

Workers power

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British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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UNEMPLOYMENT Capitalism's forgotten millions

LAST MONTH 900 applicants went for a single vacancy—a shop assistant's job in London. In Leicester over 7,000 applied for eight jobs at the local water authority within a day of the advert going out. At this rate it would take an average of a thousand applications for you to land a job!

Official Department of Employment figures show vacancies at job centres at their lowest for years. Meanwhile, the official jobless total stands at over 2.6 million. This figure bears little relation to the truth. It is the product of countless Tory fiddles during their years of office. If the official figures were compiled under the regulations applying in 1979, they would reveal that 3.7 million—12.8% of the workforce—are unemployed. In the inner cities there are real unemployment rates of 35% and more.

Not content with making millions of workers unemployed, the Tories have made sure that life without a job means crippling poverty as well. Unemployment benefit is currently a paltry £41.40. Many don't even qualify for this and have to get by on Income Support. The value of benefits has been cut by half over the Tory years.

More and more of our class are being dragged down into poverty. Councils have sent in the bailiffs to collect the poll tax even from the unemployed. Building societies are notching up record repossessions and working class families are thrown into squalid temporary housing and



bed and breakfast, their dreams of home ownership shattered.

This is the everyday reality of life on the dole in Major's Britain. And this is what Tory fat cat Nigel Lawson called "a price worth paying". Worth paying for Britain's bosses because it intimidates workers in employment to accept speed up, lower real wages, and worsened working conditions. Worth paying for the Tories, the party which fights ruthlessly for its own class.

If the Labour Party was half as

dedicated to the working class it would now be running the Tories into the ground for their record on unemployment. It would be pointing to the chronic housing shortages, the crumbling schools, the declining transport systems and the run down hospitals. It would be pledging itself to launch a massive programme of public works to employ the millions of unemployed at proper trade union rates of pay. It would be promising a massive programme of training for the youth who at the moment are

thrown out of school and straight onto the dole queues.

But Labour does none of this. It says little about the unemployed because it knows that it too will keep millions on the dole. Because it too will be running this crisis wracked capitalist system.

It would be some comfort to report that the unions were acting any differently. But they are not. As the unemployment figures jumped another 122,000 in January the TUC launched their first and only initia-

tive for the jobless during this recession. February was declared a "month of action" for the unemployed. *Action?* Demonstrations? Protest strike actions? A campaign to halt all job cuts? Come off it! All that went out with the Tolpuddle martyrs! Now we have new imaginative tactics. The invisible Norman Willis put in a rare appearance to call on trade unionists still in work to donate 50p a week to a fund for those out of it. Brother can you spare a dime!

Maybe rattling the charity tin in front of workers will get Norman a peerage but it is no use whatever to the unemployed. What we need is concerted action to defend all jobs and to force Labour if it gets into office, to put the forgotten millions of our class to work.

Where the bosses threaten redundancies we must demand can immediate reduction of the working week without loss of pay—share out the available work amongst the existing workforce.

We must demand that Labour commits itself to immediately nationalising without compensation any firm which declares redundancies, placing them under the control of the workers themselves. We must also demand that Labour commits itself to launching a massive programme of public works for the unemployed under workers' control and at the full union rate for the job.

The bosses and their media will go wild shrieking that such demands are impossible—they will make the country "uncompetitive". Our reply must be that a system which cannot provide a job for everyone who wants to work, that cannot "afford" to maintain decent social services, a free health service, or provide a good education does not deserve to exist.

We have to convince millions of workers that the market economy, capitalism, cannot achieve full employment or a decent life and that it can and must be overthrown. To do this the working class must unite the forces of the employed and the unemployed. We must bring hope to the millions in the dole queues, by building a mass fighting organisation able to deliver a sharp reminder to our rulers that the misery of the unemployed is going to cost them more than they bargained for. ■

Support black self-defence!

TWO RECENT events in East London show the reality of life for black people in Britain.

Last November, two shopkeepers became the latest victims of police racism and brutality in Newham. The police, supposedly investigating another incident, carried out a savage, unprovoked assault on Tony Deane. Tony's father, a 53 year old asthmatic, begged the police not to kill his son. They responded with a vicious attack resulting in Mr Deane himself being taken to hospital. He needed treatment for head and facial injuries. Doctors feared Tony had broken a bone in his back. As a final insult, the Deanes were charged with assaulting the police.

A month later, Panchadcharam Sahitharan, a Tamil refugee, was making his way home when he was attacked by a gang of racist thugs who beat him with sticks and bats and left him with severe head injuries. Mr Sahitharan was taken to hospital where he died four days later, without regaining consciousness. This tragic incident followed a series of attacks by the same gang on other black people in the area. The murderers have not been caught.

The Deane Family Campaign and the Panchadcharam Sahitharan Memorial Committee recognise that these attacks are not unrelated. They have called a joint

BY ZOË LLOYD

demonstration against police harassment and racist attacks.

The state in this country is not neutral. The official racism of the police, shown in cases like those of the Tottenham Three and Cardiff Three, proves they cannot be relied upon to investigate, never mind stop, racist attacks. Attacks are on the increase as the state pumps out the "Fortress Europe" line. And the police themselves continue to put the boot in. Since 1980, 61 black people have died in custody or due to police actions. No charges have ever resulted.

Given this situation the black community must form black self-defence groups to protect themselves from state harassment and racist attacks. It is the duty of labour movement bodies to support these groups, and also to organise their own detachments to support them.

It is not only the black community that is targeted by the state. Just look at the Irish community which is constantly criminalised by the PTA and "fitted up", like the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six.

There is nothing arbitrary about increasing violence against sections of our class. The British state knows that when the going gets tough they will have to resort to acts of

terror against organised workers. The miners' and printers' strikes in the 1980s showed how the state, having developed and tested its weapons through assaults on the oppressed then goes on to use them against organised workers.

The police tolerate and even protect the fascist and racist gangs to foster racism and divide the working class. The state knows that a split labour movement is a much

weaker opponent than a united one.

It is vital that we forge links between all sections of the labour movement and working class communities. We urge all our readers to raise the issue of the Deane Family Campaign and Panchadcharam Sahitharan Memorial Committee in workplaces and other organisations, and organise as big a contingent as possible on the demonstration. ■

MARCH FOR JUSTICE

Saturday 28 March

Assemble 12.30pm
Plasnet Park, Plasnet Grove,
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OUT THIS MONTH

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Campaign against domestic violence



LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS

End Manx dark age!

DUE TO an aberration of the British legal system what should be no more than the Isle of Man's local council is given the status of a Parliament. The Tynwald, as it is called, is allowed to make its own laws and inflict its own penalties on those who break them. This bizarre quirk of British history allows a bunch of reactionary bigots to hang on to policies which have been overturned in the rest of the country for decades. Homosexual activity remains a crime, for which the maximum sentence is life imprisonment.

For the third time in three years the Tynwald is about to be presented with a new Sexual Offences Bill, which would decriminalise homosexuality. This is being pushed by the British Government in order to bring the reactionary enclave into line with EC conventions.

By a strange coincidence, "born again Christian" Robin Oake, police chief on the Isle of Man, decided that this was exactly the right moment to launch a snoop on a well known gay men's meeting place. In mid-February his bigots in blue rounded up and questioned a group of gay men, charging 21 with gross indecency. Their names

BY SAM LOWRY

and addresses were duly published in the local paper. Within a week, two had committed suicide. This brings the number of suicides on the Isle directly related to such harassment to at least four in the last three years.

The Tynwald should be abolished and along with it all its stupid and backward laws. But in fact homosexuality is not fully decriminalised in the rest of Britain. Gross indecency is a charge commonly brought against gay men, often resulting in a court appearance and a fine. This can lead to public humiliation, the loss of a job, and estrangement from family and friends. Such legal attacks combine with wider oppression— isolation, rejection, discrimination and physical assaults—meaning that suicides are all too frequent amongst lesbians and gays in the rest of Britain as well.

A struggle for democratic rights for lesbians and gay men means getting rid of the remaining oppressive laws but combining this with a wider struggle against oppression, stigmatisation and exploitation in society. ■

ACCORDING TO a recent survey, one in six women have experienced domestic violence, and over seventy women die each year at the hands of their partners, compared with only 15 men. The 1988 *British Crime Survey* estimated that there were more than 400,000 incidents of domestic violence against women in 1987.

The root cause of domestic violence is women's economic and social dependence within the family. Women and men are socialised into these oppressive relationships and violence is a frequent feature of family life.

