

Workers power

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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COUNCIL CUTS AND CHAOS

FINISH OFF THE TORIES!

THE POLL Tax has been withdrawn. Faced with mounting opposition to the Tax amongst their own voters, and with continued mass non-payment in parts of the country, the Tories have retreated.

But while every opponent of the Tax will have been delighted to see Heseltine and Major squirm, the Tories have not been routed.

The new "local tax" will be half a Poll Tax. It will be assessed on both the value of your house and the number of people living there. If it is not to crucify the rich with their big, expensive houses, it will have to rely heavily on taxing the number of people in a house, just like the Poll Tax.

To compensate for their retreat on the Tax itself the Tories are going on the offensive against the structure of local councils. They will abolish county councils and reduce democratic debate. None of their proposals are out in the open because they have decided to hide them in "consultation documents" possibly until after a general election. But it is clear that they are planning new attacks.

Education will be removed from local control, putting the Eton-educated upper class twits of Whitehall in charge of what our children learn.

And the Poll Tax bills will still keep dropping onto our doormats for at least two years!

The Tories have made a cynical move to try and buy themselves a chance of winning a fourth term by cutting bills by £140 across the board. But who foots the bill for this handout? The working class, through 17.5% VAT on nearly everything we buy.

The £140 sweetener has been dispensed with typical

Tory disregard for fairness. In London, workers in Lambeth will still have to pay £450, while across the road in Tory Wandsworth the bill is zero!

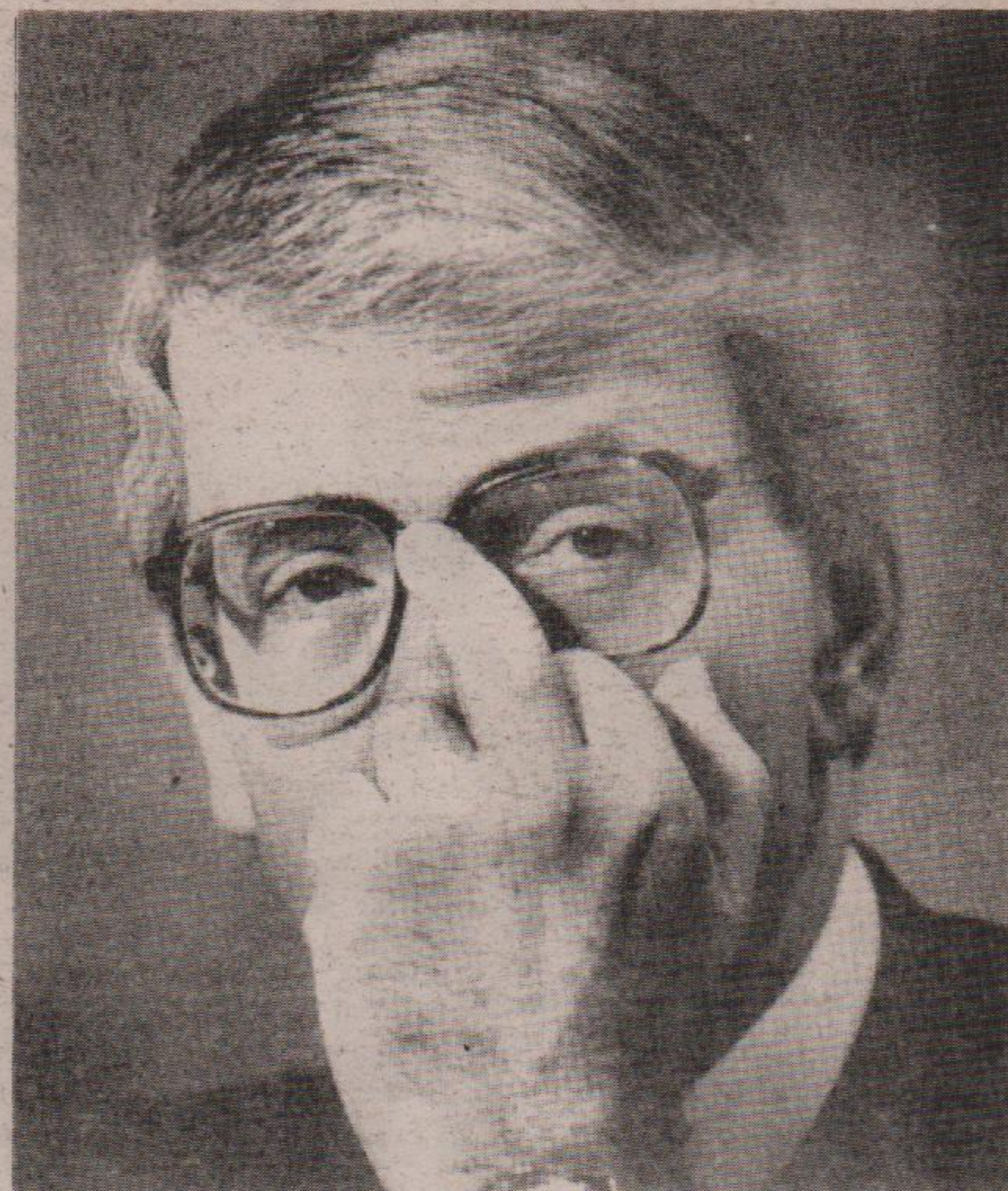
Not a penny of the £5 billion given to local councils will be spent on restoring the services that have been savaged due to the Poll Tax and charge-capping. Heseltine made it clear that for as long as the Tax remains he will use his capping powers.

What this means is the end of adult education, swimming lessons, clothing vouchers for needy children, day centres for the elderly and disabled. It means thousands of teachers and council workers will lose their jobs this year and next.

We have beaten the Tax, but the Tories are conducting an orderly retreat, preparing a new offensive on local government. And this is why it's too early to start dancing on the streets at the Tory climbdown. Heseltine will be laughing at those who celebrate while thousands of council jobs and vital services are being destroyed.

The Tories should have, and could have, been routed. The massive unpopularity of the Tax, the mass demonstrations and the marathon strike by Greenwich housing workers against the effect of the Tax all showed the potential to smash the Poll Tax through working class action.

But instead the leadership of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation stuck to the idea that "mass non-payment can win".



John Major that Thatcher's Tax was "uncollectable".

But it was Tory ministers who finished off Thatcher and Tory voters in Ribble Valley who pushed Major into finishing off the Poll Tax... by voting in their thousands for the Liberal Party.

Mass non-payment could have been the basis for a fight to the finish with the Tory government, if the Anti-Poll Tax Federation had fought for strike action to protect non-payers, strike action against collection and workers' self-defence against the bailiffs.

A fight to escalate passive non-payment into active resistance in the workplaces and the estates could have ensured the Poll Tax was buried not by an exchange of insults in parliament but by a massive class battle. This would have driven the Tories from office and left Labour to face a fighting mass movement, able to demand the immediate restoration of the jobs and services.

But the Federation never fought for this. And faced with the spectacle of the Tory retreat it refused to mobilise to drive them into a rout. It organised a "victory carnival" instead.

It would be a disaster now if the Anti-Poll Tax movement is

demobilised. We have to turn immediately to the fight against the effects of capping and to rekindle mass non-payment.

The start of Heseltine's review saw a sharp increase in arrears. Before the review councils were on target to collect 80% of the Tax. Now they have collected only 73%.

Mass non-payment should continue, backed up by mass action outside the courts, against the bailiffs and in the workplace, preventing liability orders from taking effect.

We should fight for working class Councils of Action in every borough to fight the cuts and job losses which are crippling local services. Action Councils must draw in delegates from council and private sector workplaces, housing estates, hospitals threatened with closure, school students and mature students whose right to a basic education is being denied and all the other users of local services whose voices are never heard.

Such organisations could plan and campaign for the only kind of action that is going to stop the Tories from carrying out their mass destruction of education and local services; strike action against the cuts and against the Poll Tax.

So, while the Tories have retreated, the mass non-payment campaign is also in retreat in many areas. Many anti-Poll Tax activists will have been through the experience of pathetic court demos, three-second court appearances and rubber-stamped liability orders. Many of us will have seen our workmates and neighbours finally paying up because the campaign could

not defeat the courts and the bailiffs.

The mass non-payment campaign certainly contributed to the Tory climbdown. It maintained the focus of discontent against the new Tax and offered millions a way of protesting against it. It added up to £50 to the Poll Tax bills of some councils where mass non-payment was concentrated. And it finally persuaded

VIRGIN BIRTHS

Another moral panic

EVERY DECEMBER millions of Christians celebrate a virgin birth. Last month the headline "Virgin Birth Scandal" was plastered across every tabloid's front page. Had the hacks wised up to Mary's sleight of hand two thousand years too late?

No. The fuss was all about some single women seeking to get pregnant through Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID). In a society in which a third of marriages break down, 20% of children are born out of wedlock and fertility treatment is well established, the procedure for AID should be straightforward. No visiting angels or divine interventions are required for women to establish control over their own bodies and fertility.

And children growing up in homes with one parent is hardly a new development—the slaughter of the First World War created thousands of single parent households. But the same press that cheered on the recent carnage in the Gulf and that was prepared to see thousands of Iraqi children orphaned condemned "virgin births".

This hypocrisy was not confined to the gutter press. The controversy uncovered deep veins of reaction and hostility to women's independence.

For the last few years, a number of single women have been able to take advantage of the new technology available and become pregnant using AID. They have not known the donor and have not intended to marry. Some of the women taking advantage of this service are lesbian, often in lesbian partnerships. Some heterosexual women have also chosen to get pregnant this way.

The trigger for the latest round of moral panic was the revelation that a woman who had no intention of starting any relationship with a man had applied for AID. This is not the first such case, but the woman's psychotherapist wrote to the *Lancet*.

Chance

This gave the muckraking journalists their chance. How could a woman who did not intend to "form a relationship with a man" be a fit mother? For these bigots, propping themselves against the bar in Wapping pubs and West End nightclubs, this is code for their view that "all women need shafting".

These women-haters cannot cope with any assertion of women's independence. They detest the fact that technology now makes it possible for women to choose life and children without men. The up-market version of this prejudice is more subtle but just as invidious.

Various experts came forward, like Dr Persaud of the Institute of Psychiatry to explain that women who seek to have children without having experienced a sexual relationship "may be suffering from psychological problems". This learned doctor does not know the

BY LESLEY DAY

woman in question, has never analysed her, and has no idea whether she has such difficulties. Scientific evidence clearly has nothing to do with Dr Persaud's views—moral prejudice does.

Self-appointed moral crusader Dame Jill Knight, the Tory anti-abortionist MP, railed against those who dared to have a child if they "had not had the benefit of a sexual relationship or a partner". Jill Knight's comfortable home and lucrative investments may well testify to the benefits of a good partnership.

Lost

But for the 750,000 British children who have lost contact with their fathers following marital breakdown, such benefits are dubious to say the least.

Even the liberal newspaper, *The Guardian* wondered how the woman "who had no intention of ever having sexual relations with a man" could ever "teach her child about forming relationships". Ironically, the same day that the "virgin birth" story broke, the DSS

published a survey confirming that 25% of children face the breakup of their parents' marriage before they are sixteen.

Inevitably the god squad took the AID mothers to task for their "selfishness". According to the church it is natural to want a child if your union is blessed by god but unnatural and selfish otherwise. "A child wanted because the parent wants someone to love... has to carry too much of an emotional burden for its parent's needs", pronounced Archbishop Habgood.

His views were supported by anti-abortion MP Ann Winterton. She switched from trying to make women have babies they don't want to preventing those that do from having them. The anti-abortion outfit, Life, turned out not to want life after all unless it is directly "man made".

The religious bigots of the Catholic Church have always told us that sex is "sinful" unless it serves its "natural" purpose—making babies. They should be jumping for joy now that it isn't even necessary for that!

The fact that they are howling blue murder shows up their argument for what it always was: a

rationale for maintaining generations of workers in the grip of the bourgeois family.

In fact, behind the moral or mystical judgements on "virgin birth" lies a concerted attempt to impose traditional family values on women. The family is undergoing change as more and more women gain at least a measure of independence through greater participation in the workforce. Women's wages are low and benefits are pitiful, but they have been enough to encourage the trend away from the traditional family.

Of course women and children do not always benefit from these changes since many are simply deserted by male partners. But turning the clock back would mean a return to a stifling dependence. The Tories' current plans aim to strengthen that dependence.

They are pushing ahead with their insistence that women name fathers so that they can be chased for maintenance. Under the provisions of the Child Support Bill women will be liable to lose benefit if they will not reveal the father. The only excuse that will be accepted is if you can provide evidence of physical threat.

Escape

This reveals the limits of the gain represented by the Appeal Court decision to remove the automatic immunity husbands had from rape charges. While women remain financially dependent on men, and forced into that dependence by the state, the possibility of escape from domestic violence and sexual abuse is small. No wonder some women choose to plan single motherhood from the start, rather than risk such dependence.

Why are Tories, the churches and other pillars of the establishment so anxious to shore up the traditional nuclear family unit? Because of the advantages this unit has for

the maintenance of the profit system itself. Women's subordinate role in the family means that the next generation of workers is brought up cheaply and society's ideas are passed on.

Women, with their extra burden in the home, will also do paid work at cheaper rates. Any deviation from the norm challenges this arrangement and brings down the wrath of the defenders of the existing social order. And this wrath is all the greater at a time when capitalism's economic crisis is obliging it to cut the social services, the NHS, the nursery places that had eased the domestic burden on many working class women.

A few single women choosing to have children through AID is not going to destroy the fabric of society—but the fact that it causes such panic tells us something about the continued role of the family and how women's oppression is rooted in it. It is too, a means of buttressing the growing attack by the bigots on the rights of lesbians to be mothers. Most of all, the bigots hate the idea of lesbian women being mothers.

The new Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority, set up by the recent Act, will shortly publish guidelines for clinics offering AID. A clause in the Act allows for consideration of the welfare of a child born as a result of AID "including the need of that child for a father".

Clinics will be threatened with the loss of their licence if they defy the guidelines, the likely result is that AID will only be available to single women who are prepared to pay. Otherwise it will mean do it yourself methods with attendant risks.

We should fight for the positive right to the use of all the technology currently available, free on the NHS. We should oppose all attempts to restrict the right of women to be able to choose to have children or not. ■

BRITAIN'S JUDGES are closing ranks to defend Lord Lane, the man who kept the Birmingham Six in prison in spite of overwhelming evidence that they were innocent. They know that what's at stake in the campaign against Lane is the credibility of British justice itself.

Every judge has sent down innocent men and women and then struggled to keep them inside. The reason for this is simple—the whole vengeful system of British "justice" exists to protect and defend the capitalist system. And the unelected judges are vital props to that system. Step out of the line with the system and the judges will punish you.

There is a long list of victims of this class justice. Irish people, black people, anti-fascists, anti-Poll Tax activists, strikers have all had months or years of their lives stolen from them because they fought the system that exploits and oppresses them.

The Tottenham Three figure prominently in this list. Engin Raghup, Mark Braithwaite and Winston Silcott were jailed after the Broadwater Farm uprising against the police in 1985. A policeman, PC Blakelock, died in the uprising. The police wanted revenge and didn't care how many innocent people suffered as a result. The Broadwater farm estate, in North London, was terrorised for days after the uprising. Evidence from juveniles was collected which even a judge described as "pure fantasy". Suspects were rounded up.

Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghup were both subjected to psychological torture by the police and had false confessions prised out of them. Winston Silcott refused to make a statement but his 26 word denial of guilt was treated as a confession.

No solicitors were present for any of the police "interviews". Amidst a campaign of unprecedented racism in the press the three were impris-

Free the Tottenham Three!



Bernie Grant with the Tottenham Three Families Campaign

oned despite the lack of hard evidence.

They are still in jail. Despite expert psychological evidence proving that Engin was likely to agree to anything the police had suggested to him, and that Mark's claustrophobia prompted him to confess just to get out of the interrogation cell, their appeal was turned down in 1988 by none other than Lord Lane.

He knew his job was to uphold class justice, regardless of the facts.

Now Engin has been granted the right to appeal. But Mark and Winston have not. Nor is there any certainty that Engin's appeal will result in his conviction being quashed.

The Tottenham Three are class war prisoners. They are victims of police repression before, during and

after the Broadwater Farm uprising. They must not rot in jail for one moment longer. Along with every class war prisoner caged by the British state, they must be freed—now! ■

Contact Tottenham Three Families Campaign: 247a West Green Road, London N15 5EQ

● Birmingham Six freed. Turn to page 7

The new balance of power

"THE TROUBLE is that order is a 19th century concept... History in the late 20th century seems to belong more to chaos theory and particle physics and fractals; it moves by bizarre accelerations and illogics, by deconstructions and bursts of light."

