's working class revolted, initially under anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist leadership, against the intolerable repressive conditions of labour.

The novel focuses on the Savolta arms factory which prospered during World War I, rising from being an obscure sports-rifle producer to becoming a major contributor to the great slaughter.

The end of the war brings about a crisis in the family business and a vicious power struggle takes place in which the old management is assassinated. The anarchists and 'pistoleros' are scapegoated, arrested and executed. The workers are brutalised and radical journalists first corrupted and then murdered.

I will not say more about the deftly-constructed plot since the narrative outcome in this kind of novel is part of its pleasure.

The strength of this novel is not restricted to its fine plotting, but in the historic social panorama it portrays and the depiction of betrayal as a necessary discipline of bourgeois life as distinct from the more demanding discipline of proletarian solidarity.

The novel's narrator is a petty legal clerk who becomes a cat's paw of far shrewder interloping interests. He is a betrayer and a betrayed man. He is drawn by powerful capitalist clients into the underworld of circus artists who hire themselves out as assassins and strikebreakers, prostitutes and police informers.

The novel seems to capture the atmosphere of the period as well as the city in seething turmoil. This is done not just as a remarkable act of imagination but through meticulous research. The topography of the city is still recognisable.

The inclusion of revolutionaries from police files like Andreu (Andres) Nin, and the popular anarchist Noi de Sucre (Sugar Boy) is not just a scenic backdrop or prop.

What appears as a confusing post-modernist plethora of 'texts', letters, police files, court and legal documents is part of the sinister delusion that the novel unravels.

The critics compare the characterisation of the Barcelona lumpenproletariat with that of Dickens's London underworld and I would say that though the author inventively uses the popular detective format, he is able to create a unique social and political novel capable of carrying the same themes and preoccupations of 19th-century writers like Dostoevsky.

Tom Owen

The *Truth about the Savolta Case*, a novel by Eduardo Mendoza, Harvill, 1993.

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International Trade Unionist Bulletin

International alliance of dockworkers

October 1996

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Anti Fascist Action Cable Street and Spanish Civil War Events

Friday 4 October: Rally, 7.30pm. Camden Irish Centre, 52 Camden Square, London NW1. Camden Town tube, Camden Road BR.

Saturday 5 October: Films: 'The Good Fight', 1.30pm. 'Fighting Talk', 3.25pm. 'Land and Freedom', 4.15pm. Rio Cinema, 103 Kingsland High Street, London E8. Dalston Kingsland BR. £4/£3 concessions.

Saturday 5 October: 'Oi Against Fascism'. Camden Irish Centre, 8pm. £5/£3 concessions.

* See front page for details of Cable Street committee's march and rally on 6 October.

Peter Fryer

The need for a new socialist party

'Way open for socialist alternative'

WHY I welcome the Movement of Marxists for a Socialist Party is that we have fought and waited too long for a party that will express the aspirations and desires of all those who labour 'by hand or by brain'.

Some of us had to learn that the spade, the pickaxe, the chisel, the micrometer, the pen and the book were not just a way of earning a living, but a potential means to the emancipation of labour.

Now I am sure that the very instrument that I am using, the computer-activated word processor, has many more possibilities. Some of us share the experience of active class struggle, the picket line, the occupation of living premises or the fight against poison that surrounds our habitat. Some have found that the precious qualities of human imagination and intelligence in the arts and sciences are rubbished by cash-nexus pirates.

In Britain some of our families supported the Labour Party or the Communist Party as a means of the advancement of working-class people. In other Western countries it has been the 'Communist' or 'social-democratic' parties that have been seen as the means of social progress.

Now that Stalinism has collapsed and lost its centre of con-

For more information about the steering committee and its plans for the future contact the coordinator, Steve Ballard, 0181-889 7255

We print three more personal responses to the initiative taken by the WRP towards building a new socialist party. Each week we aim to print a selection of views on this. Anybody interested in taking part in this discussion should mail, fax or e-mail (see back page) contributions which should be 300-400 words in length.

trol over the world labour movement and social democracy has become a competing capitalist agency, the way is open for a socialist alternative.