Many women feel helpless to stop these assaults. Some are left believing that is somehow their own fault, due to their own "failings" as a wife. The isolation of families, the belief that what happens in the home is a purely private matter, means that millions of women suffer in silence, never reporting their assaults, never knowing how many other women experience the same oppression.

A further demonstration of the extent of this scandal can be

glimpsed by US government figures showing that 27 million women are "battered" each year, 4.7 million of whom suffer serious injuries.

This must become a burning issue for the entire working class. Efforts at legal reform by Labour MPs like Mildred Gordon and Jack Ashley, whilst necessary, will not alter the basic situation. At best they will bring some measure of justice after the event.

For this reason Workers Power welcomes the emergence of the Campaign Against Domestic Violence (CADV). Unlike previous campaigns, CADV locates the problem in the material conditions facing women. Demands for more council housing, more refuges, free child-care facilities, a minimum wage and full benefits to cover the cost of living are all essential to breaking down this isolation and economic dependence.

CADV is beginning to gain support within the labour movement, largely thanks to the efforts of Militant. Its conference this month is an opportunity to spread the campaign even wider. However, if

CADV is to have any lasting impact it must urgently focus its energies on organising women in the workplace.

Eleven and a half million women are now employed in Britain. Many are concentrated in low-paid, part-time and non-unionised jobs. At work women can begin to gain self-respect, meet other workers and break down their isolation. But if they remain unorganised, this will not in itself be a step forward.

The TUC must co-ordinate a unionisation drive to draw these women into our movement. But we can't rest content with motions and lobbies to ensure this. Any unionisation drive must be under the control of rank and file workers, especially women who have the most to gain from it.

Women's caucuses in the workplaces and union branches must be organised to take this forward and ensure their own demands are taken up by their unions. If CADV is prepared to take steps down this road, it could begin to lay the basis for a much-needed working class women's movement. ■

EDITORIAL

Labour's big idea

SO WHAT is Labour's big idea for the election? "British socialism, the enduring values of British socialism, translated into modern policies that will make sense of people's experience" was how Gordon Brown, Labour's spokesman on trade and industry, described it.

But asked whether this meant that social ownership was still on the agenda for public utilities such as electricity and water, Brown was quick to clarify what "translation into modern policies" meant: "I think everyone recognises that as far as financial priorities are concerned there is no case for using money to buy shares in British Telecom."

Labour's traditional view of socialism was to translate the Clause Four of its constitution for "common ownership of the means of production distribution and exchange" to mean the state ownership of public utilities. Now there is a more modern version. Leave it in the hands of its shareholders but pass a consumer protection act to limit excessive price rises by BT and other monopolies!

The excuse Brown gives for this unceremonious dumping of former policy is typical of Neil Kinnock's Labour Party: "We would find it difficult to justify using money that should go to the health service." And how much money will go to the Health Service? Labour gives no figures. It only says it will devote "more resources" to it. In fact Labour's only hard promises that involve expenditure are to raise pensions and to restore the level of child benefit to its April 1987 level in real terms.

It has promised to repeal Tory measures like the Poll Tax, Hospital Trusts, the fund-holding GP system, compulsory tendering for local authorities, and opting out for schools. It hopes that the mere cessation of these attacks will attract working class and middle class voters. But Labour steadfastly refuses to promise the necessary increase in resources to restore the damage the Tory attacks have done. The biggest reform promised—the national minimum wage—has not been quantified, nor the timescale of

its introduction fixed. Doubtless a few "translations" of these promises will take place when the Manifesto is written.

None of this prudence has prevented the Tories launching a furious onslaught on Labour's "profligacy". The Tories hope to revive memories of the 1974-79 Labour government when Labour paid for what reforms it introduced, or more importantly for its capitulations to the IMF, by unloading the burden onto working class taxpayers. Inflation ripped into the pensions of the elderly and the incomes of the weakly organised and low paid workers. Millions of them deserted Labour in the three general elections that followed. So the Tory scare campaign on Labour's supposed plans for massive tax increases has put the wind up Kinnock and his cronies.

Labour is pinning its hopes of beating the Tories on the deepening and lengthening recession, on accumulated working class hatred of the Tories' record and on middle class disillusion in the recession-hit south east. Labour talks far more about interest rates than about the dole queue. Labour economic spokeswoman and ex-left, Margaret Beckett, repeatedly drums home the message that first we must create new wealth by industrial regeneration. Then, and only then, can we spend it on increased welfare provision. Despite well over three million unemployed, Labour promises not one serious measure to cut the dole queues let alone end the scourge of unemployment.

Instead the Shadow Chancellor John Smith is long on rhetoric aimed at wooing the Confederation of British Industry:

"This country must bring about a renaissance in our manufacturing industries. Manufactured goods dominate our export trade, accounting for some 70% of Britain's international trade in goods and services. Britain can pay its way in the world by producing the goods that the world and our own people want to buy. And that means overwhelmingly manufactured goods."

Industrial workers might prick up their ears and think this means government intervention to create jobs. But no. It turns out this windbagging amounts to no more than promises to set up training boards "in partnership with industry" with a "modest" levy on employers to pay for them.

As loyal servants of the bosses, the Labour leadership knows that in a period of recession it must call on workers to tighten their belts now, in the hope that times will get easier in a year or two. After thirteen years out in the cold, Kinnock, Smith and Hattersley are fawningly eager to convince the bosses that they are now "fit to govern", that they can stop the workers from eating into the bosses' profits. Hence their refusal to promise any general rise in the level of social spending or public sector wages or by taking the shackles off the unions.

Translating Labour's negative strategy into old fashioned class language it is certain that a Labour government would continue the Tories' policy of making the workers, not the bosses, pay for the crisis.

So why do we argue that workers should vote Labour? Despite the feeble promises that Labour makes, despite their open willingness to retain many of the Tory reforms which have so damaged the working class, millions of the most class conscious workers will vote Labour to kick out the hated government of the bosses. Millions of them believe that Labour will at least stop the attacks that characterised 13 years of Tory rule. They see a Labour victory as a step forward. A fourth Tory victory would be a great blow to working class confidence and morale. It would also allow Labour to continue posing as the party of the working class in opposition.

With Labour in power we have the opportunity to convince such workers that its "caring capitalism" will solve none of their problems.

Whilst arguing for a Labour vote we remorselessly expose Labour's anti-working class programme and we warn rank and file trade unionists and Labour Party members to prepare to fight Kinnock's attacks if he gets into Downing Street. ■

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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, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.

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 councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

The first victorious working class revolution, the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, established a workers' state. But Stalin and the bureaucracy destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The corrupt, parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can

defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism.

Internationally Stalinist Communist Parties have consistently betrayed the working class. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist and their influence in the workers' movement must be defeated.

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 fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

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!

Rochdale fascists – beware

ON SATURDAY 15 February the fascist British National Party (BNP) intended to hold a launch rally for their election campaign in Rochdale where Ken Henderson hopes to be their parliamentary candidate.

The Anti Nazi League (ANL) and Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), along with other local anti-racist and labour movement organisations, built for a counter-demonstration to stop the BNP scum spreading their nauseating race hate message in the area. Six hundred people came on to the streets to get the message across that Ken Henderson and his fellow brainless thugs were not welcome in the community.

After a mass leafleting people dispersed to occupy the pubs in which the fascists might have tried to hold a rally. Seven fascists unwittingly turned up at one of them. However, once they saw a fair sized crowd of anti-fascists already settled in they swiftly legged it off down the street.

Shortly after this incident a worried looking ANL steward, who no one could remember electing, told the assembled anti-fascists that physical confrontation with the fascists was to be avoided at all costs unless in self-defence. The fascists were not to be "provoked". Workers Power supporters countered this by arguing that with such a large number of our forces present it was an excellent opportunity to teach the BNP goons a lesson that would make them think twice about trying to intimidate and attack local people.

These same self-appointed stewards argued at a meeting later on in the day that it would be pointless to go to a place where we knew the fascists would definitely be on the grounds that "to physically confront the fascists would be a diversion" from the "victory" of turning out 600 people on the streets leafleting against the BNP. Apparently this had effectively turned Rochdale into "a fascist free zone". Workers Power argued that while mobilising 600 people against the BNP was a good thing it would not be enough to merely leaflet against them. To stop them having any foothold in Rochdale we need to physically smash them time

and time again preventing them from polluting our streets, dirtying our terraces and infecting our pubs with their anti-working class racist garbage through fear of strong local resistance.