This was how *Time* magazine greeted Bush's claims to have established a new world order. Scepticism about the new world order has not been dispelled in the ranks of the imperialist ruling class.

Imperialism, and especially the USA, have scored a major victory in the Gulf. Thousands of charred Iraqi corpses, dismembered by "smart bombs", are the frightful legacy of the USA's murderous determination to arrest its decline and reassert its global leadership.

Semi-colonial bourgeois and Stalinist bureaucrat alike are now forced to ponder the results of this latest venture. The carnage in the Gulf is a warning of the punishment they can expect to receive if they step out of line.

The USSR and China were bribed into accepting that imperialism could do what it liked in the Gulf. The lifting of sanctions on China by the USA and a \$3 billion aid package to the USSR ensured that both countries kept their promise not to veto the USA's war plans in the United Nations Security Council.

Economic recession obliged the USA to get Japan, Germany and the oil rich Gulf states to bankroll the war. Long term political calculations encouraged the USA to enlist the military support of semi-colonies in the Middle East itself. But it was US firepower that humiliated one of the largest armies in the world. Virtually all the coalition members gratefully accepted their role as junior partners in the US-run alliance.

The Gulf, the source of most of the world's oil reserves, will be secured for continued exploitation by the multinational corporations. A region plagued by instability since the Iranian revolution of 1979 is poised once again to fall under the strategic domination of the USA.

A new Gulf Co-operation Council will emerge. Syria and Egypt, armed by the USA, will provide the local muscle. The corrupt and despotic emirs and sheiks of the Gulf states will ensure that the democratic aspira-

tions of the masses will be thwarted and repressed. That is the US plan.

For Iraq it is now clear that the terms of the ceasefire include the disarmament of the Iraqi state, though not to the extent that it is prevented from smashing internal revolution. If the USA gets its way Iraq will be "saved" from that revolution. A new, more pliant dictator will re-establish stability and enable Iraq to play its traditional role as a counter-weight to Iran.

Beyond the Gulf this reactionary settlement will spell disaster for the oppressed masses. The Kurds will remain deprived of their right to a nation in the new carve up. The US victory means that a monumental betrayal of the Palestinians is now more possible than ever before.

Nobody should underestimate the scale of the defeat that has been inflicted on the masses of the Middle East as a result of the Gulf War. Nobody should ignore the fact that the first step towards a reactionary new world order has been successfully taken by US imperialism.

But imperialism still faces enormous strategic problems. The new order has not yet been established throughout the world. Many obstacles still confront it. While the military prowess of the USA has been boosted, its economic ability to sustain its role as world policeman is already under severe strain. The recession, the long term economic slide it has suffered will all make repeats of the Gulf War more difficult in the short term.

Yet, by attempting to establish a reactionary peace in the Middle East, by excluding Iran from the proposed security pact, by igniting the mass resentment of the peoples of North Africa whose own regimes are teetering towards economic chaos, the USA has sown the seeds of future conflicts that threaten to plunge the region once more into war.

At the same time it faces the problem of growing rivalries between the main imperialist powers. Germany and Japan, treated as virtual enemies because of their initial reluctance to go along with the war, are both developing spheres of interest different to, and potentially in conflict with, the ambitions of US im-

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perialism. Germany requires not merely the orderly assimilation of the ex-GDR, but the introduction of stability throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR. Everywhere that stability is threatened. Nowhere is the USA capable of assisting through economic aid or military intervention. Clashes with Germany, and with Europe as a whole to the extent that Germany can unify it economically, are inevitable.

Already we have seen Europe prepared to countenance the USSR's role as a peace-broker in the Gulf so as to better its influence over the Kremlin. Already we have seen the USA block the USSR from playing this role, in its bid to be unchallenged superpower.

The regionalisation of the world economy, the tendency towards rival trading blocs revealed in the breakdown of the GATT talks last December, can only sharpen these divisions.

All of these problems and contradictions are embedded in Bush's new world order. They will explode in US imperialism's face under the impact of an unstable world situation. The detonator for such an explosion could be the looming crisis in the USSR. It could be the spreading and developing of the Iraqi revolution into a Middle East wide upsurge. But wherever it comes from it places before us the prospect of instability, of war and of revolution.

And as the existing leaderships of the working class are either destroyed or discredited under the impact of the crisis of Stalinism and the offensive of US imperialism, the prospect of constructing a new, revolutionary communist leadership grows with every struggle.

The fight against imperialism and capitalism does not draw its origins or its power from the Stalinist, social democratic or nationalist leaderships—however impressive their state and party apparatuses may appear. On the contrary, these are all so many brakes on that elemental force which comes from the refusal of human beings to suffer limitless exploitation and political oppression.

Beneath the terrain on which our rulers are celebrating their "remarkable victory" is gathering the lava of the indignation and fury of millions. The more our rulers block up the old vents of Stalinism, social democracy, fundamentalism and bourgeois nationalism

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Fascists challenged in Brick Lane

FOR MANY years the fascists have sold their race-hate papers in East London's Brick Lane. This is the heart of a large Asian community and the fascists' action is deliberately provocative. It is a focal point for their work in the area, designed to show that they can get away with doing what they like, wherever they like.

The regular sale began with the NF. Today the main sale is carried out by the British National Party (BNP), led by well known Hitler-worshipper John Tyndall. The BNP does more than sell papers. It is trying to appeal to white working class youth to join it.

By mobilising its thugs for sales it pulls together the forces to carry out a systematic campaign of racial violence in the area. Attacks on black in East London have risen. So too, in the recent local elections, did the vote for BNP candidates.

Threat

For too long the left in East London have ignored the threat of the fascists. After a series of battles in the late 1970s and early 1980s the Socialist

Workers Party (SWP), the largest left organisation in the area, decided on peaceful co-existence with the fascist sellers. They sold papers in one part of Brick Lane, the fascists in another. They continue this policy right up to today.

Workers Power does not share the SWP's complacency. We support the campaign by Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) to destroy the BNP's influence in the area. Last October AFA organised the first direct challenge to the BNP's sellers for a long time and successfully prevented the sale from taking place. Building on this AFA organised a public meeting near Brick Lane which attracted over 100 people. The fascists dared not try to break up this meeting directly, though they did try to bomb it.

Following a mass leafletting campaign over the last month AFA organised a demo against the BNP sale on 17 March. The hard work began to pay off. Almost 300 people turned out to support the demo. Local people in Brick Lane enthusiastically took AFA leaflets and expressed support. Meanwhile the fascists—who had called a national mobilisation of the BNP and asked for support from the

NF (Flag group)—could muster less than 100. Had they not enjoyed the protection of a massive police presence their morale would have been severely damaged.

This demo does not mark the end of the struggle against the fascist threat in East London. It is an important stepping stone in building AFA into a force in the area capable of driving the BNP and the NF out for good. Much more work needs to be done to achieve this, most importantly taking the fight against racism and fascism into the heart of the East London workers' movement.

This work is not being helped by the SWP's refusal to support AFA's activities. On two occasions over the last year they have spumed united action aimed at preventing BNP election meetings from taking place. They did nothing to physically support AFA stewards who took action to stop the fascists getting into the meetings.

Racism

Yet, astonishingly, they now turn around and attack AFA, for failing to challenge the fascists and failing to tackle racism in East London. In their annual conference report, published in December's *Socialist Worker Review*, "John, east London" claims: "Many people, including much of the old left, have the view that east London is uniformly racist. We recently did anti-fascist leafletting of estates and Anti-Fascist Action insisted we could only go to the doors in large numbers with a full honour guard of themselves."

Not only is this a brazen lie. The use of the term "honour guard"—a well known fascist term for their own stew-

ards—is a piece of vile innuendo. The truth is that it is AFA, on a weekly basis, that has challenged the idea that all white East Londoners are racist. It has leafleted the estates—not with large numbers going up to doors, but with sufficient numbers in the area to guarantee protection. It has won the affiliation of local trade unionists. It has organised public meetings and

demos and won more and more supporters in the East End.

The 17 March demo was proof of that. The SWP, needless to say, were nowhere to be seen on this, the biggest demonstration against the fascists in the area for years! ■

Affiliate/Join AFA: c/o BM 1734, WC1N 3XX

NF disrupt Workers Power meeting

Last month the fascists of the National Front (Flag group) broke up a Workers Power meeting in Birmingham. The meeting was on the Gulf war. It was not a public meeting but a discussion circle limited to a few of our supporters and contacts.

No sooner had the meeting started than two fascists came in and sat down. We did not know who they were, so we circulated an address list to find out. The names and addresses they wrote were: "Adolf Hitler, the Bunker, Berlin" and "Rudolf Hess" (same address).

Immediately a large party of fascists entered the room—outnumbering our comrades two to one. They proceeded to disrupt the meeting and take photographs. With the odds stacked heavily against us we decided to get our contacts out of the building and out of the area.

The fascists celebrated by unfurling the union jack and posing for a group photo.

We later learnt from the porter of the building where the meeting was held that the police had been

informed in advance that there might be trouble at the meeting. We had certainly had no contact with the police—we can only assume that the fascists had.

It is clear from this incident that the fascists are growing bolder. In the circumstances of the meeting we were not in a position to dent this boldness. But the clear lesson is that the left must meet fire with fire. The fascists came to our meeting in force to break it up. They train their squads against small meetings and demonstrations of the left in order to prepare for the time when they are needed to pogrom the black community and destroy the labour movement.

The left must unite to defend its meetings and ensure that the fascists don't get any bolder. The way to do this is to deny them any platform whatsoever—no meetings, no paper sales, no marches. We need workers' self defence groups to impose this policy. We will fight to build such groups and to smash the fascists wherever they raise their heads—by any means necessary. ■

John Major told backbenchers that the Poll Tax was "uncollectable". Michael Heseltine told the Commons that it had to go because "the public has not been persuaded that the charge is fair". Even in death the Poll Tax managed to confuse the Tory leaders.

During the Tory leadership election they both pledged allegiance to the principle said to epitomise the fairness of the Tax—everybody should pay something. Heseltine and Major differed over ways to reform the Tax but at that stage neither dared speak about its abolition. The truce they agreed put Heseltine in charge of a "review" of the Tax.

But reforming the Poll Tax was not as simple as the Tories might have hoped. And the results of the Ribble Valley by election, where one of the biggest Tory majorities in the country was overturned, forced them to go for a short sharp shock and abolish the Tax. **Paul Morris** explains why the Poll Tax had to go and how to fight "Poll Tax II". Opposite, **Richard Brenner** examines Militant's claim that they beat the Tax.

Education blitzed!

BY LESLEY DAY

THE TORIES are speeding up their attack on education. They plan to take adult and further education out of the hands of the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and put them in the hands of a new central funding council. At the same time they are pressing for the merger of the University and Polytechnic Funding Councils (PCFC) and, through the opting out system, are taking more and more schools out of LEA control.

The speed of the changes—Kenneth Clarke wants the new system for running Further Education (FE) in place by April 1993—is motivated by the need to solve the problems created by the Poll Tax fiasco and cut the proportion of funds that have to be raised by local taxation.

But the plans themselves are in line with the Tories' long term aim of restricting the extent to which elected local authorities, under Labour control, can deliver services. And Heseltine's strategy is to gear education and training towards business needs while keeping a firm grip on funding.

The proposals for post-16 education will affect FE colleges, sixth form colleges and adult education centres. Colleges will receive an annual budget based on the number of students. This, argues education minister Kenneth Clarke, will free them from the "bureaucratic control" of the LEAs.

Such a move will seem tempting to many working or studying in the FE and adult sector. LEAs have been trying to solve financial problems at the expense of education. Birmingham LEA, for example, steadfastly refuses to hand over to the colleges the full amount it receives from central government for FE provision. And recent cutbacks have led to redundancy battles in areas as diverse as Sheffield, Cardiff and Lambeth.

On top of this squeeze, FE has been constantly beset by conflicting demands from the teacher-training institutions.

The prospect of more college control seems attractive. So too is the idea of putting the sixth form and FE colleges on the same footing, raising hopes of overcoming the separation of vocational and non-vocational education and between provision for working class and middle class students.

However, these laudable aims are not shared by the Tories. They aim to

cut costs and worsen the service. "The funding regime" says Clarke "is designed to provide a powerful incentive to recruit additional students and cut unit costs". Anyone with any doubts about the future of FE in the new system need only look to what has happened in the PCFC sector. The latest figures show that next year the Polys will receive a 12.4% increase in funds for 17.4% more students.

The results have been felt by both staff and students in the Polys. Students cram into lecture theatres 150 at a time. Seminars and tutorials are pared to the bone. New staff contracts have slashed holidays, lengthened hours with no corresponding salary rises.

We can be sure that Clarke intends the same for FE and worse. Individual colleges will have to be increasingly "responsive to" (read "dependent on") the needs of local business. Clarke wants "close co-operation" with the Training and Education Councils. In the face of such demands, all the plans for a wider post-16 curriculum will come down to little more than some extra English and numeracy classes tagged on to narrow training programmes.

What chance is there of stopping Clarke's plans? This depends on staff and student union action. Left to the current leaderships this will be little more than token protest action—if that. It isn't true that the leadership of the college teachers union, NATFHE, has sold the Poly lecturers' conditions. It gave them away!

General Secretary Geoff Woolf greeted Clarke's announcement with the statement that NATFHE would welcome the changes if they "raised the status of further education and training".

Any successful plan of resistance must involve staff and students in both FE and sixth form colleges in a campaign of action, including strike action, to protect working conditions as well as course provision.

Clarke's intention is to give staff the "right of transfer" but he will try to insist on new and worsened contracts.

Teachers and students will have to fight in their unions to oust the current leadership and must turn organisations like the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Socialist Lecturers Alliance to planning and building for cross union action and take the campaign for a single teachers' union forward. ■

The Poll Tax review revealed a strategic problem facing the British ruling class over the structure and finance of local services which they could not solve with minor modifications.

The immediate solution they have come up with is to increase VAT to 17.5%, and pour in more central funding to local government. To try and tackle the strategic problem several consultative documents have been commissioned.

The Tories are retreating behind a smokescreen of financial jargon and consultation designed to hide the fact that the Poll Tax was an attempt to solve a strategic problem for the bosses—high and increasing levels of public spending at a local level which they are not able to fully control. The reason for the present smokescreen is clear—they need to fight and win a general election before summer 1992.

The Tories decided on a quick and massive fix of money to appease their voting base. They lopped £140 off every person's Poll Tax bill and added £4.5 billion in subsidies from central funds to the councils.

This is a massive about turn for the Tories. Under Thatcher the proportion of local spending made up from locally collected income (rates and then Poll Tax) went up from 18% to 34%, with government cash input decreasing accordingly. Lamont's budget reversed this process almost completely. It reduced the amount raised by local taxation from 34% to 22%. And Heseltine's statement committed the Tories to maintaining that balance, funding 78% of council spending from central government and the business rate.

To pay for the quick fix Norman Lamont slapped an extra 2.5% Value Added Tax (VAT). This increase is an attack on working class living standards. Your Poll Tax bill may go down by £140 a year, but all your other bills will go up. Even the poorest families rely on the kind of goods that are taxed under VAT; clothes, phone bills, fridges, batteries, even fish and chips!

Aside from this immediate and unfair increase in taxation, the Tories plans for replacing the Poll Tax are a continued attack on local services, democracy and working class living standards.

New

First of all the new local tax will retain a key element of the Poll Tax. One half will be worked out from the value of your home, the other half from the number of adults living in it. And of course it all depends what you mean by "half". The Tories have promised to make sure that the owners of country mansions and yuppy penthouses aren't hammered in the transition to the new partial property tax. But to really avoid hitting middle class property owners they will have to make sure that a large proportion of the new tax is based on the number of people in the house.

That is why Labour's Roy Hattersley dubbed it "Poll Tax Mark II" and why Tory ex-chancellor Nigel Lawson slammed the new tax. It is ludicrous that self proclaimed leftists, in contrast, are going round shouting "Gotcha" at the Tories. The Tories have made it clear that there will be a substantial proportion of the tax based on a head count, and in that way if it goes through the Tories will have "got" us, at least on the principle that "everybody pays something".

In addition there is the threat to restructure local government entirely. Heseltine has announced "consultative documents" on getting rid of county councils and council committees. At the same time the Tories have announced

Son of Poll Tax

they are taking Further Education out of local council control.