What kind of socialist alternative in the form of a party is needed?

Firstly, it will be Marxist, recognising that the task of the liberation of the working class is that of its own self-liberation. It will be revolutionary throughout, so that all aspects of social life will serve the needs of working people.

Capitalist institutions like parliaments and councils will be seen as a means and not an end. The party will be Marxist because, despite the horrors and ravages of Stalinism, Marxism represents and pursues both the continuity of reason and the freeing of humanity. Marxism is the summation of revolutionary thought, above all a guide to action.

The new party will be internationalist, it will oppose fascism, greater nationalism, racism and petty discrimination in any form.

We need a party that will develop the social programme that is the embryo of socialism in the trade unions — for example, in health, education and transport. We have to unshackle the independent organisations of the working class from the state and from repressive legislation.

We are still at the stage of a movement for a Marxist party. This will not be achieved by the stitching together of small, previously hostile groups. The necessary process of organising and creating a vanguard means that all those that come forward in the struggle against capital, bureaucracy and a nationalist bourgeoisie corruptly attached to the tailcoats of imperialists is not a

matter of prescription or dogmatic prediction.

However much the ideologists of the capitalist class proclaim the death of socialism, the fact remains that their system threatens the very life of this planet. Socialism, like class solidarity, is not an obligation but a necessity.

Tom Owen
Sheffield

Welcome discussion

THE DISCUSSION on work towards a new socialist party is welcome.

The WRP proposes a new organisation to strive towards such a party. Dave Graham (Workers Press, 17 August) asks whether this group will have 'Bolshevik organisational principles', and whether its programme will be debated. Good questions.

I do not think the new organisation should enter discussion about a 'new party' saying, 'here's the programme, we have it all worked out'. Rather, it could state key principles on which its participants agree, and then discuss them with other workers' organisations.

As for organisational principles, it all depends what you mean by 'Bolshevik'. In 1917 the Bolshevik party was 'relatively democratic, tolerant and decentralised' as the historian Rabinowitch wrote. It saw no need for a political committee until it had had state power for 18 months. It had no secretary, general or otherwise, before Stalin (1922).

It was Stalin's methods that rubbed off on many left groups, including Trotskyist ones. If the new organisation is to go anywhere, it must set its face against

such grotesque 'top-down' parodies of Stalin's 'Bolshevism'.

Geoff Pilling (Workers Press, 14 September) asks, is the WRP 'a barrier to what we must do'? And answers, 'yes'.

Strange statement from a WRP central committee spokesperson. Strange that, as a WRP member, I agree... in a certain sense.

Unfortunately, Geoff fails to say WHAT he means by 'barrier', or WHY the WRP has become one. Consequently, he fails satisfactorily to answer Dave Graham's questions.

I would suggest three senses in which the WRP has become a barrier:

■ Having identified the fall of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a crucial turning-point, leading members make a facile, one-sided analysis of its consequences. Geoff writes that Stalinism and social democracy 'no longer exist'. But their legacy exists. Why no mention of that? Look at the legacy in divided Bosnia.

■ Having set out in 1991, with international comrades, to rebuild the Fourth International, the WRP has made little progress towards this goal. Now it proclaims its strategy to build the 'new party' — with no apparent explanation of where that leaves the FI.

■ Despite breaking with Healy, we could not easily discard old habits. In particular, old-style 'democratic centralism' and 'inner-party struggle' reappear too often. Let's drop them.

Simon Pirani
London SE18

Revolutionary Platform

IT IS a welcome change that papers of the left are opening up debate around the crucial question of party and not keeping such vital issues the internal property of this or that small group. In this sense, the debate in Workers Press is very welcome.

Even so, the tone and, importantly, the direction of the debate are highly problematic. This is best summed up with the headline 'We are joining YOU!' in Workers Press (14 September). This article sums up a pure liquidationist trajectory.

The article claims that 'social democracy is not merely in a crisis — it no longer exists'. This is clearly false.