The bankruptcy of the SWP's proclamation of Rochdale being a "Nazi free zone" was proven half an hour later when 25 fascists tried to charge 30 AFA supporters, including a good number of young Jewish militant anti-fascists. They stood their ground and successfully turned and chased the pathetic gang of thugs away. Later on the fascists' morale was further damaged when their drinking session came to an abrupt and timely end. ■

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Trade union

WE SHOULD see the "reform debate" for what it is: yet another attempt by the leadership of the NUS, dominated by the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS), to strengthen their stranglehold over the national union by a series of constitutional amendments. NOLS does not want a campaigning, militant NUS committed to direct action.

They want a service union, which provides entertainment and catering services for students and reduces campaigns to a few lobbies of MPs and the odd (usually very odd) publicity stunt.

After the spate of occupations last term, the Winter Conference offered the opportunity for rank and file students to demand that the NOLS leadership co-ordinate a campaign of rent strikes and occupations to further their demands. The aim should have been to build for an indefinite national stoppage of further and higher education until the demands were met.

Manoeuvres

What was the NOLS response? A series of outrageous manoeuvres to scrap the Winter Conference and a conscious attempt to derail the campaign of occupations. Other reform proposals include setting up regional structures to disenfranchise Area NUS bodies—some of the most active bodies in the union. Full-time regional presidents would then go directly onto the National Executive Committee (NEC), reducing the number of part-time positions there from twelve to three. This would reduce the ability of conference to determine the Executive's composition.

The abolition of the Winter Conference is to be ratified at the extraordinary conference. With only one conference a year the NEC can more easily ignore mandates and blatantly disregard NUS policy, making it harder for us to hold them to account as Spring Conference becomes reduced to one big election process.

Left Unity is one of the main oppositions to the NOLS leader-

Many students will be wondering why on earth NUS has called an extraordinary conference to discuss "reform" of its structures, when the key issues that mobilised students last term were the fundamental ones: student poverty, rising rents, loss of housing benefit, cutbacks in college resources, overcrowded lectures, lack of books. **Kirstie Parkes** explains what the NUS leaders are up to

NUS REFORMS

A charter for student bureaucrats



ship. Yet their misunderstanding of the strength and nature of the bureaucracy weakens their response. For instance, Alice Sharp of the NEC wrote in *Socialist Organiser*:

"NUS, despite its leadership, is by and large a democratic and open organisation. Its structures be they

area organisations or the NEC itself are open to all its membership."

This bears little resemblance to reality for the majority of student activists.

Officials are often able to manipulate the union's machinery against the rank and file. The very

tional collective bargaining.

BR are also currently offering, and sometimes imposing, "restructuring" packages on staff in various departments. Any higher rates of pay on offer are effectively self-financing as they are directly linked to performance, pitting workers in the same department against each other. Wage rises would be linked to job cuts. For train drivers this would also mean one person operation, scrapping the guard on passenger trains, with all the dangers for passenger safety that this entails.

The RMT is doing little to mobilise its members against these threats. They have launched a feeble "Better Rail Campaign" aiming to win over business and the public to the need for more investment. Meanwhile they pin their hopes on a Labour victory.

A year ago the RMT Council urged 8,000 Signalling and Telecommunications (S&T) workers to vote against a deal giving the bosses a free hand to introduce a ten hour day and scrap overtime pay.

The ballot deliberately contained no reference to industrial action, calling only for rejection and further negotiations. Despite a five to one vote for rejection, BR imposed the "deal" anyway. The RMT did nothing. Little wonder then that a recent ballot of 800 guards delivered only a wafer thin majority against a similar deal.

The BR bosses have been more than grateful to negotiate these packages one department at a time, thus dividing up a massive and potentially powerful workforce. The RMT leadership has even ignored the 1991 conference decision to end single department talks on restructuring, and to ballot the whole membership for industrial action if a decent agreement could not be

decision making process over reform, which saw NOLS retaking a vote because they didn't like the decision the first time around, is evidence of this.

Left Unity's positions flow from their strategy of capturing key positions within the current structure. But defending the existing structures, still less holding them up as a model of democracy, are no solution.

We must defend the NUS from the right wing's attacks whilst at the same time fighting for a different type of reform: one which would prevent the development of bureaucracy and enable NUS to become a real fighting union.

Workers Power Student Societies say: all union officials should be paid no more than the average student grant. This is the surest way to sort out those who are looking for a fast track to a career in the Labour Party or trade union

reached. The truth is the leadership has never had any intention of carrying out democratically agreed union policy. Rank and file action is our only alternative.

This must start with a clear exposé of the preferred "wait for Labour" strategy so beloved of the union tops. Even if Labour wins the next election, which is by no means certain, its own transport policy offers little to BR workers. Shadow Minister John Prescott rightly points to the £3 billion robbed from rail subsidies since 1985. But does he promise to pay a penny of it back? Does he hell! Labour merely offers piecemeal privatisation and self-financing "reforms" which put profit in the driving seat.

We must demand that any future Labour Government provide all the funding needed for a decent, safe railway industry. The level of that funding must be decided by rank and file railway trade union committees and working class users, not big business financiers.

The report on the 1990 Clapham Junction accident obliged BR to

bureaucracy from those who are committed to fight for the students they represent.

We must fight for complete financial independence from the college authorities. Does that mean not accepting state funds? Of course not. It means we want funding without strings. When students go into occupation or organise a rent strike, you can be sure the college authorities will threaten to withdraw funds.

Poverty

In this situation we must not subordinate the fight against attacks on students to the maintenance of external funding for the union. If funds are withdrawn, we must appeal to students themselves to fund our union and to campus and other trade unions to help us. To those who cite student poverty as a reason for ruling out financial independence, we say look at the Third World where workers on starvation wages have established their own unions to fight for their demands.

We must fight against all disaffiliations. They aid the right not the left, by weakening the national union. We need a stronger union with a closed shop in every college.

Participation

We need structures that allow full student participation in the union, maximum unity in struggle and control of our leaders. But more than this, we need a programme of action to defeat the Tory attacks on students and to win decent grants and quality education under the control of students, teachers and college workers.

That's what Workers Power Student Societies fight for. Join us.■

"limit" the number of hours worked each week by rail staff to 72! But many BR workers have to put in these scandalously long hours just to earn a decent wage. Low pay and fatigue amongst staff are ignored by this report—indeed they are positively encouraged! Only workers' action to win a 35 hour week and guaranteed minimum wage set at the average industrial wage can begin to solve the health and safety crisis on the rail.

Campaign

Rank and file activists must urgently launch a national anti-privatisation campaign and bulletin to draw in militants from all the rail unions. We need a national rank and file conference committed to organising on a cross-union basis against privatisation, for the 35 hour week, the minimum wage etc. This way we can build the action necessary to force the rail unions to fight both the Tory plans and to force any future Labour Government to fully finance a decent railway service.■

BRITISH RAIL Fight Tory privatisation

EVERYONE KNOWS that British Rail (BR) receives nowhere near enough investment to meet its workers' and passengers' needs. Despite all the glossy propaganda telling us how "we're getting there" the truth is that all too often trains are dirty, overcrowded and late. Horrendous, sometimes fatal, accidents are becoming more frequent. Rolling stock built in the 1950s is still in use in some areas of the country.

Not surprisingly the Tory government seeks to improve the rail, not through much needed investment, but by opening it up to privatisation. The Tories' favourite capitalist Richard Branson and a fly-by-night company called Stagecoach are already waiting to rip off some of the profitable bits of the network.

The Tories are determined to have BR privatisation on its election agenda. John Major has been desperately trying to blame BR, or even better its workers, for the deteriorating service. His Citizen's Charter proposes fines for late or dirty trains. But fines will only further reduce the

BY AN RMT MEMBER

budget for services, jobs and pay.

Information leaked to the *Guardian* reveals that Malcolm Rifkind plans to cut InterCity services in north and central Scotland, west Wales and parts of southern England, as well as axing over sixty routes on Network South East. This will mean massive job cuts on top of the loss of services.

Divide

Already BR are gearing up for privatisation by implementing their "Organising for Quality" programme. They want to divide the rail into "businesses" with the three main unions (ASLEF, RMT and TSSA) forced into agreeing this. In fact InterCity has effectively been a "business" since 1982. Now the Tories want all these business structures operating by April. If implemented, such proposals would inevitably mean differential pay rates in the various sectors and the end of na-

MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM

Labour's sorry record



Photo: B Malone

Livingstone's appeal to the House of Lords fell on deaf ears

were an increasing burden for average and low paid workers. This served to alienate the Labour councils from their working class base.