The Tories came to power in 1979 determined to "roll back the power of the state" and deliver "cheap government" to a ruling class that had seen more and more of its profits consumed in taxation.

One key element of this plan was the attack on local government spending. The Tories set out progressively to reduce government borrowing by reducing the central grant to councils, but they were only partly successful.

Labour councils raised the rates—not a victory for the workers whose rates went up, but still a big annoyance to the Tories.

So they "capped" the rates, penalising councils who raised them above a certain level. This caused another round of cuts and job losses but Labour councils were still able to fight a rearguard action, under the so called "dented shield" strategy and with "creative accounting". They took advantage of the mid-1980s boom to raise funds on the money and property markets.

Local

Worst of all for the Tories, workers in the big cities kept returning Labour councils. Year by year Labour has advanced in local elections.

The net effect of this was that whilst central funding declined, Labour councils were still able to cushion the effect to some extent. Some left Labour councils were able to wave under the Tories' noses such gestures of defiance as equal opportunity policies, womens' centres, racism awareness training etc.

So the Tories dreamed up the

bright idea of forcing Labour out of the town halls by placing the main burden of paying for local spending onto workers via the Poll Tax. This, they thought, would lead to "accountability"; workers would be enraged at the sight of their money being wasted. They would demand the cheapest local government possible and kick out Labour at local elections. As a model they set up Wandsworth with its minimal Social Services, its Dickensian education chief, its privatised services running on cheap labour, and its £130 Poll Tax.

Fewer

They counted on the majority of workers conforming to the "I'm all right Jack" stereotype and voting for fewer services and a cheaper Poll Tax. And they were encouraged when they made spectacular gains in some West London councils in April 1990.

What they failed to calculate was the electoral impact of suddenly piling the 34% of council spending onto individual workers. The structure of the Poll Tax meant that middle class and working class families paid double or treble their former rates, even in low Poll Tax councils.

This is what produced a string of parliamentary by-election results overturning massive Tory majorities only months after they had been celebrating victory over Labour in Wandsworth, Ealing and Westminster.

Non payment certainly contributed to the defeat of the Poll Tax. But the fact that active non-payment was able to be defeated in the courts with millions forced to pay,



Michael Heseltine

and the fact that the Tories were able to collect 80% of the Tax shows that this did not inflict anything like the defeat on the Tories that some are claiming.

Is this just a quibble? No. The Tories are a formidable enemy and they still have to solve the problem of local council spending and to continue to undermine those elements of local democracy which give councils some control over education and other social policies. The consultation documents planned by the Tories will come up with new ways of shifting the cost of services onto the working class and taking control over policy into the hands of central government.

With the hostility and defiance that existed against the Poll Tax the Tories could have been driven from office, but instead they have been allowed to conduct an orderly retreat, and are preparing to attack us once again.

Shape

Whatever the shape of local taxation the Tories introduce, and for that matter Labour's alternative of "fair rates", the working class will be forced to bear the brunt of it. But there is one way of raising taxes that won't cut into workers' living standards but would raise the level of public spending on services dramatically: tax the rich.

Whether it is through a steep income tax or a steep local tax on property the rich should be squeezed for every penny over a certain amount.

Is this too harsh? Would it, as the Tories say, discourage initiative and innovation?

Look at the lifestyle of the rich,

depicted in glossy magazines and programmes like *Capital City*. Compare their luxury squash courts, private swimming pools and gyms to the crumbling, understaffed and austere sports centres the working class has to use.

Compare the level of service a rich elderly person can buy from a domestic helper to the minimal provision of home helps and meals-on-wheels doled out to working class pensioners.

Massive

Compare our children's schools with the private schools with their small class sizes, good facilities and massive resources in up to date equipment, like computers and videos, which could provide a better education for every working class child.

The kind of local government services we want are the kind the rich enjoy as private luxuries. We want them for everybody. Not because we are in favour of everyone leading the pampered and lazy lifestyle of the rich, but because we want to unleash the creativity and potential locked up within the working class under capitalism.

Whether it's the potential to become a tennis star, a university professor or to live an active and comfortable life in retirement, it is denied to workers at present because of the totally inadequate level of local services, amenities and education.

To achieve this we will have to put an end to the whole profit system. But the principle of taxation workers should fight for at local and national level is: hammer the rich! ■

"THIS IS the biggest political retreat this century", wrote *Militant* after Heseltine announced the scrapping of the Poll Tax. As the leadership of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, *Militant* were claiming the credit for having forced the Tories to "eat humble-pie".

Their claims are grossly exaggerated. The Tories have certainly retreated, and on a key issue at that. But the crucial question now is will they be able to retreat in good order?

If this is the retreat of the century then the answer would have to be no. The Tory government should be in full flight on a whole range of issues and incapable of mounting further successful attacks on the working class. But this is clearly not the case.

The "son of Poll Tax" that they are set to impose, the two further years of Poll Tax bills they are planning and the squeeze on local government expenditure that their current policies are still inflicting all reveal that they are retreating in preparation for a further round of attacks.

When Ted Heath retreated on the Industrial Relations Act in 1972, in the face of mass strike action demanding the release of the Pentonville dockers, his government was badly hampered from that point on. Mass struggles and victories were won by one section of workers after another until Heath was humiliated in the two general elections of 1974.

Clearly the retreat on the Poll Tax, significant as it is, is not yet on that sort of scale. *Militant* are in danger of confusing workers who still face a barrage of Tory attacks on a range of fronts by claiming that it is.

They are trying to claim that their leadership of the anti-Poll Tax campaign and its chosen method of struggle, mass non-payment, was solely responsible for the defeat of the Poll Tax.

Militant's perspective throughout the 1980s was that Marxism was marching ever forwards. Every witch-hunt in the Labour Party, every defeated strike was, in their topsy-turvy world, proof of the strength of Marxism. Now, they say, the retreat on the Poll Tax is a further vindication of their perspective.

It is true that mass non-payment contributed to the collapse of the Poll Tax. From the very beginning we supported mass non-payment (unlike, for example the Socialist Workers Party), but only as one amongst many tactics needed to defeat the Tax.

We insisted that mass strike action, up to and including a general strike to smash the Tax, was the best and surest way of securing a clear cut victory for the working class. *Militant*, who were often well placed to organise such action, counterposed passive non-payment to industrial action.

The result of this is that while the Tories have retreated, the absence of a mobilised working class, pressing home its advantage to the full, risks giving the Tories the breathing space they are desperate for. Even the mass non-payment campaign, as an organised force, was beginning to dwindle in the run up the Tories' decision to shelve the Tax. Demos against the Tax settings were smaller, court cases were no longer being picketed, wage arremstments were taking their toll.

All of this was the direct responsibility of the *Militant* leadership of the Fed. They were floundering. After condemning the violence of the marchers at last year's mass demo—with Tommy Shéridan, the Fed leader, treacherously threatening to "name names" to the police—they tried to sabotage the demo in October, and organised a desultory People's March, which the British working class took no notice of. Even the mobilisation for the demo on 23 March was left very late in the day.

For the working class there are many dangers ahead, because while it will be Kinnock's cringing refusal to even fight the Poll Tax that risks enabling the Tories to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, *Militant's* strategy contributed to preventing the sort of mobilisation that could have broken the Poll Tax and the Tories altogether. ■

smash Clause 25!

CLAUSE 25, the new Tory anti-lesbian and gay legislation, is still grinding its way through the parliamentary machine. If passed this addition to the Criminal Justice Bill will turn acts between gay men, like chatting someone up or kissing in public, into sex crimes on a par with rape and child abuse (see WP140).

A flurry of lobbying has seen a string of amendments being proposed to the Bill as it goes through its Committee stage. These include measures to exclude all acts between consenting adults from the Bill and to equalise the age of consent. Many who have campaigned against the Clause see the likely success of at least some of these amendments as a major blow struck against the homophobes in Conservative Central Office.

They pin their hopes on some of the recent liberal mutterings coming from top Tories. William Waldegrave recently said of homophobia in the House of Commons:

"It's still there, that prejudice—it's perhaps more overtly still there than racism in some ways, but I think it will die away too."

Home Office Minister John Patten has been making encouraging noises about the need to avoid anti-gay discrimination, hinting that a number of amendments will be accepted by the Government. He is said to be sympathetic to the idea of removing consenting acts between persons over the age of 16 from the Clause, though the government may not go quite this far.

Have the parliamentary campaigners and pressure group activists been vindicated?

It's likely that the Lords will accept an amendment from the Stonewall parliamentary group which will be tabled by Viscount Falkand, a Liberal Democrat. This will exempt consenting sex acts, but it will not move towards equalisation of the age of consent for gay men. The Labour Party, despite clear policy for reducing the age of consent to 16 for gay men, is refusing to support amendments, specifically those tabled by Labour MP Harry Cohen, which would do just that.

None of the amendments tabled removes the threat to all lesbians and gay men contained in the Clause. It will be left to the courts and the magistrates, with advice from "experts", to pass judgement on the victimless "crimes" of gay men, who for example, engage in consenting sexual acts.

The Clause, even in an amended form, will encourage the bigots in the courts to carry on with the clamp down on the lesbian and gay community that they have been pursuing for years. Recently, the Metropolitan Police's

Operation Spanner led to the conviction and imprisonment of eight men for having consensual sex in private—all under existing legislation. Prosecution and conviction rates for indecency, soliciting and procuring under the 1956 Sexual Offences Act are still at an all time high with over 2,300 convictions and 100 jailings last year, and the government has just admitted that buggery between men will continue to be listed as a criminal offence under Clause 2(2)b of the Bill.

Central to the anti-gay offensive is the impact it will have on the life-styles of lesbians and gay men, forcing them deeper into the closet, imposing a form of self-censorship on our activities and creating an atmosphere of fear and anxiety.

Meanwhile Paragraph 16 of the Children's Act, which would prevent lesbians and gay men fostering children, looks like going through unchanged. The hysteria around "virgin births" is likely to strengthen those pushing through Paragraph 16. The bigots view lesbian mothers as "unsuitable". Do lesbians have a long record of proving themselves to be uncaring parents? Are there well documented cases of lesbians subjecting their children to systematic violence, systematic abuse and even murder? The bigots can't point to a single example. Yet there are countless examples of such cruelty in "normal" heterosexual relationships. So why are lesbians, and indeed gay men, considered to be unsuitable? Why is Paragraph 16 directed specifically against them? The answer is—prejudice.

The road to lesbian and gay liberation does not lie through lobbying parliament for liberalising amendments. A massive show of force by the labour movement will be able to smash not only the Clause but the whole Criminal Justice Bill and send the bigots scurrying for cover. Without minimising the difficulty of winning such working class action we have to fight for it at every opportunity. Publicity stunts and parliamentary lobbying will produce at best a temporary respite from these attacks, but will not eliminate the threat of new ones.

Trade unionists must rally to the defence of lesbians and gay men:

- ▼ Call on Labour to put a three line whip on MPs to vote against Clause 25
- ▼ Workers take strike action to defend any worker jailed under Clause 25!
- ▼ Keep the state out of the bedroom!
- ▼ Repeal all laws that discriminate against people because of their sexuality!
- ▼ Free the Spanner Trial eight!

ON MONDAY 24 April 1916 the Irish Easter Rising began. Under the command of the Marxist leader James Connolly the joint forces of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) and the Irish Volunteers (IV) seized Dublin's strategic buildings and declared the formation of the Irish Republic.

One week later Dublin's city centre was in ruins. The rebels surrendered, crushed by the gunboats and artillery of the British Army. Twelve days after that Connolly was executed. Severely wounded, he was strapped into a chair to face a British firing squad. Thirteen other leaders of the rising were shot with him.

Though the rising itself failed, isolated from the masses and crushed by overwhelming force, it was the spark which ignited a revolution against British rule in Ireland.

As the British government pursued a campaign of further executions and deportations the respectable ruling class Home Rule Party was discredited. Middle class nationalism, represented by Sinn Fein and the IRA, swept the board in the general election of 1918. In 1919 the Sinn Fein MPs declared the first independent Irish parliament (Dáil) and launched a guerrilla war against British rule.

Partition

Though the war brought independence it was granted at the price of partition. Northern Ireland was born as a sectarian statelet, guaranteeing Protestant privilege and the rule of the leading Irish industrialists. After signing a treaty with Britain in 1921, the most conservative elements of the Southern Irish ruling class collaborated with the imperialists in a bloody civil war to impose acceptance of partition. The resulting "Free State" in Southern Ireland became a semi-colonial backwater of poverty and underdevelopment, with a reactionary Catholic constitution.

The Easter Rising had promised a different outcome. Connolly led the ICA into its famous battlepost, the Dublin General Post Office, convinced that it was the first offensive in a revolution that would bring the Irish working class to the head of the national struggle and open the way for it to fight for its own class rule.

But because it remained only a national revolution, because the working class accepted a back seat role and refused to push forward their own class interests, the Irish national struggle that began in 1916 ended in "a carnival of reaction, North and South", as Connolly himself had prophesied.

Isolated

Why did Connolly launch the rising against such odds? What led the man who had organised the first mass workers' movement in Ireland to put himself at the head of a coalition of middle class nationalists and working class Marxists and stake everything on an insurrection which was isolated from the masses?

The answer lies both in the flawed nature of Connolly's political method and in the years of struggle which preceded the Rising.

The struggle for national independence is, for Marxists, essentially a bourgeois question. That is, it coincides with the capitalists' need to unify the nation and free it from foreign domination. But the capitalist class of a colonial or semi-colonial country is, in the modern world, incapable of fighting resolutely for national independence.

1916: The Easter Rising

Seventy-five years ago, amid the carnage of the First World War, the Dublin Easter Rising shook British rule in Ireland. The Rising was crushed, but became for the international workers' movement "the touchstone of our revolutionary views" (Lenin). **Colin Lloyd** explains why it happened and why it failed.



Irish Citizen Army outside Liberty Hall, Dublin, 1916

The reason for this is that the national ruling class has to face two enemies: the big imperialist corporations backed up by imperialist armies, and also the working class of its own country. The semi-colonial bosses sometimes fight the imperialists to expand their own sphere of profit making. But they are terrified of the workers and poor peasants of their own countries.

The entry of the working class into anti-imperialist struggle threatens to end the rule of the national capitalists altogether. So these bosses constantly seek deals with the imperialists, accepting a subordinate place in the imperialist system and the right to some form of independence which does not threaten the imperialist world order.

It was just such a deal that the Irish Catholic ruling class tried to make between the end of the 19th century and the outbreak of the First World War. As Britain transformed itself from being a colonial capitalist power to a modern imperialist power it was able to solve "from above" the main social question which had led the Catholic ruling class to espouse the struggle for national independence: the land question.

Connolly initially presumed that this would mean the Irish ruling class giving up the struggle for independence for good. During Connolly's first spell as an activist in Ireland bourgeois nationalism, faced with British intransigence, was in crisis. But when Connolly returned from America in 1910, where he had been a syndicalist

trade union organiser, the balance had changed.

The Liberal wing of the British ruling class offered the Irish bosses Home Rule, within the Empire and on imperialist terms. And the bourgeois nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party, led by John Redmond, resolved to make every compromise with Britain to facilitate this.

Having underestimated the ability of the Irish bosses to make a deal with imperialism Connolly then overestimated imperialism's

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IRISH WORKERS GROUP

ability to deliver that deal. After 1910 he regarded Home Rule as "almost a certainty of the future" and looked on the organised Protestant resistance in the North as "the last flicker which blazes up before totally expiring".

As the organiser of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), Connolly set about building up the Irish trade

union movement and fighting for a Labour Party as the voice of the workers' movement in a future independent Ireland. He rose to prominence as the leader of the Dublin strike in 1913, where, in the face of armed repression, he built the workers' militia that was to become the basis of the ICA of 1916.

But the year 1914 dealt the Irish working class, and Connolly's whole perspective of preparing it for class struggle in an independent Ireland, a series of savage blows. The Dublin strike was defeated and trade union membership plummeted. Instead of flickering out, Unionist resistance consolidated and armed itself in the shape of Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force.

Redmond pledged Irish bourgeois nationalism's support for Britain in the First World War. He conceded the principle of partition to the Unionists. And although the 1914 Home Rule Bill was shelved by the British, Redmond and the Irish bosses staked everything on independence within the Empire. The workers themselves put up little resistance to the war in its first phases.

These developments were all major blows to Connolly's perspective. But it is not enough to explain the Easter Rising as a product of his disillusionment with the working class and a turn to radical nationalism as the solution.

As a Marxist Connolly believed that the war would inevitably lead to mass social upheavals throughout Europe. He wrote in the *Irish Worker*:

"Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the pyre of the last warlord".