Social democracy lives on in the Labour Party, despite its right wing taking it on a merry dance to its liberal roots. Social democracy, of a variant, is trying to recreate itself in the Socialist Labour Party, but this is still in its early stages.

Thus the SLP is now the place to carry out our collective struggle to build the type of party that the class actually needs, not a party created in the image of this or that workers' leader. Reformism remains the major barrier in developing our revolutionary party.

Geoff Pilling also wrongly states that the task of revolutionaries is to 'understand that the working class is a class that helps itself and it is the task of Marxists to get into that working class among those helping themselves'.

This perspective clearly confuses the admirable struggles of militant trade unions (such as the Merseyside dockers) with that of communist struggles and communist consciousness. The role of revolutionaries is not to lower ourselves to the level of trade union consciousness and organisation, but to work with militants in the class and win them to the higher level of communist consciousness and organisation.

The Revolutionary Platform of the SLP recognises the need for a revolutionary party of the working class as a whole. Such a new party cannot be built on the struggles of one section of the class, no matter how militant and heroic. The best place now for building such a party is in the Socialist Labour Party.

What comrade Pilling gets partly right is on the question of party building. He says 'the main

thing to understand is that it is not a question of getting everything clear and right and then taking it into the working class'.

However, this is only partly right. If this is the perspective of the leadership of the WRP, then they are irrevocably on the road to liquidation.

The truth about what comrade Pilling says is its partial recognition of the relationship between the development of party and programme — and this relationship to the consciousness of the class.

However, flipping from sectarianism — what comrade Pilling calls 'pontificating' — to liquidationism is not the answer. What you seem to be doing is moving from the one-sided position of 'getting everything clear and right' and preaching it to the class, to the one of saying 'we have no answers, we are joining you'.

The Revolutionary Platform of the Socialist Labour Party calls on all members of the WRP to struggle against liquidationism. Join the SLP and fight for your politics in that growing party of the class. Bring your experience, your organisation, your press and your perspectives to the SLP, but do so without liquidating.

Phil Bowen
Revolutionary Platform
Socialist Labour Party

Clarification

HASSAN — who wrote in the new party discussion on 24 August — would like to make it clear that his contribution was in a purely personal capacity and did not represent the views of the Iranian Workers' Association.

■ NEXT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING: Wednesday 9 October, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Holborn tube. Conference, 23 November, see advert front page.

High cost of capitalism in China

BY CHEN LEI

BACK in March, at the eighth National People's Congress of the Communist Party of China, Li Peng, the state council premier, detailed the ninth 'five-year plan'.

Many pages of the *China Daily* and its *Business Week* were filled with figures showing the planned growth. 'State chequebook open for technology binge', was one headline.

Boasts were made about the 3,629 contracts made in 1995 for new technology and technical equipment worth \$13 billion, a 217 per cent increase on 1994.

New gas fields have been found and Hong Kong is already supplied by China's offshore rigs.

BMW and Toyota already have bases in China, and Ford plans to very soon. In 1995, half of all cars assembled in China came from the Shanghai Volkswagen plant.

More than 300 overseas-funded enterprises have been given the go-ahead by the central government in the first quarter of 1996.

German, French, US, Dutch, and Japanese companies were among the 105 exclusively foreign-funded enterprises. That was in addition to the 196 Sino-foreign ventures.

So everything would seem to be going well for those seeking to make a fat profit out of the working men and women of China. Most of the investments are based in the special economic areas or zones. Across the river from Shanghai is the massive 'Pudong New Area', where 2,000 foreign-funded investments worth \$15 billion expect a good return.

Just north of Hong Kong is the economic zone of Shenzhen. Close to this border is a car park



Businessmen on their mobile phones cutting deals in Shanghai (left) and worker forced to adjust a machine tool with his bare hand (right)



project which is a good example of what could happen.

The company Shenzhen Fountain was China's first publicly-listed joint venture.

It was called Champaign Industrial and was owned by Chinese-Australian James Peng Jiandong. But he was jailed for fraud and the company was taken over in 1992 by Ms Ding Peng, who happens to be the niece of

the Chinese Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping.