Even worse was the way in which the left councils spent the resources they did have. Every year billions of pounds of local tax payers' money is paid to the banks and the finance houses simply in interest repayments on previous loans. Faced with financial crisis, every Labour council continued to pay out obscene amounts without so much as a murmur of discontent. Islington paid out £58 million to the banks in 1981 alone, while 15,000 people were left waiting for houses to be built.

Many councils tried to polish up their tarnished left images by in-

by a two vote margin.

Livingstone declared: "The only way of overturning the Law Lords and Council's own decision is to force a vote in parliament to change the law." In fact the one weapon capable of forcing the Tories and the judges to back down—independent working class strike action—was never part of the Labour left's armoury.

While the GLC climbed down over fares, London's bus and tube workers were taking their first co-ordinated strike action for over fifty years. Livingstone failed to unite the political struggle in the town hall with workers' industrial action, and the Tories won an easy victory. In 1986 the Tories abolished the GLC as "Red" Ken stood

was afraid to open up a second front during the 1984-85 miners' strike. Despite what amounted to a betrayal of the miners in their hour of need, Liverpool council was looked to for a decisive showdown with the Tories.

This time the council unions in London and Liverpool were organised at a shop steward level through the London Bridge forum and the Liverpool Joint Shop Stewards' Committee. Strike action against rate-capping, cuts and surcharging of councillors was explicitly on the agenda.

But again the weakness of leadership of the unions and the councils was unable to fuse the workers' struggles with the political struggle against the Tories. The unions

The left talked endlessly of extra-parliamentary action, but by that they mean demonstrations which lobby in support of one side in a parliamentary power struggle.

troducing some much needed reforms aimed at those workers who found themselves at the bottom of Tory Britain's scrap heap. Centres and helplines for women, blacks, lesbians and gay men, as well as anti-racist and anti-sexist policies within the various council departments, were all much needed gains.

However, when they existed alongside crumbling housing estates, they merely represented equality of cuts. Greenwich council even had the audacity to sack eleven cleaners, turn round and declare that since seven of them were black they must have been an equal opportunities employer!

Insistence on staying within the law was the classic reformist excuse used by both left and right for refusing to lead a fight. The best example is the GLC's "Fare's Fair" campaign. In October 1981 the GLC subsidised London Transport by £175 million to lower fares by 25%. When this was declared illegal, "Red" Ken and the left allowed the Labour group right wing a free vote, thus ensuring that the requisite 100% fare increases were carried

impotently by.

In 1985 the Tories introduced rate-capping, which penalised councils that spent more than the Secretary of State thought desirable. Not for the last time, this attack on local democracy was first tried out in Scotland with a 1981 Act which effectively prevented Scottish authorities producing deficit budgets. Lothian council was the one council that briefly defied this law, before capitulating just days after a 20,000 strong demonstration in support of "Defiant Lothian".

This time some of the lessons of the previous debacles appeared to have been learnt. When the Bill first appeared over fifty councils declared their intention to break the law. By April 1985, when councils were legally required to set their rate, only 17 remained. At the end of July just Liverpool and Lambeth stood defiant outside the law.

The previous year the Militant Labour Group had "taken Liverpool to the brink". They had forced the Tories into a compromise that was noticeably better than other councils', largely because Thatcher

saw their role as secondary to the "real" struggle taking place in the council chamber. Manoeuvres in the town halls dictated events, rather than the mobilised mass of council workers and working class users.

The flaw in this strategy was to be cruelly exposed. Having been mobilised and demobilised on numerous occasions as a stage army, the unions became divided as workers became wary of a struggle that they did not control and which sometimes produced bewildering tactical turns from their council leaders.

In particular, Liverpool council's decision to sack 30,000 workers as a legal loophole to buy time, led directly to a narrow majority of council workers voting against strike action in September 1985. How were the workers to know that this time they really were supposed to go on strike?

The resulting collapse of Liverpool and Lambeth's defiant stand proved to be the end of an era, albeit an ignominious one of bluff and gesture politics. Since then, Labour councils up and down the

country have quietly done the Tories dirty work. Significantly, every Labour council in the land imposed the Tory poll tax first time of asking.

These defeats were not inevitable, but they were the product of the Labour's reformism. Local councils could have defied the Tories, and won, if they had been willing to do two things.

Firstly set their budgets to meet the needs of the local people—deficit budgets, defiance of Tory capping, refusal to pay the banks and finance houses, refusal to pass on the burden of payment to the working class through rent, rate or poll tax payments.

Secondly, and inseparably, they needed to mobilise the working class to defend these moves, leading immediately to a legal and political confrontation with the Tories. The working class, starting with the council unions but drawing in the private sector and the users of council services, had to be central to any campaign. They needed to be involved in deciding the priorities of the budget and determining the tactics of the struggle.

Organised together in councils of action, they could have unified the political struggle with a defence of their jobs, wages and services. The Tories' district auditors would have been met by local general strike action, occupation of the town halls and total refusal from the workforce to co-operate.

Demonstrations

The police trying to arrest the leaders of the council and the unions would have been met with workers' defence squads, massive protest strikes and demonstrations. And crucially, the defiant stand would have inspired and promoted similar resistance in other councils around the country.

But the reformists, being fundamentally unwilling to break out of the parliamentary method of politics, were unable to lead this type of struggle. The left talked endlessly of extra-parliamentary action, but by that they meant demonstrations which lobby in support of one side in a parliamentary power struggle.

Focus

Councils of action created in a struggle against the Tories would have been the start of another focus of power—that of the workers themselves organising and deciding collectively and directly. That necessarily undermines the authority of parliament and presents the workers with a choice: either take power and rule directly in their own interests with a revolutionary leadership, or back down and subordinate themselves once again to the interests of the bosses and financiers through the rule of Westminster and the town halls.

Labour councils, like Labour governments, cannot break with the existing structures, and therefore cannot break the bosses' power. Even left reformists in office are incapable of mobilising the revolutionary potential of the working class, a power which would turn and destroy them. ■

CAMDEN'S LABOUR council last month sacked 113 social workers. Their crime had been to stage a ten month strike demanding full implementation of a nationally agreed pay claim. They are the latest victims in a long line of workers sacked by their "socialist" employers.

Since the last Labour government was brought down by the winter of discontent, there have been many winters, summers, springs and autumns of discontent across the country. The Tories' third term may have seen fewer strikes than almost ever before, but for local government workers it has been and continues to be a period of the most intense struggle in their history.

Yet this hardly seemed conceivable back in the early 1980s. In those days "Red" Ken Livingstone terrorised the City of London from across the waters in County Hall. The Red Flag flew over Islington's town hall while "Red" Ted Knight ruled Lambeth. Sheffield was seat of the "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire" and defiant authorities ruled from Liverpool to Lothian.

Ah, memory is a cruel thing! In truth the strategies of these councils were designed not to fight for the interests of their working class supporters but to expose the Tory hand behind the onslaught on local services. They hoped that by ameliorating the blows they would capture the imagination of the voters and pave the way for the next Labour government. "Jam tomorrow" was their real rallying cry. The problem came when these left reformists found that the Tories prevented them from even delivering bread and butter today!

Problems

Ironically the problems of local government started with the last Labour government. The Labour Party was built under the illusion that the capitalist state could be used to usher in socialism peacefully. Labour's first taste of state power came in local authorities like Poplar, where "gas and water socialism" earned them working class support for basic social reforms.

By the 1970s this pipe-dream was coming to an end. During the last Labour government local authority spending was slashed by 14%. Faced with threats from the IMF, Labour chose to cut off the gas and water.

When the Tories regained office in 1979, Thatcher targeted local government. During the 1970s public spending had more than trebled. If central government made cuts whilst Labour councils continued to spend, not only would the state's debt not be reined in, Labour would gain credibility in even middle class voters' eyes. Thatcher and her minister Heseltine demanded that Labour councils make cuts.

Responded

Labour councils generally responded with enormous rate and later rent increases to make up for the shortfall in central government support grant. South Yorkshire raised its rates by 48%, 38% and 22% in 1980-83. And they still made cuts in jobs and services!

David Blunkett, then leader of South Yorkshire council, argued that councillors had to remain inside the law if they were to continue the fight for services for the working class. Rate increases were acceptable since the rich and the bosses had to pay more than workers. The Labour left enthusiastically supported this argument despite the fact that, although the rates were weighted to make the rich pay more, the steep increases

Dictatorship of the party?