But unlike Lenin he did not grasp the dynamic of the war as an inter-imperialist war. Lenin explained that the war was one between equally oppressive robber states, and that the working class should refuse to take sides.

Connolly, having seen the workers unable to stop the war, now sought the military defeat of what he saw as the biggest enemy of small nations like Ireland; British imperialism and its strangulation of the world economy.

In March 1915 Connolly wrote: "I believe the war could have been prevented by the socialists; as it was not and the issues are knit, I want to see England beaten so thoroughly that the commerce of the seas will henceforth be free to all nations—the smallest equally with the largest."

Instead of Lenin's perspective—"turn the war into a civil war"—which placed workers' revolution on the immediate agenda, Connolly saw the defeat of British imperialism as ushering in a new period of capitalist development in which the forces of industrial trade unionism could recover, develop and lay the basis of a struggle for workers' power.

Perspective

Although he saw that the war put a working class-led insurrection against British imperialism on the agenda, Connolly failed to fight for that insurrection with the immediate perspective of turning it into a struggle for socialism.

While outwardly leading the ITGWU in day to day economic struggles Connolly prepared an insurrection based on the workers' militia of 1913. These he transformed into a uniformed armed body which regularly drilled in the streets of Dublin in the weeks prior to Easter 1916.

He was driven by the fear that any further delay in organising the insurrection would only work to the advantage of Britain. Masses were enlisting in the British army, British victory would bring a partitioned Ireland under Redmond in the South and Carson in the North.

So Connolly browbeat the middle class revolutionary nationalists of the Irish Volunteers, led by Pádraig Pearse, into the planned insurrection—threatening to launch it with just the thousand men and women of the ICA if necessary.

A week before the rising Connolly told the ICA:

"The odds against us are a thousand to one. But if we should win, hold onto your rifles because the volunteers may have a different goal. Remember we are not only for political liberty but for economic liberty as well".

But although he understood the differing class interests within the anti-imperialist alliance of workers and middle class nationalists he led into the Post Office, he did not grasp the need to bring those class interests to the fore in the initial struggle for power itself.

Connolly was aware of the widespread apathy of the Dublin workers to the insurrection and the support for bourgeois Home Rule and the war. He was able to tell his lieutenant, on the day of the uprising, "we are going out to be slaughtered". Asked if there was any chance of success, he answered "none whatsoever".

Connolly failed to fight for a general strike to back up the insurrection in the trade union or-

ganisation he led. He agreed to the radical democratic programme of the insurrection and co-authored the Proclamation of the Republic which contained no specifically socialist measures aimed against the economic power of the Irish bosses.

Despite writing numerous articles on revolutionary warfare in 1916 Connolly seemed not to learn the first lesson from them: the importance of involving the popular masses. One well documented example of this was the refusal of help from onlookers in the building of a barricade to stop British troops arriving by rail:

"Pearse sent an Irish Volunteer in charge of ten from Connolly's ICA to build and defend a barricade. Onlookers offered to assist in building it and to join the insurgents, but the Volunteer had to refuse because the orders were strict: only Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army soldiers were eligible." (*James Connolly: A Biography* Levenson 1973)

Disaster

The immediate result of the insurrection was a disaster. The Irish ruling class condemned it with full force and backed the British reprisals and repression. The right wing of the international workers' movement also condemned it. Luxemburg and Karl Radek, though they were revolutionary internationalists, saw in the failure of the rising the eclipse of the national question as a revolutionary factor. Radek condemned it as a *putsch*. Trotsky, who did not condemn it also saw it as proof that "the historical basis for the national revolution had disappeared even in backward Ireland".

Lenin defended the rising, despite its premature timing, because it represented for him the role that national revolutions would have in destabilising imperialist rule: that the national revolution, under the leadership of the growing working class of the semi-colonies, was a feature of the new imperialist epoch not a remnant from the last century.

Today in Ireland nationalism is deeply ambivalent about Connolly's rising. The ruling parties of the South long ceased to celebrate the moment when a Marxist-led militia sought to overthrow imperialist rule by force.

Celebrate

The constitutional nationalists of the SDLP want to celebrate Connolly's heroic struggle whilst pretending it has no relationship to the heroic resistance of the nationalist community today.

Sinn Fein meanwhile celebrates Connolly as the man who finally subordinated the socialist struggle to the armed uprising, lowered the red flag in front of the Irish tricolour.

Revolutionary Marxists, despite our criticisms of the weaknesses of Connolly's political perspectives and tactics, honour the memory of 1916.

Britain's bullets robbed the Irish working class of the best socialist leader it ever had. The leaders who followed Connolly made sure that the Irish working class remained in the ante-room of the nationalists with their famous instruction: "labour must wait".

The fight for a new revolutionary leadership and a thirty-two county workers' republic in Ireland will be led by those who do not fear either the national revolution or the socialist programme. Though he failed in the end, and though his method was flawed, Connolly's struggle was to unite the two, and so is ours. ■

BIRMINGHAM SIX

Victims of Britain's war in Ireland



THE COLLAPSE of the case against the Birmingham Six, after almost seventeen years, ended a nightmare which began when the men were jailed for life in August 1975 for the murder of 21 people who died in the Birmingham pub bombings.

Paddy Hill, Hugh Callaghan, Gerry Hunter, Richard McIlkenny, Billy Power and Johnny Walker started out on a journey to Belfast sixteen years ago, to attend the funeral of a friend. They got as far as the check-in point for the ferry at Heysham. There they were arrested by Special Branch officers, and had their last taste of freedom for almost two decades.

The Birmingham Six were arrested because they were Irish. When the Birmingham bombings brought the reality of the Irish war to the streets of mainland Britain, the gutter press engaged in an anti-Irish witch-hunt. Irish people were attacked in the streets. A *Daily Express* feature of the time stated "Today in Birmingham, if you are called Seán or Patrick, you do not broadcast about it". Irish people had to be found and victimised for the bombing. Their guilt or innocence was never the issue. As Paddy Hill said at the time of his release:

"The police told us from the start that they knew we hadn't done it; we were selected; they were going to frame us."

Following the Birmingham bombings, sections of the media called for "tough and effective" action from Roy Jenkins, the Labour Home Secretary at the time. He obliged by rushing the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) through Parliament, sanctioning the systematic repression of the Irish community in Britain from that point on.

The 1975 Lancaster Trial of the Six appears now as a farce. At the time, dubbed "The Brotherhood of Blood" by the media, the Six never had a prayer. In sentencing the men, Mr. Justice Bridge said:

"You stand convicted on each of the 21 counts, on the clearest and most overwhelming evidence I have ever heard."

What Mr. Justice Bridge heard was forensic evidence, presented by Dr Frank Skuse, that two of the Six had handled explosives. Skuse was forcibly retired in 1985 on grounds of

"limited efficiency". The purported forensic evidence, and the threat of violence, coerced Billy Power into signing a six page confession describing how he and the others had carried out the bombings. Power tells of facing several hours of being punched and kicked on the body and the back of the head. He was so terrified, he said, that he fouled his trousers.

Paddy Hill recounts: "They were screaming at me. Calling me an Irish bastard, cunt, fuck-pig, animal. [They said]... I was covered in gelignite from head to toe."

The Birmingham Six had their confessions beaten out of them. Each man gave details of different numbers of bombs: Power described seven, Walker three, McIlkenny four. Each gave different accounts of the planting of the bombs. None of this bothered Mr Justice Bridge. Inaccurate in detail the confessions may be, "but do they necessarily show that the statements are not genuine?", he asked the jury.

An appeal in 1976 was dismissed almost as a matter of course. In his review of the allegations of beatings in police custody and consequent forced confessions, Lord Widgery, the Lord Chief Justice, said "There was no evidence to suggest the Six had received any knocking about in custody beyond the ordinary."

From the very beginning of their time in prison the Six were subjected to routine beatings by the screws. Not only robbed of freedom, they continued to be subjected to the torture that had been begun by the police.

In November 1977, the Six were granted legal aid for a civil case against the Chief Constable of the West Midlands and Lancashire police forces. In January 1980 the case reached the Court of Appeal. At the conclusion of the hearing, Lord Denning, in his statement, revealed the high stakes the British state had to play for in maintaining the convictions of the men:

"If the six men win, it will mean that the police were guilty of perjury, that they were guilty of violence and threats, that the confessions were erroneous. This is such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say: 'It cannot be

right that these persons should go any further'."

It was not only the discrediting of the police that Denning wanted to keep covered up. Britain's war in Northern Ireland requires routine repression of the nationalist population and their supporters in the Irish community in Britain. Harassment by the police, judicial frame-ups, the relentless use of the PTA are all part of Britain's armoury of repression. The continued imprisonment of the Six was part and parcel of the British state's bid to remain free to continue this repression of Irish people.

In 1985 the case against the Six began to crack. New evidence, along with the many demands for the case to be re-opened, finally led to the referral of the case back to the Court of Appeal in January 1987.

The media determined that the appeal would be a re-run of the Lancaster trial, carrying photographs of the carnage of the 1974 bombings. Everyone entering the Old Bailey was body searched.

Despite witnesses who testified to the assaults on the Six, including a mock execution at Morecambe police station, despite the collapse of the forensic evidence, Lord Chief Justice Lane remarked:

"The longer this hearing has gone on, the more convinced we were that the verdict was correct." After the appeal failed, the *Sun* ranted: "We would have been tempted to string 'em up years ago".

It was the collapse of the cases against the Guildford Four and the Winchester Three, and the discrediting of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad, which again put the frame-up of the Birmingham Six onto the public agenda.

New forensic evidence revealed that the statements of the men had been altered. Evidence emerged of "The Reade Schedule", a handwritten document detailing times and places of the interviews which contradicted the original evidence.

Even with the complete collapse of the case against the Six, the state would not relent. The final appeal was delayed for months by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). At the end the DPP's counsel still argued that the convictions were unsatisfactory but not unsafe.

As Paddy Hill put it when he walked out of the Old Bailey:

"I don't think them people in there have got the intelligence or the honesty to spell the word justice, let alone dispense it. They're rotten."

Lord Denning's view of the case in 1990 confirms the truth of this. Denning proclaimed:

"We shouldn't have all these campaigns to get the Birmingham Six released if they'd been hanged. They'd have been forgotten, and the whole community would be satisfied."

The frame-up of the Birmingham Six exposes the sordid reality of Britain's war against the Irish people. The legal establishment had known from the moment of their arrest that the Six were not guilty of the bombings. But their release would explode the myths about Britain's role in Ireland carefully built up in the wake of the Birmingham bombings. The lynch-mob atmosphere, deliberately generated by the media at the time, the determination of the police to get a quick conviction, all served to create a popular consensus for the war against the Irish struggle for self-determination.

From the criminalisation of the Irish community through the use of the PTA, to the shoot-to-kill death squads which roam the streets of the Six Counties, all of Britain's brutal actions depend on the popular conception of the Irish question as a law and order issue, with the IRA denounced as murderers and psychopaths.

To preserve their ability to continue to oppress the nationalist struggle in Northern Ireland sections of the ruling class want to offer up Lord Lane as a sacrificial lamb. But the root cause of the framing of innocent Irish workers time and again is not the incompetence of individual members of the judiciary. It is the need of British imperialism to terrorise anyone in the the Irish community in Britain that dares to support the republican resistance in the North.

The way to put a stop to all future frame-ups is to fight to get the troops out now. The British working class should side with all those who resist British occupation in Ireland, against their common enemies: Britain's bosses, their uniformed thugs and the judges who dispense injustice. ■

Wrecked by bombing, now by civil war, only the working class can rebuild Iraq. JPoncé of Poder Obrero (Peru) examines the politics of the rebel forces and outlines a programme of action for workers in the struggle against Saddam Hussein.

CIVIL WAR is raging in Iraq. In the majority of principal cities there are reports of fighting and insurrection. There are three main sources of opposition to Saddam Hussein's murderous Ba'ath regime.

In southern Iraq, which is predominantly Shi'ite Muslim, a Shi'ite-led revolt has taken the major cities from the Gulf to Karbala (a Shi'ite holy city). The Shi'ite forces are locked in a fierce battle with the Republican Guard in the provincial capital, Basra.

In northern Iraq the Kurdish *peshmergas* (fighters) are in control of the Iraqi-Turkish border and all of the historically constituted territory of Iraqi Kurdistan. They have taken the major oil producing city of Kirkuk.

The third, more amorphous, source of opposition comes from the ranks of the crumbling Iraqi regular army and the desperate city dwellers who face disease and starvation as a result of the allied air war. This threat to Saddam's regime is not confined to the Shi'ite and Kurdish regions but has penetrated into the Sunni Muslim heartland of central Iraq. There are reports of street fighting in Baghdad itself.

The uprisings are being met with ruthless repression by what remains of Saddam's security forces. They have bombed Kirkuk and fired missiles containing white phosphorus at rebels in southern Iraq. In Basra there are reports of indiscriminate tank attacks on civilian areas. In Baghdad the secret police are conducting round the clock house to house searches and summary executions.

Saddam's promised holy war against imperialism was a miserable failure. Now he has launched a "mother of battles" against his own population. He has replaced the interior minister with his own cousin, Ali Hassan Majid, the man responsible for both the genocide which killed more than 5,000 Kurdish civilians in gas bombing at Halabja in 1988, and the administration of occupied Kuwait.

At the same time he is desperately trying to buy off the leaders of the rebellion. He appeared on television to promise a new constitution and elections to parliament. So far this has not garnered him any support. But it has weakened the resolve of the army and local militias.

In Kurdistan, where the army was not destroyed by fighting in the war, there are reports of its collapse in the face of the offensive by the *peshmerga*. The local militia has gone over *en masse* to the Kurdish uprising.

The western media's combat-suited reporters have not dared venture near these scenes of new carnage. They report it from afar as if it were simply chaos, as if *Apocalypse Now* had been brought to the streets of Iraq's modern cities.

But the revolt underway is not an inexplicable collapse of civil society. It is an upsurge of struggle by hundreds of thousands of ordinary working people who have suddenly been denied the means to survive by capitalism and imperialism.

There is a revolutionary situation in Iraq. Though it has been created by the imperialist victory the imperialist victors fear its consequences more than they ever feared Saddam's army. As *Time* magazine

explained:

"More than once President Bush has publicly exhorted the Iraqis to topple their leader. Yet what the allies had in mind was a palace coup, a change of regime 'from the centre of Baghdad'... not a free for all in the provinces that might rip the country asunder."

The reason Bush wanted a palace coup against Saddam is clear. The allied armies murdered an estimated 200,000 Iraqis in order to impose stability in the Gulf. They flattened one of the most advanced economies in the third world in order to ensure that the imperialist balance of power was restored in this oil producing region.

The breakup of Iraq will not only leave a vacuum and upset this new balance. Its national and religious character has the potential to ignite anti-imperialist revolts in every surrounding country. This prospect is now terrifying the imperialist "victors".

Yet US imperialism is paralysed in the face of the revolts. It is, at the moment, unwilling to intervene directly to restore civil order. It did its bit to aid Saddam by letting Republican Guard units pass under the gun barrels of imperialist tanks so that they could crush the revolt in Basra. But the whole military and political strategy of the USA was aimed at avoiding large ground casualties and avoiding responsibility for the post-war administration of a defeated Iraq.

In order to "kick the Vietnam syndrome", Bush ordered the destruction of the Iraqi economy from above to avoid heavy US casualties on the ground. The allied offensive stopped at Nasiriyah when it could have taken Baghdad because Bush, conscious of the toll taken by years of occupying Vietnam, did not want responsibility for civilian government. Now this doctrine, which no doubt sounded like an infallible blueprint when it was worked out in the smart military colleges, has rebounded on the imperialists. They have "kicked Vietnam" only to create what may prove to be another Lebanon.

The Shi'ite movement in the south is headed by pro-Iranian Islamic fundamentalist forces. The leader, Mohammed Bakr Hakim, is based in Tehran and wants to extend Shia Islamic rule into southern Iraq.

Shia Muslims make up 55% of the Iraqi population, but are second class citizens under Ba'ath rule. This guarantees the main positions of power to the bourgeoisie from the Sunni Arab minority, who make up less than 20% of the population. The Shi'ites had remained loyal to Saddam throughout the long war with Iran, but at the end of that war they still faced poverty and repression and became increasingly resentful of Ba'ath rule. The war with imperialism caused that resentment to explode into revolt.