The company's annual general meeting in June cast doubts on her activity and the auditors expressed reservations about its finances. And while the Shenzhen bureau revoked her ownership of the car park the central government strangely came down on her side!

In contrast to the profiteering

deaths and injuries in these economic zones grow by leaps and bounds. Even the official All-China Federation of Trade Unions says that 90,000 people per year die through industrial or traffic accidents or through fires at work.

The real figures will be far worse, since the official unions' involvement in foreign-owned or managed work places is very

small. Three working-class activists in Shenzhen were arrested when they tried to publish a poem mourning the death of 84 workers in a fire at the Zhili factory. These workers' current whereabouts is unknown.

On 29 June, 36 people were killed and 52 injured when there was an explosion at the Yongxing firecracker factory. Previous to this 20 died and 89 were hurt in a

fire at a Christmas ornament factory in Shenzhen.

These fires, and many others were in factories not organised by the All-China Federation, so the true accident figures would be nearer 150,000 than the 90,000 quoted.

This is the real price of capitalist investment in China: big profits for investors, death and injury for workers.

Serb workers explode

'IT is only a question of days when everything will explode and the whole of Serbia will say no to bandits, bloodsuckers and thieves,' workers' leader Gvozden Markovic told a mass rally in Kragujevac. 'There will be no peaceful solution to this.'

About 20,000 people took part in the rally in this industrial town, once regarded as a stronghold of support for President Milosevic. Some 7,000 have been on strike for six weeks. It began with workers at the Zastava weapons plant, then spread to the city's car factory. Students and teachers joined the almost daily rallies.

Serbia's workers feel abused and angry. They withstood years of bureaucratic mismanagement and shady business deals enriching a few. No one asked them whether they were willing to bear the cost of war, bank-rolling nationalist rebels in Bosnia and Croatia, and carrying the brunt of international sanctions, while profiteers opened bank accounts abroad.

The average monthly pay is \$100, and often months in arrears. Annual per capita income is now equivalent to \$1,000 — half what it was when Milosevic took office in 1987. With a population of 9.7 million, the foreign debt of rump 'Yugoslavia' is about \$8 billion, and inflation runs at 100 per cent a year.

Threat

Threatening to spread through Serbia the workers' struggle is a major threat to the Milosevic government facing elections to the federal parliament, representing Serbia (including Kosovo and the Vojvodina) and Montenegro, next month.

Many people think Milosevic, who technically cannot be elected to another term as Serbian President, wants to be Yugoslav presi-

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

dent next year, a post that is largely ceremonial at present.

On 14 September it was reported that the workers had met with a partial success in receiving an 'advance' payment for July wages in arrears. Kragujevac Zastava autoworkers were promised a 120 dinar (\$24) bonus.

Scared

On 16 September car plant director Miodrag Bogdanovic claimed that foreign investors, with whom talks had allegedly been under way, might be scared off by the strike. He said investors were considering pulling out of a deal rumoured to be worth 'hundreds of millions of investment dollars' to the Serbian economy, according to the official Tanjug agency.

On 18 September, *Nasa Borba* reported that opposition politicians were backing the strike, with Vuk Draskovic of the Serbian Renewal Movement declaring 'workers of Kragujevac are effectively fighting for all Serbia's workers'.

The following day the paper reported that the arms plant had secured a preliminary agreement on a 10 million dinar deal with the Yugoslav army.

Milosevic blamed the opposition for the strike. Aleksander Ivovic, president of the Union of Metalworkers of Serbia said workers had obtained many of their demands, and should go back because they were jeopardizing the company's future. But workers in Kragujevac vowed to continue till all their grievances were met.

With support coming from factories throughout Serbia, and from students, opposition parties and even churches, their action has sent Milosevic running to Western investors and the International Monetary Fund for support. But the IMF, unsure whether his regime can control the workers and privatise enough for its taste, hesitated to help.