IN YOUR November edition [WP148], you include an article by Bill Clinton analysing Red Action's politics under the title "Marxism without Lenin".

A comprehensive consideration of the issues you raise will be forthcoming in future editions of the *Red Action* paper. As an interim response may we make a number of points in relation to your article which appear to be based on a misapprehension of Red Action's position?

● You claim that Red Action has "rejected the very idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This error lies at the very heart of their politics". I am happy to clear any confusion that this may present to readers who may have read the original articles in *Red Action*, Red Action unconditionally accepts the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its necessary role within a workers' state in the transition to socialism as that concept is outlined by Marx himself, and as he considered, it exemplified by the Paris Commune. That I hope, is clear enough.

It follows that Red Action has not "abandoned the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as Bill Clinton alleges. We agree with your writer that "it is the focal point around which all other programmatic questions revolve"—which is why *Red Action* has lately contained a number of articles analysing the term and its implications in some depth.

● You state that Red Action "fetters the question of class composition of the party over and above its programme". This is a nonsensical accusation appearing as it does in a Marxist publication. Marxist politics are entirely based on the class nature of capitalist society and the antagonisms and class struggles consequent upon it. Only if Marx himself fetishised class relations can Red Action be accused of doing so.

We make no apologies whatsoever for insisting that it is class composition that ultimately determines the politics and programme of "revolutionary" organisations and for denying that any truly socialist programme can be implemented other than by organisations composed of and led by the working class itself.

● You ask, "What did Marx and Engels mean when they referred to the dictatorship of the proletariat?" and reply:

"They meant the rule of the revolutionary proletariat unlimited by any laws other than proletarian laws; a dictatorship by which the working class will consolidate its own rule, smash the counter-revolution and lay the basis for socialism."

So far so good. Then, without a break, Mr Hyde takes the pen from Dr Jekyll's hand: "The workers' dictatorship will have to be highly authoritarian and centralised to the extent that is necessary to counter the centralisation and authoritarianism of the class enemy, the imperialist bourgeoisie."

Here is the crux of the matter. "Centralised" within certain limits imposed by a workers' democracy, yes, but "authoritarian"? Marx was clear that extremes of force might be necessary to oppose the counter-revolution. In that sense only, the "dictatorship" he envisaged was authoritarian. But "authoritarian" contains another sense in this context: the undemocratic, unaccountable authority of a self-elected committee. The character of this authoritarianism is directly compared with the existing authoritarianism of the bourgeoisie, leaving us in little doubt as to its form.

No such authoritarianism is to be found in Marx's own conception of a workers' state; just the reverse. He looks forward to the dismantling of state forms standing over society itself and says that this process begins immediately after a workers' revolution.

For example, armed force is retained in the form of a workers' militia, but is abolished in the form of a professional standing army (or state secret police like the Bolshevik Cheka). Here is the reason why Workers

Power (along with other groups on the left) unreflectingly assume that in rejecting the *dictatorship of the party*, or more likely, of some committee within the party (and its necessarily authoritarian form) Red Action "must" be rejecting the concept of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. For you there is no difference between the two; for us, it is the difference upon which the whole principle of the self-emancipation of the working class depends.

● Your writer claims that the Mensheviks, Kronstadt sailors and Makno's anarchists were all "subjectively revolutionary workers" but objectively acted in the interests of the bourgeoisie and therefore "had to be deprived of their political rights by force".

Where in Marx does it say or anticipate that one section of the workers, let alone an authoritarian party bureaucracy announcing that it is "acting in the interests" of the workers, has the right to decide that other revolutionary workers have to be "deprived of their political rights by force" during the transition to socialism? Where in Marx is the authority for permitting a group to decide that other working class organisations, groups or individuals are acting "objectively" against the interests of the class, that is, against their own interests?

Nowhere in Marx; but it is a principle explicitly elaborated in certain writings of Lenin and Trotsky. Red Action has done no more than to point this out.

● You acknowledge that, "The Bolsheviks' curtailment of full proletarian democracy was certainly a retreat. But it was one calculated to prevent counter-revolution". Articles in recent editions of *Red Action* have shown in some depth that whatever the "calculation" may have been, the actual results of the Bolsheviks' elimination of workers' democracy were disastrous, not least for members of the Bolshevik Party itself.

As Trotsky himself remarked after the triumph of the Stalinist state, the prohibition of factions within the Bolshevik Party was the first step on the road to the totalitarian dictatorship. This is not a lesson that socialists today can ignore.

● Finally, Bill Clinton concludes that, "If the Bolsheviks had followed Red Action's advice in 1917, there would have been no workers' dictatorship to complain about in the first place". He adds at the time there were "numerous Marxists" who advised the Bolsheviks to "hand back power to the bourgeoisie" and, through a train of reasoning I cannot claim to follow, concludes that Red Action would have been among their number. Red Action has in fact stated in many contexts that the revolution of 1917 succeeding in establishing a genuine workers' state which has remained the inspiration and example to revolutionary socialists ever since, much as the Paris Commune inspired Marx. Here is an example from the last edition of *Red Action*:

"[Red Action believes that] the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 succeeded in establishing a form of workers' state in the sense that the industrial proletariat . . . established effective forms of political direction and control of an economy that remained fundamentally capitalist, and that the revolution itself was the result of a genuine mass proletarian movement."

The entire point of Red Action's criticism of the Bolshevik leadership is not that they did not hand power back to the bourgeoisie, but that they refused to hand power back to the working class.

Although a number of other points could be made, these will perhaps suffice to direct the attention of your readers to the pages of *Red Action* itself, where their judgement, whether favourable or not, can be informed by knowledge of what we really are saying.

Yours fraternally,
F Gordon
Hatfield Red Action

AT THE centre of the debate between Workers Power and Red Action (RA) is the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat. F Gordon assures us that RA unconditionally accept the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Our previous article was clearly mistaken in suggesting that RA rejected this concept.

However, if we explore what RA mean by the dictatorship of the proletariat then it soon becomes clear that their view of the transition to socialism is utopian.

Engels wrote of the utopian socialists:

"To all these socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power."

RA echo the utopians Engels was criticising:

"We are just after the truth. All other alternatives have been exhausted but no effective substitute has been discovered. We need to know the truth because if we are going to do it by ourselves we need to know what works." (RA 56)

The transition to socialism, for RA, is dependent upon this "truth", not on the reality of the class struggle as human beings attempt to effect the transition, often in circumstances not of their own choosing. RA's view of the transition is ideal. Their socialist aspirations are, in the end, utopian.

An important clue to the utopian basis of RA's socialism comes in an article by G O'Halloran in RA 57. The article correctly defends the Marxist idea that the working class must emancipate itself, but then adds:

"In comparison the whole content of *Das Kapital* is secondary being merely the economic basis for this proposition."

Marxism developed as a revolutionary doctrine in a remorseless critique of this sort of idealism. It rooted its strategy for the transition to socialism in the economic development of capitalist society and in the developing class struggle that it gave rise to: the creation of ever larger units of production, the centralisation and concentration of capital the changing character of the capitalist state.

Far from being secondary, Marx's analysis of the inner workings of capitalism took socialism and the self-emancipation of the working class from the realm noble ideals onto the battlefield of the class struggle as it actually develops. The mark of the utopian is that when the class struggle reaches the stage of seizing or defending power, when life or death measures are forced upon the working class, they become hopelessly enmeshed in its ideals.

Marx came to understand that his early optimism concerning the rapid victory of socialism had to be tempered by an extremely sober view of the restraints that capitalism itself would impose on the working class even during the transition to socialism. In explaining the continuation of inequality during the transition period Marx wrote:

"But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby."

For RA the opposite is the case. Right is absolute, regardless of the economic structure of society, in defiance of the economic structure of society, for after all this economic structure is merely secondary. This utopianism is at the heart of RA's confusion concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In his reply Gordon argues that our view of the "authoritarian" character of the dictatorship of the proletariat suggests, "the undemocratic, unaccountable authority of a self-elected committee". He points out that within Marx no authority can be found for such a dictatorship directing any repression towards workers.

Every shot that Gordon fires at Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks hits none other than Marx and Engels. Neither were afraid of recognising that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a centralised and authoritarian organisation of the state, now in the hands of the proletariat. In describing the whole transition period between capitalism and socialism "which could be nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat" (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*) they correctly emphasised that during this period the direct producers would exercise a democratic control over the political and economic administration of society. The state would assume a different character to that existing under capitalism. The military bureaucratic-machine of the bourgeois state would be replaced by direct democracy and self-administration.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks shared this conception completely as *State and Revolution* shows.