At present, reports suggest that Saddam's forces have unleashed a "reign of terror" against the southern uprising. Its fate rests more and more with the Iranian regime. Throughout the Gulf crisis Saddam sought to bring Iran into an alliance against the imperialists. The Iranian ruling class is split. There is a minority hard-line Khomeinist faction which, while stopping



Kurdish *peshmerga* in Dyaneh, Kurdistan

Civil war in I

short of outright support for Iraq, wanted to maintain Iran's hostility to the Great Satan and its coalition. Ranged against this faction was President Rafsanjani and his supporters who played a clever diplomatic game to advance Iran's regional interests whilst playing imperialism and Iraq off against each other.

Without firing a shot Rafsanjani obtained the return of the territories and soldiers captured by Iraq between 1980 and 1988, the elimination of immigration quotas to Saudi Arabia (crucial in once again allowing Iranian participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca), reintegration into the diplomatic orbit of both imperialism and the USSR, the unravelling of the Arab diplomatic coalition against Iran and the active sympathies of Iraq's southern population.

He also gained for Iran 147 of Iraq's Soviet made top-level military aircraft, which he now refuses to return to Iraq. These would give Iran a formidable airforce if the USSR agrees to supply them with spare parts and training (up to now the Iranian airforce has had to rely on US and French technology inherited from the Shah).

There are reports that the Iranian *pasdaran*, the so called "Revolutionary Guard", has participated in the fighting in southern Iraq. In turn the USA has warned Rafsanjani to stay out. The Iranian ruling class has to weigh its new-found acceptance into "civilised" diplomatic circles against the chance to defy imperialism and gain a major strategic hold on the Gulf region.

A southern Iraqi state allied to Iran would control 60% of Iraq's oil production (about the same volume as pre-war Kuwait).

On the other hand Iran itself has

gained recognition and trade agreements with Turkey, Uganda and Zambia since its re-acceptance into the western fold. The agreement with Turkey includes plans for a gas pipeline from Iran, through Turkey, to Europe.

The problem for the Shia rebels in the south, over and above the utterly reactionary Islamic fundamentalist character of the organisations leading the revolt, is the potentially fickle nature of Iran's support. Factional struggle within the Iranian bourgeoisie will decide whether or not it is prepared to sacrifice the movement in order to buy further accommodation with imperialism, and at present the pro-imperialist wing under Rafsanjani is in command.

If it can gain peacefully more than it could gain by antagonising the USA it will be prepared to sacrifice its supporters in Iraq. Though if the USA maintains its hostile stance to Iran, including deliberately excluding it from the proposed Gulf security pact, then the hardliners will push for the resurrection of the crusade to "export" the Islamic revolution.

The Kurdish uprising is the latest in a long line of revolts within Iraq. The 22 million Kurds in the Middle East are the biggest nation in the world without a state. Over four million Kurds live in Iraq. The rest are divided between Turkey, Syria, Iran and the USSR. In every one of these countries they suffer discrimination and repression.

However, throughout the whole history of the Kurdish national struggle they have been used as pawns by their oppressors against

each other.

In 1975 an armed Kurdish uprising was crushed after Iran and the USA withdrew support because Saddam reached agreement with the Shah over the border dispute in the south with the Algiers Accord.

The Iranian Kurds played a major part in liberating Iran from the Shah, but fell as the first victims of the Islamic counter-revolution. As the Iran-Iraq war drew to a close a Kurdish uprising in Iraq was crushed when Saddam used poison gas. Many Kurdish villages were depopulated and their occupants herded into concentration camps.

At the end of the recent war the *peshmergas* launched a new offensive. The camp dwellers joined them, overpowering their guards and seizing the weapons, including tanks and artillery, of the retreating soldiers. The seizures of Kirkuk, and potentially Mosul—both of which are in an area where Kurds mix with Iraq's Arab population—represent the greatest military victories ever in the Kurdish liberation struggle.

But the Kurdish uprising faces danger from two sources: its bourgeois nationalist leadership and the designs of the Ozal government in Turkey.

The leading forces within the uprising are Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). The PUK and the KDP have a long history of conflict with each other and of making tactical alliances with Iran, Syria and Saddam. The KDP has a history of seeking accommodation with the Ba'ath regime with the goal of regional autonomy inside a unified Iraq.

Barzani issued a call to all the factions involved in the Joint Action Committee, set up in December to



Iraq

March, was heralded as the start of a consensus between the Kurdish leaders, the Shi-ite militants and US/Saudi-backed pro-imperialist Iraqi oppositionists. The western media trumpeted it as one of the fruits of victory: here was the coalition replicated at the level of the Iraqi opposition, the basis for a provisional government of a unified Iraq. But it will remain a paper coalition for as long as the USA refuses to intervene directly in the civil war.

Only US military and political power held the anti-Iraq coalition together and only the same could put such a varied coalition government in power in Baghdad, since it would have to either smash or incorporate the projected anti-Saddam military forces that America is banking on.

As we write there are some signs of a change in US policy within the 15% of Iraq it currently occupies. It is being forced to feed the population and to accept deserters instead of its former brutal policy of sending them back to face starvation and the Republican Guard.

But the USA may yet be forced to make a strategic change and intervene directly into the civil war. It fears like the plague an extension of Iranian power and could not tolerate the break up of Iraq. But the power it is relying on, the Iraqi military, seems vulnerable to forces no military or diplomatic analyst can predict: the desire of ordinary workers and peasants to stop killing their own people and join with them to rebuild their shattered country.

What should the Iraqi workers and poor peasants do in this massive crisis?

The name "Iraq" derives from an Arab word meaning "the well rooted country". The defeat of Saddam has revealed that this multi-national state was not well rooted, and that all its oil wealth and industrial development had not allowed the Iraqi ruling class to complete the elementary bourgeois task of unifying a nation state.

Now with its industries destroyed and its oil wealth rendered temporarily useless, it is clear that two paths open up for Iraq—disintegration, or unification at the price of complete subservience to the imperialists. Only the working class has the power to lead the population of Iraq out of this situation.

Of the total Iraqi population 73% live in towns or cities. Iraq is one of the most industrialised Arab countries and has a large working class based in oil, chemicals, textiles and food processing. The millions of Iraqi workers are a formidable threat to imperialism's desired peace in the region for the simple reason that they were made to pay for the war and are now being forced to pay for the peace.

Ninety per cent of the Iraqi working class stands idle, its factories smashed. It has not been paid for over a month. Having been herded into the trenches the Iraqi conscripts are returning to find their families literally starving, drinking foul water, living in shattered homes, and under the constant threat of repression from the desperate Ba'ath regime. The biggest workers' party, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), is not inclined to mobilise the anger of the masses at these conditions in a life and death struggle against Saddam and the imperialist army of occupation in the south.

This is hardly surprising. The ICP has a history of collaboration both with Saddam and imperialism. It participated in Saddam's government until the late 1970s

when Saddam turned on it and smashed it. During the war it has participated in the openly pro-imperialist Joint Action Council, hoping to become the ally of any new government installed by the USA and sell its pro-imperialist programme of "reconstruction" to the masses.

Despite the fact that it is industrially atomised, and that its organisations were long ago destroyed by Saddam, the Iraqi working class has the power to impose order onto this situation. Workers are already taking to the streets to defend themselves against repression, supporting whatever forces are ranged against Saddam.

While we were prepared to defend Iraq against imperialism, revolutionary Marxists never supported Saddam, never ceased to be in favour of his progressive overthrow. The Stalinists and the Labour left now say we were wrong to support the military victory of Iraq, pointing to the revolutionary consequences of Iraq's defeat.

They ignore the scale of the defeat that has been inflicted on the masses of the whole Middle East as a result of imperialism's triumph, not least the Palestinians. They overlook the terrible price the Iraqi masses have had to pay for the failure to defeat imperialism.

Moreover imperialism will never tolerate revolution in Iraq. Its troops are there ready, after their victory over Saddam, to quell any revolt which threatens the new balance of power, let alone the capitalist system in its entirety.

Now workers must enter the struggle to overthrow Saddam. There is not and never was anything "socialist" about the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party.

But workers' organisations which arise in the new conditions must keep politically separate from the present leadership of the rebellions. Any subordination of the workers' organisations to these leaders will mean disaster for the Iraqi masses. Once in power those leaders will be faced with the task of rebuilding Iraq. They can only do so with imperialist money and on imperialism's terms. Those terms will exact

a heavy toll on the Iraqi working class in the shape of austerity, more starvation and unemployment, more repression.

To prevent this the workers must take charge of rebuilding Iraq. The workers must seize control of every remaining factory and utility and organise the reconstruction of the economy under workers' control. Where will the money come from? It will have to come from the seizure of all imperialist holdings in Iraq and from the wealth of the bourgeoisies in the surrounding countries.

Thus the Iraqi revolution will have to place on its immediate agenda not an accommodation with the rulers Syria, Iran and Turkey but their revolutionary overthrow. And it can best succeed in this by appealing to its class brothers and sisters in these countries who themselves suffer under dictatorships and face grinding poverty.

If imperialism intervenes militarily in the civil war workers must oppose it. They have no interest in being "liberated" at the point of US guns—guns which have refused to fire against Saddam's repressive apparatus and will be turned against anyone resisting a reactionary imperialist settlement.

Against Saddam's attempt to counter the revolution with the promised elections the workers must reply by demanding the convocation of a sovereign constituent assembly. He is certain to restrict the elections and use what is left of the Ba'ath apparatus to intimidate voters.

A sovereign constituent assembly, elected by all over the age of 16, could only advance the revolution if it was convened by the workers' organisations themselves and defended by a workers' militia.

This, together with every other aspect of the crisis and civil war gripping Iraq, faces the working class with the immediate task of building democratically elected cross workplace and city wide councils of action and an independent workers militia. Such organisations will be capable of making a limited alliance with Kurdish nationalists and the southern insur-

gents but will also protect the distinct class interests of the workers and poor peasants.

They can impose working class order in the cities against arbitrary looting and vendettas against continued repression and against real counter revolutionaries. They can defend the regime of workers' control and ensure a fair distribution of food and fuel, crushing those who try to exploit the misery of the masses in search of profit.

The struggles of such councils and such a militia will not be confined to routine administration. Iraq is being torn apart by civil war. The question of who is to rule the country is directly posed and a revolutionary party can and must be forged in the heat of the current struggle that can answer this question.

Instead of a provisional government of US allies the workers must fight for a workers' and peasants' government based on the action councils and the workers' militia. Immediately the Iraqi working class should fight for:

- the release of all political prisoners
- full political and social rights for women
- complete separation of religion from the state
- self-determination, up to and including secession, for the Kurds and all other oppressed nationalities of Iraq. Launch the fight for a unified, socialist Kurdish republic in every part of Kurdistan
- cancel the \$30 billion debt to imperialism. No reparations to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia
- nationalisation without compensation of all major industries
- workers' control of every workplace
- an immediate programme of reconstruction under a plan drawn up by the workers and poor peasants themselves
- spread the revolt throughout the Middle East
- no peace with imperialism and its puppets.

25 March 1991

Edited and abridged from original

co-ordinate the Iraqi opposition, to form a provisional government of the whole of Iraq based in Kurdistan.

At the same time Turkey, whose regime most brutally repressed the Kurds, has made a something of a U-turn on the Kurdish question. Turkish premier Ozal announced a much publicised decree legalising the Kurdish language, for conversation though not for official purposes, for the first time in Turkey's modern history. On 11 March he broke with all precedents and met representatives of the PUK and KDP in Ankara.

Ozal's new found cosmetic concern for the Kurds stems from a position of weakness, not of strength.

He is faced with the prospect of a Syrian and Iranian backed Kurdish government on his borders. Once news of the rising spread into Turkish Kurdistan it prompted immediate mass demonstrations in some towns which the Turkish army crushed with its habitual brutality, killing six Kurds on the streets.

Clearly the Turkish regime is no friend of the Kurds. Even the language law has been stalled in parliament and the Ozal regime, a Presidential dictatorship installed after years of military rule, has been attacked by the far right and the generals for its new softness on the Kurds.

The USA, faced both in the north and the south with risings which might hand regional advantage to Iran and Syria, both formerly designated "terrorist states", is for the moment still counting on a military coup to topple Saddam.

The Beirut conference of 11-13



THE DEFEAT of Iraq and the suppliant nature of Egypt, and now Syria, have robbed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) of its "intransigent" anti-Israel allies in the Arab camp. The PLO leadership relied on them as a point of support against the servile monarchs of the Gulf states. Now the PLO is bereft of friends in the Arab states and under severe pressure to give the USA what it wants. In return the USA plans to bring Israel to the negotiating table and stitch up a reactionary solution to the Palestinian question.

The recent statements from the PLO after the war indicate that Arafat is prepared to surrender all along the line, even to Israel's insistence on having the PLO excluded from the negotiation process. Israel has much to gain if US pressure and domestic Israeli forces can combine to marginalise the extreme ambitions of the Greater Israel faction of the Zionist ruling class. In return for peace with land for the Palestinians, the Zionists will get the right to control the armed forces, peace treaties with all its old enemies (or in Iraq's case its military destruction) and the promise that the whole of the Arab Middle East will open up to Israeli goods and capital.

The Palestinian struggle now faces the severe danger of betrayal. Crucial to the betrayal process is the Palestinian bourgeoisie, the bosses and financiers of the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian diaspora (those living outside Palestine's historic boundaries).

The origins of the Palestinian bourgeoisie lie in the prosperous war years of the early 1940s. Trade and manufactures under the British mandate brought considerable wealth to a small layer of Palestinian landowners and merchants. When Israel was built on the ruination of Palestine much of this wealth was confiscated, especially the land based wealth.

But some £50 million worth of stocks, shares and financial investments lodged abroad was recovered by the emerging bourgeoisie in the diaspora. This fortune allowed the bourgeoisie to escape the worst of the conditions in the camps endured by the tens of thousands of refugees fled to surrounding Arab states in the late 1940s.

In the 1950s the Palestinian bourgeoisie blossomed. Through setting up banks and insurance companies in Lebanon and Jordan they established a secure base. Throughout the early oil boom in the Gulf states a whole layer of Palestinian entrepreneurs found themselves indispensable to the British-protected Gulf monarchies as they exploited the black gold.

Inclination

By the end of the 1960s this class, dispersed throughout the Middle East, numbered around 200,000 and accounted for over 6% of the region's Palestinian population.

During the early 1960s the Palestinian bosses showed no inclination to struggle for their own state, despite the suffering of the Palestinian people in the camps. They were more concerned to exploit the migrant Palestinian cheap labour that flowed throughout the region. The ruling class found that it was respected and in demand by royal families and politicians alike. Its economic interests inside the old mandate of Palestine were insignificant as compared to its wealth in other Arab states.

But by the mid-1960s the Gulf societies were undergoing a radical transformation of class structure themselves. A new layer of middle and bourgeois classes was growing up under the royal families. They began to press for national privi-

Marxists argue that the national capitalist class in the semi-colonial world cannot represent the interests of the national struggle against imperialism. As the Palestinian bourgeoisie pursues a reactionary deal with Israel and the imperialists, Keith Harvey surveys its history of ambivalence towards an independent Palestinian state.

Intifada's fickle friends



Arafat—prepared to surrender Palestinian rights

leges over the existing Palestinian elite. Gradually the scope of Palestinian economic activity was restricted. Only in Jordan had the diaspora bourgeoisie any stable property rights

Elsewhere different pressures were leading in the same direction. Anti-monarchic coups took place in Iraq (1958) and Libya (1969). Members of the Palestinian bourgeoisie who had offered loyal service under the old regimes were victimised. In Libya under Gaddafi the large Palestinian owned Arab Bank was told to leave or have its assets seized.

It is from this time that the Palestinian ruling class began to express an interest in the fight for an independent state. They concluded that in such unstable conditions their property and wealth could only be adequately protected from expropriation by other Arab states if they had their own state which could secure its own property rights and legal dominance.

In the wake of the 1967 war and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza the desire for a state

increased and was given added impetus by the events in Jordan.

Originally, Jordan had control over the West Bank and most of the pre-1948 Palestinian landed aristocracy had dropped the idea of an independent state in favour of autonomy on the West Bank under Jordanian control. They even backed King Hussein in his massacre of the PLO fighters inside Jordan in 1971. But by 1974 King Hussein renounced all claims on the West Bank. At the same time he launched a "Jordanisation" drive inside his country to reduce or remove the power and influence of the Palestinian bourgeoisie.

The PLO had come into existence in 1964 as a result of an agreement between the different Arab states. It was not the deliberate creation of the Palestinian bourgeoisie of the diaspora so much as the creature of the Arab states. They wanted to use the Palestinian cause against Israel and to pre-empt any more militant movements of Palestinian resistance that were outside of their control.