'Strike marks an inevitable turning point'

From RADE PAVLOVIC

THE strike of workers at the Namenska arms factory in Kragujevac, a town of more than 50,000 workers in the heart of Serbia, with the Zvesta automobile plant, marks an inevitable turning point.

Milosevic's Bonapartism, with its nationalist demagoguery, resulted from the inability of the Serb bureaucracy to settle accounts in a brutal manner with the working class, and from the latter's inability to seize power.

Milosevic tried to export this explosive contradiction; hence the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, camouflaging civil war.

Today, after Dayton, which spelled out Balkans' impotence under the dictates of imperialist power, Serb Bonapartism has lost its social base. The bureaucracy's power has become unbridled gangsterism, while the immense majority of workers have fallen below the poverty line.

Four years of barbaric wars for the 'Great Serb' delusion have quartered Serb workers' spending power. To meet a family's minimum needs requires 800-1,000DM a month, but salaries have only reached 300DM.

To this social misery, we must add 200,000 Serb refugees driven from Croatia, whose hatred for Milosevic, who used them and let them down, exceeds that for Tudjman, who drove them out. Without homes or work, their misery is made worse by the fact that they have no perspective, and that pan-Serb solidarity has proved a myth.

Serb nationalism, which pushed them to chop up Croat territory into several non-viable shanty-statelets (Krajina, East Slavonia, West Slavonia), blames them today for rising up against Tudjman.

The Dayton accord has not produced the perspective of an honest and durable peace, but has reduced war tensions, while political and social problems accumulate.

The fall of this tension and general impoverishment pushes the Serb workers, like Bosnians, into a struggle against threatening pauperisation.

In Serbia, industrial production is around 10 to 15 per cent

with hundreds of thousands of workers technically unemployed.

The catastrophic fall in living standards is the direct result of the wars across the Danube and the Drina. During those wars the working class remained more confused and passive than consenting.

In five years, not one mass meeting supporting Karadzic's war has taken place in Serbia, and nobody has celebrated the 'victory at Vukovar', apart from the fascist minority.

The Serb working class, like the refugees from Croatia, has the same feeling of having been duped by those in power, who

its \$600 million orders, its funds were wide, but because the state budget was swallowed up by the police, the Namenska workers have not been paid for two months. That put the spark to the powder. The Namenska workers aren't especially keen to make cannon, they say they're ready to retool for civil work, but the state must say what it wants to do.

Led by the autonomous unions, (former state unions, led by Milosevic's men, but losing control under pressure from below), the Namenska workers, highly skilled and very well-organised, launched themselves into action like a rocket.

At the head of the movement

take much to make the workers of the Zastava factory join them, but day by day, the town square filled up with people, mostly workers from other factories.

After several days, 83 workers decided to show their determination by a hunger strike. The independent paper *Nasa Borba* was the only one to report the event fully, but news spread throughout Serbia.

Messages began coming from trade unionists, such as the Subotica trades union council. Representatives of the Belgrade bus drivers and Rakovica metal workers came with solidarity greetings.

Ljuba Tadic, a grand theatre actor known for opposing Serb nationalism, addressed the workers, and got a big ovation. So did the message from students at Novi Saad.

On 9 September, workers from Uzice and Kraljevo set out to join their comrades at Kragujevac, but were stopped on the road by police.

After six days on hunger strike, the armourers of Namenska obtained the resignation of their director, the payment of salaries in arrears, and the fall of several town officials, but there remained the paid leave supplement to settle.

In appearance a derisory sum — 35 dinars or 100DM — but for the workers, just when the kids are going back to school, an important sum, and above all, of symbolic importance — who would give in first?

Without having got a mass walkout from the Zastava workers, and under pressure from concerned doctors as well as the public which had supported them, the hunger strikers abandoned their fast, but without losing face. The strike continued, as did the meetings in front of the town hall.

The diverse support shown in solidarity from workers all over Serbia has strengthened the Namenska workers' will to struggle. The leaders of this movement are new people, combative, determined.

■ RADE PAVLOVIC will continue looking at the Kragujevac strike, and the implications for Serbia's coming elections, in next week's Workers Press.