In *Workers Power 148* we printed an article on *dictatorship of the party* and strategy. Below we print their reply. We have only printed those sections of the article which concern the dictatorship of the proletariat and the class composition of the party.

Red Action's latter socialist



The declaration of the Paris Commune—lack of

But none of this means that the dictatorship renounces the authoritarian means necessary to defeat the counter-revolution. These involve not only the use of weapons against the class enemy but also the concentration and disciplining of the forces of the revolutionary class so that it can deliver these blows with the maximum effect. In short the proletariat has to create an authority for itself and indeed over itself that allows its vast numerical strength to be concentrated at the decisive point.

The Paris Commune was the only actual experience Marx had of the dictatorship of the proletariat but he never presented it as a perfect ideal as RA do. Marx and Engels had very serious criticisms of the Commune. In short they thought it was not authoritarian enough. In particular they thought its "central committee" should have retained and strengthened its authority rather than weakening it, as actually happened. Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

"The Central Committee surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune. Again from a too 'honourable' scrupulosity."

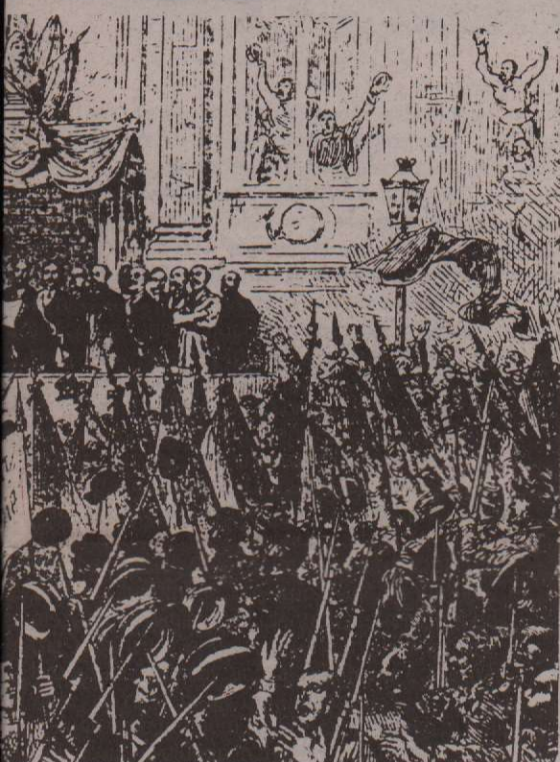
Marx is here attacking the Commune's leaders for being too democratic and not authoritarian enough. He is attacking the "self-selected" Central Committee of the National Guard for ceding power too quickly to the Commune, to the directly elected representatives of the working class.

The Central Committee of the National Guard gained power not through an election but through an uprising. It consisted of the most resolute and decisive elements. It then mistakenly ceded that power to the Commune through an election. It seriously over-estimated the extent of the victory in Paris and underestimated the reserves of the reaction in France as a whole. The election of the Commune was in effect a noble gesture which allowed the forces of reaction to regroup and prepare to strike back.

On the basis of their utopian conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat RA should surely condemn Marx the authoritarian as gravely

article critical of Red Action on disputed questions of revolutionary theory, reply, and Mark Harrison writes our response. For reasons of space, we will deal with the central issues of dispute – the dictatorship of the proletariat and the composition of the revolutionary party

Action: day utopian ists



centralisation and authority cost it its life said Engels

as Lenin and Trotsky. Engels too should get it in the neck. This was his assessment of the Commune, less than a year after its defeat:

"It was the want of centralisation and authority that cost the Paris Commune its life. Once you have won you can do with this authority whatever you like, but the fight needs to have all our forces brought together in a fist and concentrated at the central point of attack. And when I hear people speak of authority and centralisation as of two things deserving condemnation whatever the circumstances, I feel that those who say this either have no idea of what revolu-

tion is, or are revolutionaries only in word."

So RA's suspicions about our association of the dictatorship of the proletariat with centralisation and authority and whether it can always be elected or re-elected cannot be justified by citing Marx or Engels against us. The Bolshevik experience is not qualitatively different either.

Gordon has recently written two major articles on the Bolshevik Revolution and the policies of Trotsky. His themes are similar to those outlined in his letter to Workers Power—that the Bolshevik Revolution began as a genuine workers' revolution, that the party gradually displaced the class at the helm of the revolution and that the dictatorship of the class was transformed into a dictatorship of the party over the class.

The utopian and impractical squeamishness of RA is again in evidence in this entire analysis. The transition to socialism is analysed from the standpoint of a series of general principles. Now the Bolsheviks get an A plus, now they get an E minus according to how well they carried out these general principles. What we do not get is any recognition of the material restraints placed upon the implementation of principles by the Bolsheviks. And in consequence we get no indication from RA, ever, of what alternative course of action could have been taken.

For the transition to socialism to successfully take place three things are essential: the political rule of the proletariat; the economic mechanisms that can displace and eventually destroy capitalism as an economic system; the international spread of the revolution. The priceless legacy of the revolution the Bolsheviks led, is that for the first time in history men and women consciously strove to make these three things real.

You won't get this from reading RA. However much they claim that they view 1917 as a positive experience, their articles are all about how "non-proletarian" Bolsheviks tried to pull a fast one on the masses.

"The fatal error is prior to theory, in the divorce of party from class and the supremacy in practice of party interests over and in place of

those of the class." (RA 60)

This is not a Marxist analysis of the Bolshevik experience, it is a vulgar sociological one, one that sees in the very existence of the party an iron law of bureaucratism. Hence, every event in the post-revolutionary period is analysed by Gordon as a link in the bureaucratic chain. The attempt to improve labour productivity, even by the use of coercive measures, was merely a step in a bureaucratic direction. Gordon concedes that the motive for this measure was the appalling material conditions, but he offers no practical alternative.

Right can never be higher than the economic structure on which it stands. The proletariat is not a beautiful abstraction able to do anything a revolutionary journalist asks of it. After four years of civil war Russia was starving. Production was at a standstill. All talk of improving workers' democracy and continuing the transition to socialism was just fanciful dreaming unless the economy got moving again. This is why it was vital to raise labour productivity. It had nothing to do with a party setting itself against the class. Improving labour productivity in conditions of economic chaos meant, in the short term, getting people fed, and in the longer term, regenerating the proletariat as a class physically and culturally capable of ruling society through democratic soviets.

What is Gordon's alternative to the Bolsheviks' programme? No attempt to intensify labour, no coercive measures, no centralised attempts to regulate production? Presumably all we need is a wave of the political wand and the soviets will be revitalised, the party relieved of the necessity of acting for the proletariat, the revolution regenerated at the critical moment.

Gordon tells us that by 1921:

"The split between the working class and its declared vanguard, the Bolshevik party, developed into a decisive and entrenched break." (RA 60)

And in his letter Gordon concludes from this view that:

"The entire point of RA's criticism of the Bolshevik leadership is not that they did not hand power back to the bourgeoisie, but that they refused to hand power back to the working class."

For RA proof of this charge is supplied not only by the flood of non-proletarian elements entering the party in that period, but also by the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt rising. Gordon again asks, where in Marx there is any authority for one group within the working class declaring that another group or party are acting "objectively" against the interests of the class as a whole.

Well, both Marx and Engels recognised—as have many socialists and workers since—that workers, dominated by the ruling ideas of society (that is, the ideas of the ruling class) can be drawn into actions which are directly against their self-interest in the general, class sense. What else are scabs? What else are workers, not necessarily fascists, who engage in racist attacks? What else are workers enlisted to fight on behalf of the bosses in imperialist wars against progressive forces?

How do we decide that these people are acting "objectively" against the working class? Because we are Marxists, scientific socialists, who recognise that there is such a thing as an

objective class interest that needs to be defended, even against workers. That is why we know how scabs should be treated if they refuse to observe a picket line. In practice RA know this too, but in this case their practice is at variance with their theory.

RA, as utopians, will not allow any force or group other than the "working class" to determine the nature of its own objective interests. Red Action cannot comprehend how a party, because of its programme, because of the actions it is committed to carrying through, and because of its organic roots within the working class, can win the right to represent the objective interests of the class as a whole. This is what happened—at a much higher level than that of a strike but the analogy is valid nevertheless—between 1918 and 1923 in Russia.

In circumstances where the working class had made the revolution but had exhausted itself, and to a large extent had been decimated, the party that had led that revolution was capable and fully justified in temporarily exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat on behalf of the working class. We stress, temporarily. The dictatorship of the party is not the norm for the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was Zinoviev, not Lenin or Trotsky, who developed a theory justifying this temporary retreat as a norm, and we reject that theory.