But the defeat of the Arab

states—especially Egypt—in the 1967 war accelerated the development of a distinct, armed Palestinian nationalism, first of all in the shape of Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat. Fatah grew in power and influence within the PLO and despite its commitment to the armed struggle, became the chosen vehicle of the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the fight for an independent state.

This was because Arafat and Fatah espoused two essential planks of bourgeois nationalism. The first was non-interference in the internal affairs of the Arab states. This was crucial in allowing the Palestinian bourgeoisie to remain tolerated in these states. Secondly, Fatah rejected any social programme. It refused to espouse radical economic change that would threaten the class interests of its bourgeois backers.

Though the bourgeoisie and the PLO leadership have spoken at times in terms of the complete destruction of the Zionist state their class interests do not coincide with its progressive overthrow. The Palestinian bourgeoisie can accept a truncated state as long as this guarantees its legal property rights. For that the question of size is only secondary, since the economic viability of the state is irrelevant for the chief layers of the diaspora ruling class. Their commercial wealth, and profits derived from it, will not be located within any state of Palestine.

But for the masses who live in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as for the thousands of refugees and immigrant workers in the surrounding Arab states, the question of what size and kind of state is of vital importance. Will they be at the mercy of the Israeli armed forces or will they have an army of their own? Will Palestinians outside the West Bank be allowed to return to live and work in such a state? Will the state be propped up with capital investments from outside to make it "viable" or will it be allowed to wither on the vine, an impoverished bantustan for Israel to exploit unhindered?

The conservative pressures on the PLO, mediated through Arafat and Fatah, increased during the

1980s. To begin with, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 destroyed Beirut as an effective centre of Palestinian financial and social power. Secondly, within the Gulf states during the 1980s the Palestine struggle was a constant source of instability and inspiration for the workers. This was increasingly resented by the conservative monarchies.

From 1982 onwards the Gulf state rulers followed up their economic restrictions on the Palestinian bourgeoisie by imposing ever more severe limits on their political operations. Their established freedom to travel, to host their families and PLO officials, to raise funds—all these have diminished.

In the last decade Palestinian capital and the Palestinian bourgeoisie has migrated further, to Cyprus, London and Paris. The banking, construction and publishing interests of the top layer of the bourgeoisie are now very diverse. The Palestinian ruling class has become more integrated into the international capitalist class, and this is reflected in the nature of its commercial holdings.

Increasingly, it has no interest in any kind of struggle for an "independent" state at all. Its programme coincides with that of the conservative Gulf states in seeking an accommodation with Israel and achieving "stability" through a territorial solution that could fall well short of separate state.

Interests

Such a solution is also favoured by a layer of bourgeois inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They have the same interests in a political settlement that does not disturb existing Israeli and imperialist power in the Occupied Territories. After 1967 a layer of agents for Israeli and western capital developed in the West Bank and Gaza. Their wealth and power is tied to the continued hold of the Israeli capitalist interests over the West Bank.

They act as the internal agents for the external Palestinian bourgeoisie and are a conduit for their money into the Occupied Territories. During the *intifada* this layer has been the focus for the anger of the Palestinian youth.

The Palestinian bourgeoisie in the diaspora has no material interest in the struggle for an independent state; the comprador bourgeois and merchant class inside the Occupied Territories concurs in this outlook.

The great tragedy at present is that the Palestinian masses in the Occupied Territories are exhausted and aspire to gain their own state whatever restrictions imperialism may impose on it. Even if that state is wholly inadequate to the needs of the Palestinians we will support their fight for it against Zionism. But in the struggle we have to fight for new goals and a new leadership for the *intifada*.

Only the Palestinian workers and poor peasants have an interest in a revolutionary struggle for genuine national self-determination. Only they have an interest in smashing through the economic chains that bind them to Israel in the Occupied Territories and the repressive Arab states elsewhere in the Middle East.

That is why the national struggle is inextricably combined with the fight to overthrow Zionist capitalism and its state together with the semi-feudal regimes in the Gulf.

Only a strategy that sets this as its goal and consciously seeks to rally all the workers and poor peasants of the Middle East to achieve it can do justice to the four years of the *intifada* and 24 years of heroic resistance to the Zionist occupation. ■

The Palestinian bourgeoisie can accept a truncated state as long as this guarantees its legal property rights. But for the masses who live in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as for the thousands of refugees and immigrant workers in the surrounding Arab states, the question of what size and kind of state is of vital importance.

Will Yugoslavia survive?

LAST JULY Croatia and Slovenia declared their sovereignty. The latter has even opened up diplomatic missions abroad. Slovenia is further down the road of realising its independence than the Baltic republics in the USSR because of the far higher degree of actual economic autonomy. Only the absence of its own armed forces, separate from the Yugoslav People Army, keeps it tied to the federation.

Over the past two years tensions between the Republics, and between the Republics and the Federation have reached breaking point. Kosovo (the autonomous province in Serbia with a majority of ethnic Albanians) has been in violent dispute with Serbia over Kosovo's demands for autonomy. In response Serbia's ruling Stalinist party (SSP) under Slobodan Milosevic meted out violence and tightened direct rule from Serbia. Milosevic has spewed forth endless Serbian chauvinist rantings directed at Albanians, Slovenes and Croats to gain popular support for his measures.

The richer Republics (Slovenia and Croatia) through elections last year have gained a mandate for state sovereignty and a pro-capitalist economic direction, following the pattern of the rest of Eastern Europe.

The response of the dominant Serbian Stalinist bureaucracy is to try and cling on to the Yugoslav Federation as the only way in which they can retain their power, including some of the economic privileges which they reap from the more industrially developed republics to the north. In March, so desperate was Milosevic that he tried to engineer a military coup by the Serbian dominated army to impose Federal rule over the republics. Having failed he has merely given comfort to his opponents both outside and inside Serbia.

Until recently his opponents inside Serbia were weak. Milosevic had come to power at the head of an extreme Serbian nationalist movement between 1987 and 1989, even promoting violent anti-Albanian demonstrations. He fostered Serbian chauvinism and more recently directed it against other Yugoslav nationalities as well, in particular the Croats. The Serbs have a historic grievance relating to the Croatian regime's butchering of Serbs under Nazi rule in the Second World War.

The Croatian parliament's resolution refusing to recognise Federal law led to fears for the Serbian minority within Croatia, in the province of Krajina around the town of Knin. This led to a declaration of a Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina at the end of February 1991 which did not recognise the Croatian resolution on dissociation from Yugoslavia, and stated that it remained part of the Federation.

The Croatian opposition is led by General Martin Spigelj. He is as guilty as Milosevic of indulging in rabid chauvinism. It is also true that the Croats have been receiving arms from outside Yugoslavia, mainly Hungary, both as a way of building up a separate army to the YPA and as a way of defending the Croats from the attacks of the Serbian sponsored militias inside Croatia. But there is no evidence that Spigelj was aiming to launch a coup against the Federal leadership, so much as seeking to break away from them entirely.

When Milosevic proposed the state of emergency against the republics he was also hoping that this could be directed against the growing oppositionist movement inside Serbia. Its most popular figure is Vuk Draskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal Party. He came second to

Yugoslavia is rapidly breaking up. The federation of six republics and two autonomous provinces is on the verge of collapse, brought there by deepening ethnic conflict, economic crisis and Stalinist brutality, writes Clare Heath.



Milosevic in the Presidential elections in December. Draskovic is a veritable Frankenstein's monster, a product of Milosevic's own chauvinist antics. But Draskovic is also an open capitalist restorationist.

But the demonstrations which shook Serbia last month were not just those of nationalism and restoration. The core of the demonstrators who demanded, and won, the release of arrested oppositionists and the sacking of the television chiefs were students and other democratic forces.

The tragedy of this anti-Stalinist movement, as of those in many parts of Eastern Europe and the USSR, is

that the leadership of the workers and students mobilised around legitimate grievances is being taken over by reactionary forces of nationalism and restorationism.

In Yugoslavia the national question has become central to the future of the degenerate workers' state. The likelihood is that the federation will collapse and with it the rule of the Stalinists. They will be replaced by pro-western restorationists. Several weak states, perhaps as part of a looser confederation, will then become prey to the exploitation of West European imperialists. This country will once again return to the condition

which gave rise to the term "Balkanised": fragmented into competing poor semi-colonies.

The prospects for averting this course lie with the industrial and agricultural workers. The question of national rights cannot be ignored, and a working class movement would need to stand fully behind the rights of nationalities to autonomy and secession, and resist tendencies towards "reverse" oppression of Serb minorities in seceding areas for example. No political support can be given to the nationalists currently leading the moves towards independence as in Croatia and Slovenia

but neither can any support be given to a military crackdown, even if it were possible, to prevent their secession. The people in these republics have clearly demonstrated their support for some degree of independence from the Serbian dominated federation, and it would only force them further into support for the restorationists if the federal state were to take up arms to force them to remain part of Yugoslavia.

However, the workers of Croatia and Slovenia will have no rosy future through independent capitalist states. The impact of the IMF-demanded austerity in 1988 was a massive drop in living standards. Further attacks on the working class will be inevitable if imperialists are to be tempted to invest in such states, whose general productivity is far lower than many plants now closing in Western Europe amidst deepening recession.

This fate can only be avoided if the workers' movement rejects its present leaders, both Stalinist and restorationist. Workers must take up the fight for a political revolution that rescues the remnants of the Federal workers' state from oblivion:

- for the right of self-determination to the national groups
- for democratic central planning to redress the imbalances between the republics, between industrial and rural areas
- for a new voluntary federation of workers' states of the Slavic peoples

Roots of the crisis

DESPITE ITS name Yugoslavia has never been able to successfully unite the southern Slav peoples. The prevailing conditions of capitalist depression in the inter-war years not surprisingly failed to achieve this goal. But after 1945 many thought that Tito's successful Stalinist movement, capitalising on its success in leading a popular partisan movement against the Nazis and their Yugoslav collaborators, could succeed where capitalism had miserably flopped. But it was not to be.

The creation of the degenerated workers' state in the period after the Second World War imposed a federation which was formally made up of independent republics with full rights to secession. But in reality it was bureaucratic rule rather than voluntary agreement that kept the federation together. Tito was able to use the degree of populist support achieved amongst the partisans and through the control of the Communist Party to legitimise and stabilise the federation for a long time.

His death marked a turning point. The Bonapartist figure who skillfully balanced the disparate forces in the federation was gone, and the system of rule which replaced him revealed ever increasing instability. The eight man "collective Presidency" that replaced Tito was the site of inter-republic conflict rather than its resolution.

Pre-existing national disputes in the territory were controlled under Tito partially through bureaucratic repression and domination of the bureaucracy by the Serbians, but also through a conscious attempt to develop some of the more backward sections of the federation through diversion of resources via the five year plans.

One example is Kosovo, an area with 90% ethnic Albanians and a minority of Serbs and Montenegrins which was, and is, the poorest province of Yugoslavia. The ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were pacified in part by promises of diversion of resources



President Jovic with Slobodan Milosevic (right)

from the rest of the federation in order to develop its very backward economy.

The economic reforms, particularly those of 1965-71, were important in fuelling the inter-republican disputes. Yugoslavia pioneered the pro-market reforms later taken up in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. As the YCP said in 1965:

"The League of Communists acknowledges that in contemporary conditions, production for the market is the only possible form for the rational expansion of productive forces."

In reality the contemporary condition of Yugoslavia ensured that the market provided neither rationality nor expansion. After 1950 Tito had abandoned the Soviet command system (which in fact gave the country its fastest period of growth and went some way to overcome regional disparities) and replaced it with more decentralised decision making at the enterprise and republican level. Continued central control

over investment and accumulation was guaranteed by Federation control over the banking system through access to industrial credits and by the state control of foreign trade.

There was an institutionalised system of "workers' management" of the enterprises. This certainly acted to put pressure on the enterprise managers to concede wage increases and prevent sackings but the workers' committees did not control or manage the plant. Key decisions over production (product lines, investment plans etc) were firmly in the hands of the specialist technical managers.

Before 1965 the logic of the market in deepening regional inequalities was held in check to a degree. But in the later 1960s this restraint collapsed under the new reforms.

At first it was argued that the central purpose of the reforms was to "discourage regional rivalry by replacing political criteria of resource allocation inherent in central planning with the objective criteria of

the market".

But the result of placing responsibility for development in the hands of the market was to increase rather than decrease disparity. The state monopoly of foreign trade increasingly loosened its grip and handed over the initiative to the enterprises; prices were raised up to the world market level; foreign investment was invited; subsidies to loss making plants were cut and in return taxation of profits was reduced.

This development led to growing uneven economic development between republics. By 1970 the per capita income of the poor regions was half that of the richer northern ones. This was a natural outcome of a process that stressed that investments should be directed at those areas where the infrastructure was developed and where productivity was higher.

Centralised direction of investment to develop areas like Kosovo was decreased, and differentials between the living standards in the various areas increased.

Kosovo remains the poorest province of Yugoslavia and the increased disparity exacerbated inter-national disputes. In 1981 the income per person in Kosovo was only 30% of the national average, and one seventh of that of the richest republic, Slovenia.

It has very high unemployment—in 1987 there were 79 registered unemployed for every vacancy offered—and remains poorly industrialised. There are five times as many industrial workers per head of population in Slovenia as in Kosovo. In Slovenia 44% of the population remain agricultural workers, compared with 81% in Kosovo.

Although the more radical market reforms were reigned in during the 1970s the pro-market thrust of the federation's policies have never been abandoned. Having failed to expand the productive forces rationally through the market the Stalinists have had no other solution to the national tensions than increasing the output of one thing they are good at manufacturing—chauvinism and repressive measures. But these too are now only serving to further, rather than restrain, the break up of Yugoslavia. ■



the LRCI

NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

Workers Power launched in New Zealand

"After more than a year of intensive discussion and debate, the Communist Left of New Zealand recently made the decision to become a sympathising section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International."

So opens the article in the March issue of *Red Letter* (No71) announcing the welcome fact that the LRCI now has a presence in Australasia. The comrades have also taken the decision—to mark this new stage in their development—to change their name to Workers Power (NZ).

The full text of the declaration of fraternal relations between the LRCI and WP(NZ) will be published in the forthcoming issue (No6) of *Trotskyist International*. This declaration expresses the fruits of written and face to face discussions on such questions as the socio-economic nature of New Zealand, the struggle of the Maori people, the history of the Fourth International and the political economy of world capitalist crisis. We are also able to test out this agreement in practice through joint work inside New Zealand.

This new step for WP(NZ) could hardly come at a more important time for the left of the labour movement in New Zealand. From 1984 until the general election in October last year, the Thatcherite Labour Party government rode roughshod over the working class. The scale and tempo of privatisation of state assets surpassed that of the Tories in Britain. Presiding over a near permanent state of economic recession in New Zealand since the end of 1985, the Labour government acted in concert with the trade union bureaucracy to ensure that working class resistance to a major rise in unemployment was muted. Not surprisingly six years of drastic attacks by Labour left the working class disgusted and confused. Mass abstentions and defections at the last October elections ensured the return to office of the openly conservative National Party.

The new administration lost little time in attacking the two areas that the last government held back on: compulsory trade unionism and the level of state welfare benefits. The Labour government, needing the assistance of the trade union officials to get through its attacks, agreed to underwrite the closed shop since this underpinned many of the privileges of the bureaucrats. The National Party felt no such compunction.

The government has tabled a new Employment Contracts Bill (ECB) which, in a calculated insult, is due to become law on May Day. This Bill replaces the Labour Relations Act. Under the ECB unions are not recognised as such and compulsory unionism is abolished. The ECB clearly shifts the whole of industrial relations in favour of the bosses and is an attack on effective trade unionism.

And the other main plank of National Party's attack shows how important effective trade unionism is going to be in the months ahead. On 1 April a new Finance Bill is due to become law. This cuts \$1NZ billion off welfare benefits for hundreds of thousands of claimants, including the abolition of the universal child benefit. As *Red Letter* explains the two Bills are related in the minds of the government:

"The cuts in benefits and the social wage . . . will force the 300,000 unemployed to compete with low paid workers for jobs on the bosses' terms or face a 26 week stand down. At the same time the ECB will pressure workers to accept individual contracts on the bosses' terms."

The Labour movement has moved hesitantly into action. Most major unions have stopped work to hold meetings on the ECB or in pursuit of new contracts before 1 May. Such renegotiation is the favoured approach of the bureaucracy as it would prevent them coming into head on collision with the government. The dockers took a decision to strike for two weeks in March, but settled on a new contract before the action was due to start. In return for recognition the union has agreed to abandon national agreements and settle port by port. We have seen the consequences of this in Britain!