Workers outside Kragujevac town hall shouting 'Thieves! Thieves!' and 'We want work and wages!'

made use of the nationalist myth to line their own pockets.

Fifty thousand Serb reservists were mobilised to destroy Vukovar, and yet under the Tudjman-Milosevic accords, Vukovar is to be returned to Croatia.

So what was the point of this war, people ask themselves in Serbia? It is finally becoming clear in Serbia that Karadzic, supported by Belgrade, launched an infamous war, leaving the Serb people with a heavy mortgage on its future.

The 7,000 Namenska workers, who make cannon and rifles, worked under a unique set-up during the war, run by the military. The Serb state didn't pay for

are militant young toolmakers. They put the colonel-director and management out, occupied the factory, and made their demands, of which the bottom line was payment of salary arrears.

After the experience last spring in Nis, southern Serbia, where the workers of several factories on strike marched in the street, the Namenska workers didn't fall for the regime's game of letting strikers stew behind the factory gates.

Every day, they marched from the factory to the town hall, in the centre of Kragujevac, holding a public meeting there before going back to the factory. It didn't

Aid for Bosnia

Saturday 18 October: Open meeting to discuss the past, present and future of the Workers Aid and Student Aid campaign for Bosnia, 2pm. This meeting will hopefully prepare proposals for future actions.

Saturday 18 October: Fundraising concert and social, 8pm.

Sunday 19 October: Workers Aid meeting, 11am-3pm.

All events at Leeds University Student Union

More information from John Davies, 0113-262 2705

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Gulf War — not over yet

BY DANIEL ROBERTSON

THE second Gulf War — the fight of war veterans to get official recognition of 'Gulf War Syndrome' — looks set to flare up after several recent revelations.

Gulf War Syndrome is a collection of conditions, including kidney problems, immunodeficiency, headache, muscle pain, spasms and tremors, fatigue, depression and diarrhoea. These were suffered by Western soldiers involved in the Middle East War against Iraq.

To date 60,000 US and 1,700 British troops have reported symptoms. The British government has denied that the condition exists.

The US defence department has admitted that small numbers of troops may have been harmed by chemical or biological weapons, but has denied any mass exposure. They still insist that Gulf War Syndrome, as a unique

cluster of symptoms, does not exist.

The White House, with an election looming, has taken a more sceptical position. It has accused the Pentagon, in an unusual display of disunity, of conducting a superficial investigation.

Now US General Barry McCaffrey has blown the lid off the cover-up by expressing fears that up to 24,000 of his troops may have been exposed to deadly Sarin nerve gas.

This was not an Iraqi gas attack, but 'friendly fire' caused by the destruction of a captured arms dump. The nerve gas bombs were blown up without any warning to him and his troops. None of them were wearing chemical warfare clothing at the time, and they must be considered lucky not to have suffered mass deaths.

More revelations are expected now that the truth is coming to light.

Research reported from US Universities have found that combining various anti-chemical and biological warfare inoculations with insect repellents used in the Gulf War can produce some symptoms that are not caused by any agent in isolation.

These resemble some of the nerve damage symptoms reported by veterans, and are the main alternative hypothesis that might explain the syndrome.

Biological warfare antidotes were distributed under conditions completely in conflict with normal safety procedures.

British troops have reported long-term symptoms after being exposed to these agents but the government has imposed a blanket of secrecy over what really happened. It appears that troops

were subjected to completely untested combinations of agents, and possible exposure to chemical weapons, under conditions of complete disregard for their safety.

Winning the war for control of Middle Eastern oil was all that mattered.

We are used to the images of the barbaric mass slaughter of fleeing Iraqi troops during the war.

Now it appears that Western troops were being treated with similar contempt and cynicism by their leaders.

Iraqi and Western victims of this war should have a common purpose in exposing the inhumane war machine that capitalism has created to defend its interests.

In-depth information can be found on the internet at the Gulf War Veterans Resource Pages at <http://www.gulfwar.org/index.html>.