What Lenin and Trotsky recognised was that in the perilous situation that arose at the end of the civil war, the collapse of the Bolshevik regime would have destroyed any possibility of Russia resuming the transition to socialism on the basis of a healthy dictatorship of the proletariat. The choice was not handing back power to the proletariat or keeping it for the party. It was whether to keep it in the hands of the Bolsheviks or let it fall into the hands of the counter-revolution. This was the choice posed by Kronstadt, and the Bolsheviks made the right choice in suppressing the rising.

RA are fond of quoting Victor Serge to prove their case against the Bolshevik leaders. His views on Kronstadt deserve to be recounted:

"If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the communists, the return of the émigrés, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian. Dispatches from Stockholm testified that the émigrés had these very perspectives in mind; dispatches which, incidentally, strengthened the Bolshevik leaders' intention of subduing Kronstadt speedily and at whatever cost. We were not reasoning in the abstract."

The whole problem with RA's approach to the Bolshevik revolution in the period after 1918 is that they are "reasoning in the abstract". That is why in his entire two page article on Trotsky in RA 61, Gordon cannot bring himself to recognise that despite the mistakes that Trotsky made, mistakes of both a minor nature (his attitude to Lenin's "Testament" for example) and of major importance (his belatedness in organising the Left Opposition into an all-out factional struggle against Stalin) his overall programme, his overall struggle within the party and within Russia, was directed at regenerating the revolution and restoring the healthy dictatorship of the proletariat.

The key features of this programme were democratising the party and thereby arresting the growth of bureaucratism in the upper echelons of the state apparatus, revitalising industry as a means of raising the economic conditions of the proletariat as a precondition for the revival of soviet democracy, cementing the alliance with the peasantry through co-operative production as a means of laying the basis for voluntary collectivisation and, above all, spreading the revolution internationally so that backward Russia would not remain isolated.

What other alternative would RA have proposed to this programme? What other alternative existed that would not have meant either bureaucratic counter-revolution or capitalist counter-revolution? There was no such alternative in the 1920s, nor is there now. The Trotskyist programme alone pointed to the revival of a healthy dictatorship of the proletariat. Alone it mapped out a means whereby the party could have handed power back to the working class.

In rejecting this programme, along with the defence of the workers' state by the Bolshevik Party in the years 1918 to 1921, RA reduce the value of the Bolshevik experience to the events of a few months in 1917 and 1918. As we stated in our previous article RA want a totally pure revolution in which the realities of the class struggle do not intrude. This is utopian socialism comrades, a version of the dictatorship of the proletariat that you, nor anybody else will ever live to see.■

Working class elitism

GORDON TAKES us to task for saying that RA "fetishise class composition of the party over and above its programme". He insists that class composition is decisive. Let's be clear where we agree. We too think that the revolutionary party must be overwhelmingly proletarian in its composition. Anything less and it is, as Engels said, "a sham and a sect".

But we also think that it has to be a revolutionary party, not just a party made up of proletarians. Self-evident? Not at all. The Communist Party of Great Britain was, for many years, not only made up of a majority of working class members, it was also led by workers. The same was true of the German Communist Party at the very moment that it handed Hitler victory through its criminal policy of rejecting the united front.

So you see, proletarian composition is no guarantee that a party will follow a correct line. That is why, unlike RA, we do not counterpose the struggle to build a workers' organisation to the struggle for programmatic re-elaboration. We do not fetishise class composition in the sense of believing that it alone is a guarantee of correctness. It isn't. It is, however, a precondition for success and that is why building a revolutionary

workers' party is a key task.

The problem we have when we look at RA is that their origins in the Socialist Workers Party during what they term its "populist" period—the period of the Right to Work Campaign and the Anti-Nazi League (1975-79)—demonstrate that they have a very narrow definition of the working class. They explicitly associate working class politics with street politics, with the rock music scene and "popular culture" and with young workers (see the pamphlet "We are Red Action").

In RA there is little detailed attention to the complex problems facing militants engaged in the long and difficult struggle to build revolutionary influence in the trade unions. RA's preoccupation with the working class does not result in a preoccupation with the concerns of millions of members of that class, including the critical problem of how to overcome illusions in the Labour Party in the industrial towns it still dominates.

These are real questions for real working class people, but RA gives them scant attention, its eyes fixed, it seems, on a much smaller section of the class.

Last but not least, RA's solution to the

problem of class composition is wrong. It rejects what it terms the "hierarchical" Leninist party structure, so as to safeguard itself from elitism. In so doing it merely rejects an accountable, democratically elected leadership, in favour of an informal leadership. It rejects institutionalised elitism—which is typical of sects—but enshrines in its practice the elitism of an unaccountable leadership, one that decides what to do without reference to those engaged in collective struggle.

RA is led by a small number of individuals. Their leadership in particular actions is unquestioned by RA members and others because of their "experience", because of their "record of struggle". Within limits these factors are important in the selection of leaders. We Leninists would be the very last to deny this. But we add that such leaders should be consciously selected and should be accountable to those they lead. Without this we end up with a new type of elitism—an elitism based on the force of individual personalities.

Ironically this echoes the undemocratic methods of the Stalinists that RA correctly stigmatised. They should be wary of allowing the echo to become a replica.■

SINCE "BLACK Thursday" further statistics have revealed that the current recession is the longest since the Second World War. Six successive quarters since mid-1990 show a decline in output, while estimates suggest that UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 2.5% in 1991. Now the balance of payments figures are showing a dramatic slump in exports.

Leading figures in the City and in industry are as alarmed as their Tory representatives. Why has the recession lasted so long? When Chancellor Lawson pushed interest rates up in the autumn of 1988 to stop the economy "overheating" he explained that this "cooling off period" would produce a "soft landing". But as the recession gathered pace the line changed. "If it wasn't hurting it wasn't working" according to Major.

As the prospect of the election loomed, predictions multiplied that "the worst was behind us", the upturn was "just around the corner" and even that the green shoots of recovery could be seen everywhere". But the winter of 1991/92 has nipped these shoots of Norman Lamont's imagination in the bud. The government script-writers are having to admit the British economy remains firmly stuck in recession.

Yet only a year or two ago the organs of the City, the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, were confidently predicting that Britain would never suffer a severe recession again, if indeed it suffered one at all. Thatcherite neo-liberal shock therapy had "cured" the British economy. Had not the markets been freed of state interference, public spending slashed and inflation conquered? Had not union power been broken, productivity boosted and wage demands capped? And privatisation was opening up whole new areas of the economy to profitable investment and competition.

Yet less than ten years after the last major recession, here they were in the middle of another one. The raucous singing and dancing on the grave of "communism", the champagne toasts to the eternal life of "free market" capitalism have become muted. A cold shudder has gone through the ranks of the revellers. As Karl Marx said, every economic crisis is a sort of *memento mori*, a reminder to capitalism of its own mortality.

Obsolete

This recession is certainly not identical with that of 1979-81. The last recession was shorter and deeper. This one is longer and shallower. In the recession of the early 1980s, masses of obsolete and outdated plant were scrapped, in what came to be known as "de-industrialisation". After this recession the recovery of profit rates in Britain did allow for a considerable modernisation of industry if not for its expansion. So in this recession there was much less obsolete plant to scrap.

But a more significant difference is the changed relation of class forces in the early 1990s. The defeats inflicted on the working class in the Thatcher decade allowed the capitalists to offload the burden of the recession onto their workers far more easily. The unions have ceased to present any serious opposition to the bosses. 1991 saw the lowest number of strikes since records began 100 years ago. The bosses responded to falling demand with immediate sackings without the fear of long and damaging struggles.

The result of this can be seen in the productivity figures. Normally in this phase of recession productivity falls as less work is spread

Every week seems to bring worse news for the Tories on the economy. In the middle of last month came "Black Thursday". A whole welter of statistics showing the full scale of the recession hit Tory optimism amidships. The January unemployment figures had shot up by 53,000 to 2.6 million, twice the expected rise even according to the government's rigged calculations. Mortgage lenders repossessed record numbers of houses: 75,000 in 1991 alone. And capital investment by factories was 15% below the previous year's figures. **Brian Thomas** looks at who is to blame for the current recession and the prospects for the British economy.