In a similar process the hotel workers have agreed to the end of overtime rates for weekend working, and to increased casualisation.

The bureaucracy has planned a Week of Action for 2 to 9 April which may include strike protests on 4 April by teachers, and possibly other workers, plus a march of claimants. In the best move so far the seafarers are threatening an indefinite strike from 3 April.

WP(NZ) have been quick into action. Their leaflet, calling for a general strike to beat the EBC, has been distributed to many of the union meetings. They were instrumental in getting the university technicians' union nationally to call action against the ECB. The stakes are high in this fight. The union leaders are only interested in mitigating the effect of the Bill; those with the unions' interests at heart should be fighting to smash it now. As *Red Letter* says:

"Workers Power believe that the only way the Bill can be defeated is by launching an all-out indefinite strike . . . Different unions going on strike at different times will allow the employers to employ the salami tactic and take us on piecemeal . . . Militants must put forward motions calling on the CTU to organise an all-out indefinite stoppage, every meeting should decide on their claim and strike for it now regardless of the expiry date of their award. No groups should settle until all claims are agreed by the bosses."

Copies of the monthly *Red Letter* are available, price \$20 NZ for 12 months, from: Workers Power, Box 6595, Auckland, New Zealand

The LRCI
ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (Austria), Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany), Irish Workers Group, Poder Obrero (Peru), Pouvoir Ouvrier (France), Workers Power Group (Britain),
Poder Obrero-OCIR (Bolivia), the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (USA) and Workers Power (New Zealand), are fraternal groups of the LRCI.

USSR

Support Soviet miners' strike

THE FIRST indefinite miners' strike in the USSR since 1989 is spreading to all the major coalfields. It represents the accumulated grievances and frustrations of the last two years.

Despite promises after the last strike to substantially improve conditions at work and in the mining towns, nothing has happened. The wage increases won have been eaten up by inflation. Distribution continues to be erratic and shortages persist.

The central demand uniting all the coalfields is for a 100-150% wage increase. But, as explained in a Moscow home service report on the 18 March, "this is only the tip of the iceberg". Their correspondent went on to say:

"This is the biggest social explosion since the revolution over 70 years ago. But many people seemed to think that this is merely something which has been provoked by extremists and that the miners simply need to be re-assured. But I could not show you any specific evidence that anything has actually changed in the Donbass mines since the government's decision [after the 1989 strike] was adopted."

The strike comes at a critical moment for the Soviet economy. The Soviet State Planning Commission (Gosplan) has just predicted that Soviet GDP will fall by 11.6% in 1991 and industrial production by 15%. Gorbachev, addressing a conference of economists on 18 March, confirmed this when he revealed that industrial production had fallen by 4.5% in two months.

If the strike continues to spread then the whole of Soviet heavy industry could grind to a halt. What is more the miners' leaders know this. Yuri Boldarev, a leader of the Donbass miners, said:

"If we strike for two more weeks the metallurgical industry will be paralysed . . . We want two to three billion more roubles for wages but Fokin [the Ukrainian Prime Minister] is afraid to give it to us because he is under strict orders from Pavlov [the Soviet Prime Minister] and Gorbachev not to give in."

In addition to the wages' issue miners are raising a disparate series of often contradictory political demands. The most widespread is for Gorbachev's resignation and the dissolution of the Soviet Parliament, to be followed by the holding of free multi-party elections. In the Ukraine the miners are also demanding a new constitution for the Ukrainian Republic. In the Kuzbass, demands include a market economy, de-nationalisation and workers' ownership of the mines.

The influence of the marketisers is very strong in the Kuzbass, based on the belief that it would prosper due to its significant geological and economic advantages over other areas. Coal seams are thick, continuous and near the surface, hence costs are much lower than, for example, in the Donbass.

Kuzbass is a major exporting region and is vital to hard currency earnings. The idea of turning the Kuzbass region into a "special economic zone" open to foreign investment has consequently gained wide support.



Striking miner in Chelyabinsk urges "no return to work".

The miners' strike has spread because of frustration with the economic crisis and the inability of Gorbachev to deliver his promised reforms. It is this, most crucially the question of wages, which has laid the basis for the struggle. But the popularity of additional slogans around privatisation, or autonomy for the Ukraine are an indication of the crisis of leadership within the working class. It reveals the pressure from, and growing influence of, pro-capitalist "experts" and "advisers" that have descended like a swarm of locusts on the Independent Miners' Federation.

For many workers the idea of marketisation seems the only way to break the hold of the central and local bureaucrats hated by the workers for their arrogance, incompetence and corruption. In addition they have an idealised vision of a market that assumes the production and distribution of plentiful, high quality goods for all, combined with workers' self-management of the individual enterprise which would grant workers' control over their work and remove a whole caste of bureaucratic parasites.

The bourgeois "advisers" also spread the lie that a de-centralised market economy automatically means a pluralistic, democratic political regime where trade unions will be free to bargain for their members. This is particularly attractive to the new layers of officials in the new unions and is also appealing to workers given their lifelong experience of Stalinist dictatorship.

Because Stalinism is so utterly discredited by the collapse of its bureaucratic command system and by the revelation of its crimes, the pro-capitalist ideologists have gained a temporary grip on the most democratic and independent workers' organisations. These misleaders wish to use them, as Solidarity was used in Poland, as a battering ram to evict the Stalinists only to then install the dictatorship of profit under free market capitalism.

A revolution to drive the Stalinists from power is essential.

But if the result of the current struggles against the bureaucracy is the rise to power of Yeltsin, he will then turn on the working class in the process of trying to restore capitalism. This would be a decisive defeat for the Soviet labour movement. First in the Donbass, but in the Kuzbass too, the ensuing butchery of jobs would leave a tiny "profitable" base for German, US and Japanese multi-nationals to exploit.

Reports from the Donbass and Vorkuta testify to a slight weakening of the influence of the marketising liberals. There is a growing realisation amongst the minority of socialists in the new working class movement that the USSR will not leap by means of restoration to the prosperity of the USA or Japan. Rather it will plunge into the abyss of misery experienced by South America, Africa and Asia.

The task still remains to smash the KGB and Stalinist dictatorship to smithereens. Even if the miners' strike does not bring down Gorbachev, a success even for its limited economic goals will strengthen the working class, and act as a barrier against a Chinese style clampdown and reign of terror. A mobilised and confident working class will also act as a barrier against restoration. Workers' struggles in Eastern Europe are already denting the confidence and subduing the celebrations of the bankers and industrialists.

This is why workers around the world should give their support, financial and industrial, to the Soviet miners in this strike. We must hold out the hand of international class solidarity and build direct links with these workers, discuss with them the realities of capitalism and the market, and collectively build a new revolutionary leadership which smashes the rule of the Stalinists and capitalists alike.

Workers must warn the Soviet miners of the fate of the British and the Bolivian miners—workers of two very different countries united as victims of liberal free-market regimes—who have had their jobs, industries and communities decimated by profit system. ■

GERMANY

The fight for workers' control

A DEMONSTRATION of 100,000 on a Monday night in Leipzig is a powerful symbol in the united Germany. It was in Leipzig that small scale protests began. These were transformed into the mass movement that toppled the Stalinist regime. That the streets now ring to the demand for Kohl's resignation is a measure of how much has changed since unification.

Behind the demonstrations lies the growing realisation that an economic catastrophe is about to overwhelm the "new states". Immediately after the currency union in July, strikes erupted across the GDR. Workers demanded wage increases to cope with western prices. Western trade unions entered the fray to recruit new members and to protect their western membership from a wage-cutting flood of cheap labour. Typically, they negotiated a breathing space; wage deals and job security packages for between six months and a year.

The government's strategy was to rationalise the GDR economy under the control of the Treuehand, a state trust which was given control of all nationalised industry.

The anniversary of the first free elections in what used to be East Germany was marked by demonstrations across the south of the country. This year though, the demonstrators cheered on the speeches which denounced Helmut Kohl. Peter Main looks at the changes taking place in Germany and the tasks of Trotskyists as hard times approach.

This strategy has failed. Buying off unrest has cost the equivalent of 35,000 million and forced higher interest rates and taxes.

Meanwhile the sheer scale of trying to reorganise an entire planned

economy in accordance with the norms of capitalism, added to the complications thrown up by promises to return state property to its original owners, has defeated the Treuehand's management.

Their plan now is simply to sell off all property at knockdown prices and allow the new owners to "rationalise" it as they see fit. Now the deals that bought the breathing space are running out. Workers'

fears are stirred by the forecasts of unemployment reaching three or even four million. Already 30% of the workforce is either unemployed or on short time. On top of the mounting fears about unemployment came last week's announcement that rents in the "new states" will rise by 360% in August. This has begun to create increasing pressure for action.

The demos themselves were big but not especially militant. In Leipzig, 100,000 responded to a call from the West German engineering union, IG Metall, and the Citizens' Movement, which was formed during the first phase of the revolution against the Stalinists in the autumn of 1989.

In Berlin, still an important region of PDS influence, the discontent, and the realisation that a new political direction is needed, has penetrated into the ranks of the PDS itself. Supporters of the LRCI, organised around the newspaper *Arbeitermacht*, are working within the Communist Platform group inside the party. Since the last party conference in January they have seen the support for their arguments grow rapidly.

The developing German crisis is unique in history, the result of the first attempt to restore capitalism in what was a degenerate workers' state. The chief feature of the former GDR was the state control of the economy after the expropriation of the capitalist owners. Until the final collapse of the old regime, the strategic task of the working class was to seize control of the economy and the planning mechanisms from the bureaucrats.

Today's objective has to recognise that the working class lost the opportunity to install its own regime and its own control of the economy. Today we have to fight to get control of the Treuehand, to stop it breaking up the workforces, to stop it privatising the assets, to stop it creating the imperialist world's biggest reserve army of unemployed workers.

The starting point for this is the current wave of protests. The way forward lies through the occupation of threatened plants and their use as organising centres of resistance to all the attacks on living standards.

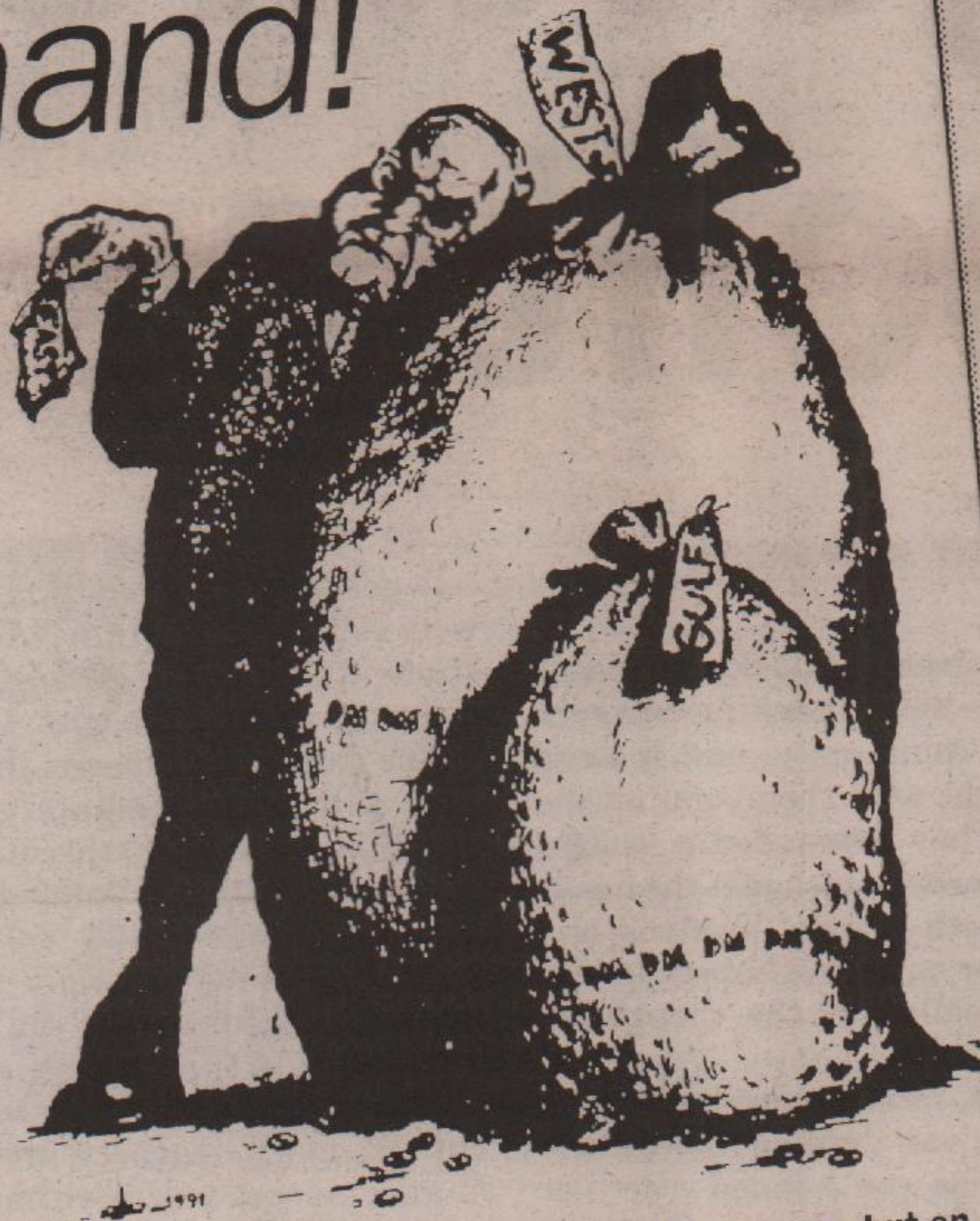
Without a doubt this will bring the working class up against the full might of the state. Speaking to BBC Radio, after the Berlin Demo on 23 March, the Mayor of Berlin said he was expecting "a lot more than just demonstrations" in what might become a very hot summer.

The working class must create the alternative to the old state. Its factory committees, its democratic trade unions, its workers' councils, its control commission and its defence organisations are not only necessary here and now to stop the destruction of the economy, they are also the embryos of the future healthy workers' state.

That is the strategy to which the LRCI is winning recruits both inside and outside the PDS. ■

This leaflet was distributed by *Arbeitermacht* and Communist Platform members in the PDS and reproduced by several PDS branches instead of the official Party leaflets for the Berlin demonstration on 23 March. On 22 March, *Neues Deutschland*, the PDS newspaper, condemned the leaflet because "it might spoil friendly relations with the trade unions". At the demo the official slogans of the PDS were "More Money!" and "As Few Redundancies As Possible!" No doubt this explains the warm reception given to the *Arbeitermacht*/KPF leaflet!

Get hold of the Treuehand!



"Nobody will be worse off than before!" and "There will be no tax rises!"—who doesn't remember the CDU's election promises of last year?

Lies have short legs, so the proverb says. None have shorter legs than the taxation lie served up by "Unity Kohl" and his deputy, De Maziere. Massive tax rises for all workers, tax cuts (abolition of property and commercial capital taxes) for the rich and investment gifts for big companies. They would have us believe that the "social market" was a miracle worker that would bring us out of stagnation and economic collapse. For that every second job is to disappear, whole industrial regions are to be turned into industrial graveyards, a merciless policy of demolition destroys the factories. Rents leap to astronomical heights, whole cities and states are already bankrupt, and the health service and social services are to be liquidated.

It was all lies and deception, like everything else the Bonn government promised. The market economy means the capitalist economy and there profit rules, not the needs of working people (who are of interest to the bosses only if they represent a profitable market).

The Treuehand was set up to "renovate" the clapped out GDR economy and to make it "competitive". Now we can see what that means, the reckless destruction and throttling of all GDR industries. The Treuehand is not working in the interests of the people of the "new states". It is working solely in the interests of the West German employers, and they want three things from it: a viable market for their goods, no competitors in their own sectors, the ruination of the existing plants.

What they are looking for is to pick up those plants for next to nothing as soon as the property question can be sorted out, so they can then move production over to the low-wage regions of the East.

That is what the Treuehand is doing—that is what we have to fight!

The economic and taxation policies of the government affect everyone. We must give a massive and determined answer to this general attack on our living and working conditions. Tens of thousands have joined the demonstrations in the last couple of weeks; tens of thousands have walked out in protest strikes. In some areas, factories have been occupied. But protest demos and token strikes alone will not be enough to stop Kohl.

Parliamentary protests and resolutions from the SPD and PDS or harsh words from the union leaders will be just as ineffective. These struggles can, and must, become the starting points for broadening the resistance and organising to make it effective. From protests to real resistance is a big step! It will only be successful if we take control of the fight into our own hands!

The employers and their government will press on with their plans for as long as we let them!

The Treuehand must be taken under the control of the workers!

- Get control of the Treuehand! We must open all the books and accounts, inspect all the deals and make them public—we can't leave it to the managers of the Treuehand!
- To get this we need a control commission in every plant with the right of veto on all plans, elected by mass meetings of all employees!

"We must scrimp and save every

penny" the government tells us—but on the very same day Kohl can shell out DM15,000 million to the USA to help pay for genocide in the Gulf.

In total some DM60,000 million are to go up in smoke in the Gulf War. They have money enough for that, in the last couple of years the bosses have had their highest profits ever, in part thanks to the *anschluss* with the GDR. Take the money from those who've got it! Let the bosses pay for re-unification!

The GDR economy had a lot wrong with it. First and foremost that the SED [Stalinist party] bureaucrats decided on production, not the workers. But it was only "state socialism" that made possible secure jobs, low rents and that our pensioners didn't go below the breadline. Did we march on the streets in autumn '89 so that we could sleep out on them today?

- Mass meetings in every plant to decide on the next steps!
- Occupy all plants threatened with closure!

THE "LEFT"-led Lambeth Council presides over one of the poorest inner city boroughs in the country. Its collapse in the face of Tory demands to cut jobs and services was predictable. This London council, which earned notoriety in the early 1980s under the leadership of "Red Ted" Knight, has a long history of talking left and then caving in, doing the Tories' dirty work for them.

Time and again the workers of Lambeth have been called upon to support the Labour Council, only to be rewarded with cuts, steep rate rises and eventual surrender to the Tories in the name of keeping within the law. The latest collapse is yet another indictment of the Labour left's addiction to gesture politics and council chamber posturing. It is a reflection on the left's steadfast refusal to mobilise its working class base in action for direct confrontations with the Tories.

The unsavoury sight of the Labour leader, Joan Twelves, presenting a giant sized cheque for £10,000—representing the Councillors' unpaid Poll Taxes—before the carefully assembled press, symbolised the depth of the capitulation. Yet, as is always the case when you grovel rather than fight, the Tories have come back for more.

Not content with a cut in real terms of about £20 million they have made it clear that they will demand more through capping Lambeth. And just for good measure the "enemy within", the Labour Party leadership, is pursuing its witch-hunt against Joan Twelves as well as those who actually oppose cuts in services.

Twelves, who won the leadership of the Labour group by opposing Linda Bellos' policies of making cuts in services, has quickly followed down the same road. The reason is clear. Like other "left" councils Lambeth pinned its hopes on being able to avoid making serious cuts, by borrowing, creative accounting, rate rises and then a high Poll Tax. They believed they could cling on until a newly elected Labour government came to the rescue.

This reformist strategy, pursued not just by Lambeth but by other "left" councils like Liverpool, led them to reject any policies, such as setting a budget based on the vital needs of the working class community, which would have led them into "illegality" under the Tory laws. It also meant they ignored the possibility of a fight based on the mobilisation of the council workforce and the community under attack from the cuts.

Such an alternative was presented to the Lambeth councillors in March. When news of the proposed level of cuts leaked out Lambeth trade unionists immediately mobilised against them. A lobby organised by college unions and students and joined by teachers and parents, ended up occupying the council chamber where the Labour Group was due to meet.

The 150 protesters challenged

LAMBETH COUNCIL



Poll Tax demonstration against Lambeth Council, March 1990

K Carpenter

The limits of gesture politics

BY JOHN MCKEE

Joan Twelves and the Labour leadership to stop attacking workers and the community, and instead join a fight with them against the Tories. They demanded a budget and resources which met the needs of Lambeth people. Twelves and the majority of the Labour group were appalled by the thought of such a struggle.

At the next council meeting Twelves was smiling before the cameras as she handed over her Poll Tax cheque! Even so she could not muster a majority for her cuts budget and £590 Poll Tax charge. So "legal advice" was quickly sought. Miraculously the advice was that two of the seven councillors who were against all cuts were barred from voting because they had not paid their Poll Tax and were being pursued by the council!

Having eliminated two opponents the budget passed by 33 votes

to 32. The following day all the colleges and most council offices were shut as lecturers in NATFHE, student unions and NALGO went on strike against the cuts.

The cuts budget means that 500 jobs will go immediately, with anything up to 2,000 threatened if Lambeth is capped. Adult Education is being cut by 40%, the Youth Service is being virtually wound up, over a thousand college places will be lost in the borough, and 12 of the 15 day nurseries are to be cut. So many teachers are to go that classes will become unmanageable. Swimming pools are to be shut or restricted in their opening hours, council rents have already gone up by £7 a week. All of this comes on top of the highest Poll Tax bill in the country. And it is being imposed by a "left" Labour council!

If Twelves expected some congratulations from Labour Party headquarters in Walworth Road for these anti-working class measures

If the Labour group had refused to make the massive cuts demanded by the government, refused to set a Poll Tax, and instead tried to organise the workers of Lambeth in defence of local services, they would have got a huge response.

she was quickly disillusioned. In the run up to the budget crisis she and other council leaders were summoned to Walworth Road where they were met by Bryan Gould, Kate Hoey, the MP imposed

on Vauxhall constituency by Kinnock, and Keith Hill, prospective parliamentary candidate for Streatham.

The councillors were told that if they wanted to avoid an inquiry and possible expulsion they had to do three things: pay the Poll Tax, make stringent efforts to collect it, including using bailiffs, and accept the massive cuts budget that the Council Officers' were demanding. By the week before the council meeting it was clear that Walworth Road had decided Twelves had not fulfilled all their conditions.

Hoey circulated all Labour Party members in the constituency inviting them to join her in the witch-hunt and Joyce Gould was put in charge of the inquiry. The national and London press was suddenly full of accounts of "loony" Lambeth once again, with much of the background information on the "extremists" coming, no doubt, straight from the Walworth Road files. The target of this witch-hunt is not just Joan Twelves. It is primarily the seven Labour councillors who have stood out against the cuts and the Poll Tax.

If the Labour group had refused to make the massive cuts demanded by the government, refused to set a Poll Tax, and instead tried to organise the workers of Lambeth in defence of local services, they would have got a huge response. Instead, the "left" leaders have ended up siding with the Tories against the workers of Lambeth. There can be few more glaring examples of the bankruptcy of the left reformist perspective for shielding the poorest sections of the community from the Tory attacks. It is now up to the trade unionists in Lambeth and in every other borough under attack, to mobilise against these cuts.

Only by mobilising tens of thousands of workers in strike action, in demonstrations, mass lobbies and pickets, will it be possible to force the Tories to retreat. Already the trade union leaders are prevaricating, proposing only token one day actions, and in some cases trying to sabotage united cross-union action. To prevent this it is necessary to organise tenants, trade unionists, students, parents, users of the services, the black community organisations in rank and file, mass-based action committees against the cuts.

Such committees, if they have real workplace and union support, can push forward the struggle and overcome the divisions which currently exist between the white collar and the manual unions. They must also co-ordinate action across the boroughs. Only such a strategy can prevent a wholesale massacre of jobs and services across London.

- Mobilise for mass strike action against the cuts!
- Build action committees against the cuts!
- Fight the witch hunt against Lambeth!
- Oust all Labour councillors who support the cuts!
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Dodging the draft

Dear comrades,

The article "Workers and Conscription" in the March issue of Workers Power does not succeed in demolishing the case for conscientious objection and draft dodging as political tactics. It correctly identified theoretical weaknesses in the dominant tradition of western pacifism, but this does not mean that there are not practical lessons to be learnt from its experience.

There appear to be two strands to your position: the working class should acquire military skills, and activists should agitate within the armed forces. For the first part, the solution would appear to be—at a time when conscription does not exist—to advocate workers joining the Territorial Army, thus getting the benefits of weapons training without abandoning the arena of industrial struggle.

The second argument is more difficult, and your presentation of it is confusing. You seem to argue that during the Vietnam War, the draft dodgers ("overwhelmingly middle class or students") effectively abandoned both the political struggle and the thousands of workers who were conscripted, thus ensuring that opposition within the ranks "was not given a political direction". This looks dangerously patronising, both in its implication that black workers were leaderless without the white middle class (which obviously, you don't believe), and more importantly, in its assumption that the anti-war movement in America was the sole province of that white middle class. Where did the Nation of Islam stand? Or the advocates of Black Power? Or even Martin Luther King?

To take another example: the defeat of South Africa in its war in Namibia. Clearly there were several factors involved in forcing a South African withdrawal, including the cost of the war and the (admittedly sporadic and minor) mutinies within the SADF. But amongst them must not be forgotten the symbolism of, for example, 18 year old Charles Bester being sentenced to six years imprisonment for conscientious objection, the growing number of public declarations of refusal to serve in the forces, and the massive level of draft-dodging white graduates—the future ruling class—leaving the country.

And, at a time of war when propaganda and censorship are even more powerful than at other times, the contribution to the communication of political dissent that conscientious objection can make is often useful. Obviously it is essentially a symbolic rather than practical stand, but it can inspire and influence large numbers of people in a way that joining up and struggling for the rights of troops "to produce and have access to their own papers and bulletins" may not.

The major omission in the article was an understanding of the relevance of geography. For a successful revolution, it is clear that winning over the army is, if not absolutely vital, certainly of massive significance. Under these circumstances agitation within the ranks is clearly the first task of revolutionaries and your arguments are valid. But, no matter how protracted and violent the Gulf War might have been, it was never going to precipitate a revolutionary situation in Britain.

The focal point for action would therefore be here rather than the

Gulf. The breaking down of the political and popular support for a war abroad is more likely to hinder the waging of such a war than dissent within the ranks. This was the case in Vietnam. The reason it was not the case in Russia in the First World War and is not the case in Iraq today is the proximity of the battleground to the seat of domestic political power, thus raising the possibility of a direct intervention in the political arena—in either a progressive or a regressive role.

The Gulf War is over but, as you say, "Capitalism is a system doomed to push both classes and nations into bloody war again and again". The issues will return.

Yours in solidarity
James Rymer
c/o WFP

This letter has been cut for reasons of space

Dear comrades,

Your article on conscription misses the point. The problem we have to grapple with is how to deal with recruitment into professional armies, not forced conscription. The tendency in imperialist countries at the moment is in the direction of professional rather than conscript armies (note German plans and the problems the US experienced with the National Guard's inability to master the new weapons because of lack of training).

The question is thus posed; how do we undermine a professional army. Of course sending in revolutionaries is a central plank of such a programme but there is an aspect that has been completely ignored. It is to frustrate recruitment in the first place via organising the labour movement.

Recruiting offices tend to be set up in areas of high unemployment, particularly black ghettos here and in the USA. Many recruits see the army as the only way out of unemployment. That is why Railton Road

in South London, centre of the Brixton riots in the early 80s and an area of intensely high unemployment, had six soldiers serving in the Gulf. And furthermore the army is seen as the only means of gaining further education.

It strikes me that you should argue in the labour movement for pickets of recruitment centres under the slogans of proper jobs and proper pay, work or full pay, free universal further and higher education on full grants, an immediate programme of public works to improve the area etc. Most recruits would prefer jobs outside the army and this is one way of fighting for them and against the only job in the neighbourhood—the death business. A professional army, precisely because it is based on voluntary recruitment, is the most difficult army to undermine. That is why struggles around recruitment are so vital.

Yours,
Roy Gabriel
Brixton

KKE: Sell out as usual

Dear comrades

While the bombs were raining down on Baghdad, the US Ambassador to Greece and the right wing Prime Minister were addressing the 13th Congress of the KKE (Greek Communist Party). Never before have the proceedings been broadcast live and imperialists and their agents been present at a KKE Congress.

Having entered in June 1989 into a coalition government with Mitsotakis' New Democracy, and again in November 1989 in an all-party coalition with New Democracy and Papandreou's PASOK, the KKE expelled its youth

section KNE, having reportedly lost 30,000 members out of a total of 65,000.

In September 1990 Greece was paralysed by a three week general strike and occupations of factories as well as city-wide blockades from workers (as in Patras). The "hardliners" of the KKE in the GSEE (Greek TUC), Kostopoulos & company, instead of tuning the strike into an indefinite struggle against the system, derailed it and called it off when Mitsotakis made concessions. Once more an attempt is being made to reverse these concessions, with

Mitsotakis announcing the privatisation of the buses, Olympic Airways, public sector etc.

In December 1990 Mitsotakis proclaimed laws in Parliament signalling the return to the era of the 1950s in education (discipline and expulsion of pupils for "anti-social" behaviour, closure of night schools, privatisation of university education). A wave of pupil/student occupations shut down every education establishment all over Greece for two months. Minister for Education, Koutogiannopoulos, was forced to resign and withdraw every single law.

But victory was gained at an immense cost; a left wing teacher and others were murdered by organised para-military fascists of New Democracy. This in turn led to massive riots in Athens for three days. Two hundred thousand confronted the riot police and successfully burnt down the main headquarters of New Democracy in central Athens.

Every single newspaper, "left" and right, just as in 1965, called the workers and students "provocateurs". In reply tens of thousands of protesters wore stickers which said PROVO-CATEUR, rubbishing the government's claims. Throughout this whole period the KKE was nowhere. Justly it was viewed by the demonstrators as still being in coalition, although not formally with Mitsotakis, when they chanted outside parliament: "You are all mates—we are the opposition".

The outbreak of the imperialist war against Iraq to which Greece sent two ships led to pro-Iraq demos outside the US Embassy in Athens.

The recent massive demonstrations in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, and Iraklion occurred against and despite both PASOK and the KKE. They are only a minor foretaste of future developments. Mitsotakis, for the third time in less than a year, is attempting to smash the workers—having singled out the bus workers for the moment. These renewed attacks by the government, coupled with the political bankruptcy of Greek Stalinism, make the struggle for a new revolutionary leadership in the workers' movement even more urgent.

Yours fraternally
V N Gelis
Athens

write to:
Workers Power
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WC1 3XX

Unity conference Stalinist?

Dear Editor,

I am writing to point out some quite serious inaccuracies that were put forward in a letter (WP 140) from a certain David Holt regarding the Communist Unity Consultative Conference which was organised by the CPB in liaison with the NCP in January.

Being a "consultative conference" open to all communists, no one had any mandate to make any firm decisions on the future of any of the parties represented by those attending. This conference, along with many such regional conferences, are the basis for discussions on possibilities of unity for the future.

The formal proposals will come through the various parties in adherence with their democratic centralist structures.

It was quite clear beforehand that this was not the time nor the place to make binding decisions so there were no resolutions to vote on. Any attempt to do this would have been undemocratic.

The CPB's finances are completely independent to those of the Morning Star, since the Morning Star is an independent newspaper, run as a co-operative and is owned by its readers and supporters. The Morning Star is not the organ of any other party as has been the case since the 1940s. The Soviet order has been suspended not cancelled, since the USSR has suspended all currency imports since the new year.

Why so many left-wingers seem

to think that the BBC, Daily Mirror and Guardian give more working class based daily news, than the Morning Star is quite beyond me.

I should like to question the blanket use by the letter writer and by your paper of the term "Stalinist". It seems that it is used as a euphemism for Marxist-Leninist, purely as an insult without any basis for use or explanation of its meaning. It seems that its use simply tries to write off Marxist-Leninists and Marxist-Leninist parties leaving Workers Power as the only "true communist" left.

This would-be purging of the labour movement of Marxist-Leninists is more akin to what Stalinism really means then what you are attempting to describe.

Yours
Nick Kelleher

We reply: For us Stalinism is a term signifying a political method—namely Stalin's. It is a method that underlies the politics of "Marxist-Leninist" organisations as diverse as the Peruvian Sendero Luminoso and the British Eurocommunists. It subordinates workers' revolution to a strategic democratic stage and it believes the Soviet Union is some sort of socialist state. We have never been in favour of "purging" the labour movement of Stalinists, only of fighting their politics. As for the refusal to vote on the Gulf, whether or not either the CPB or NCP is "democratic centralist" it was indicative of the fact that anti-imperialist politics will never be tolerated in this milieu.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

The misnamed Communist Parties are really Stalinist parties—reformist, like the Labour Party, but tied to the bureaucracy that rules in the USSR. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) inflicts terrible defeats on the working class world-wide.

In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.

If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!