Recession hits High Street sales

Tory's recession blues

over the same or an only slightly reduced workforce. In 1991, however, productivity actually rose by 3.9% in manufacturing despite a 5.2% fall in total output. This demonstrates that the bosses have been firing workers faster than output has been falling, thus spreading the available work over fewer and fewer workers.

Despite these "advantages" for the bourgeoisie this time round, a recession is still a recession. And this recession is not only long but is affecting much wider sectors of the economy—banking, transport, business services etc—than the 1979 recession which was heavily concentrated on manufacturing.

Seeds

Thatcher's policies certainly benefited the capitalists, by weakening the trade unions, slashing state expenditure, privatisations, giving tax handouts to the industrialists etc. But these self-same policies also sowed the seeds of this specific recession.

The Tories' housing policies are a prime example of the "Thatcher revolution's" contradictory effects. Freezing council house building programmes reduced state expenditure in the short term, but it also produced a massive housing shortage. This forced up house prices, especially in the south east, which in turn reduced the mobility of labour and drove up wages.

Labour costs began to rise faster than in competitor countries. These inflationary pressures were further

boosted by privatisation itself. The newly privatised state industries, which before had subsidised private sector production through low prices, now raised their prices to enhance their profitability. At least 40% of the rise in general price levels in 1988-89 was due to the pricing policies of the privatised industries, services and utilities. By the late 1980s, despite a rapid growth of productivity, British inflation began to accelerate past the European average.

Deregulation of financial markets contributed to a massive expansion of credit which fuelled inflationary pressures through consumer demand. The banks and building societies massively increased their lending. Home-owners, whose numbers had increased dramatically under Thatcher's "right to buy" policies, rushed to cash in on the rising house prices to borrow from the more than willing banks. While this led to an apparently booming economy based on consumer spending the hangover from this debt spree was such that by the end of the decade Britain had the highest ratio of borrowings to personal income of all the major industrial countries.

To add to the surge in personal borrowing, Lawson unleashed rapid-fire tax cuts, mainly for the rich and the middle classes. Soon demand surged beyond the capacity of the British economy to deliver. The result was an inrush of imports. By the end of the 1980s the British economy had become severely distorted and was head-

ing for a balance of payments crisis.

Interest rates had to be repeatedly hiked to defend sterling. They jumped from 7.5% to 13% between May and December of 1988. The champagne corks stopped popping. The bailiffs started to go in. Bosses and consumers alike had to pay the bills for the credit boom of the Lawson era. Just as in 1979, Britain again had the distinction of leading the world capitalist economy into recession. But whereas last time around the Tories wanted to let a recession rip, to cut the unions down to size and close down huge swathes of unprofitable "rust-belt" industry, now it was the last thing they expected and the last thing they wanted.

The Tories' latest explanation for the state of the economy is that all the major economies are in recession or slowing down. The British slump is, therefore, a product of the world recession. Labour, on the other hand, want to blame the Tories and absolve the capitalist system itself of any guilt, claiming they can run it without such crises.

Illusory

Clearly the neo-liberal Tory policies contributed to the British recession as did "Reaganomics" in the USA. It is no accident that the USA is mirroring the British economy. Predictions about the end of the recession there have proved as illusory as those for the British economy.

It is now described as in a "dou-

ble dip recession". That is, it appeared to be coming out of recession and then went straight back in again! Britain, the USA and Canada are now held up as examples of the failure of deregulated markets, lack of state intervention etc. In contrast, Japan and Germany with their greater state regulation and direction of the economy, are seen as much more successful economies, especially by the Labour Party.

But even these economies are now in trouble. German growth rates in 1991 were half their 1990 level, down from 4.7% to 2.6%. And these figures are for the old "West" which exclude the collapsing East, where unemployment is expected to reach 20% this year.

Even the economic miracle of Japan is beginning to slip with growth rates for 1992 predicted at 3.5% compared with 5.6% in 1990. The Japanese stock market has already suffered a serious collapse and there are fears that another financial collapse could seriously affect the banks.

The indications are that all the major economies are about to join the Anglo-Saxon countries in a synchronised world recession. This does not mean that particular policies by particular national bourgeoisies have no effect on determining the length, depth or speed with which a country enters a recession. Rather it makes it clear that they are not the underlying cause of it.

Instability

The reality is that the world capitalist economy shows no sign of having solved the fundamental problems that have afflicted it from the mid-1970s, the slump that marked the end of the "long boom" and the onset of a new period of economic crisis and instability. The key indicators for the major economies—growth rate, investment and profit rates—remain higher than they were in the depressed 1970s but are considerably lower than in the 1960s.

Even countries such as Britain, which significantly restored profit rates in the 1980s by inflicting serious defeats on the workers, have failed to break out of this cycle. Tory hopes for a consumer spending revival to kick-start a recovery are quickly fading. Burdened by debt, threatened by unemployment and adjusting to lower real salaries and wages, workers show no sign of providing the consumer demand to lift the economy out of recession. ■

THE VICTORY of the Conservative Party in the Potchefstroom by-election demonstrated the level of disquiet amongst the National Party's traditional base—the white workers and petit bourgeoisie. During 1991 many of the old pillars of apartheid were removed. National Party supporters have seen their traditional privileges—public sector jobs, skilled work in the private sector, special housing districts and better resourced schools—being eroded.

The week before the election the government announced a sharp cut in the white education budget which could lead to the cutting of 4,000 teachers and a three-fold increase in school fees for the middle classes. White unemployment has doubled to 50,000 in the last 18 months. Increasingly there is a move to the extreme right—to the Conservative Party or even the fascist AWB.

In contrast the bourgeoisie know that they can survive in "post-apartheid" South Africa if a suitable settlement is won. For example, the repeal of the Land Acts gives black farmers the right to buy land in what were once "whites only" areas. In practice, however, given the lack of capital of blacks, the rich farmers and agribusinesses know they will retain their estates.

De Klerk had no alternative but to adopt a high risk tactic and call a national whites-only referendum to endorse his reform programme. Potchefstroom was the third by-election defeat in a row that the National Party had suffered at the hands of the right. De Klerk is trying to use the referendum to his advantage, posing white voters with a choice: reform or chaos and international isolation. In this way he hopes to defeat the right and press ahead with his plans.

De Klerk knows the right has no real solutions to South Africa's problems. The right is seriously divided. One wing of the Conservative Party, recognising the impossibility of maintaining dominance over the black majority, favours the formation of an independent white state carved out of South Africa. It is even willing to enter the negotiation process to get it. This faction, against the advice of Conservative leader Treurnicht, won the party to

SOUTH AFRICA

Strike against racist referendum

The stinging defeat suffered by De Klerk in the National Party's erstwhile stronghold of Potchefstroom showed that the South African government's plans for reform were in deep trouble. Joan Mayer looks at why the white voters are deserting the National Party for the right.

participate in the referendum to vote no.

Treurnicht stands for the reimposition of the old apartheid system at whatever the cost in terms of increased repression. Along with his allies in the AWB, he wanted a boycott, in order to demand an election. These right wingers know the advantages the South African constituency system gives to the rural areas, where they are strongest. They also know the enormous advantages De Klerk has with his dominance of the media and backing from the massive monopolies like Anglo-American in calling for a yes vote.

Some South African militants, like the black consciousness organisation AZAPO, have wrongly argued that De Klerk is actively seeking a right wing victory. Others see a coup as an inevitable outcome of the developments since negotiations started in February 1990. Such views underestimate both the degree to which the ruling class desires reform to rejuvenate South African capitalism and the lengths to which the ANC is prepared to compromise with De Klerk to stitch up a deal.

The ANC is now locked in a negotiating block, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), with the National Party, the



White racist paramilitaries train for future conflicts

Democratic Party, the "coloured" Labour Party and the full gamut of homeland chiefs and ethnic leaders.

CODESA is a vehicle designed to swindle the masses out of a democratic say in their future. It is already debating the type of constitution South Africa should have—including what sort of safeguards "minorities" (i.e. the whites) need to prevent them being "oppressed"

by the majority! Mandela is now on record as saying that reserved parliamentary seats for the white minority for a period is not a problem. The Nationalists have put forward a proposal for an upper house which entrenches the white veto over a lower house elected on the basis of universal suffrage.

Black militants and socialists need to break immediately with the ANC and its strategy. ANC

members have to challenge the decisions of the leadership which has, without consultation, dropped the demand for an immediate constituent assembly to decide on the country's future.

Trade unionists in COSATU affiliated unions should call their leaders to account. While the last Congress allowed the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance to go ahead with negotiations, it gave no mandate for the current actions which are in the process of enshrining a white veto.

The ANC's paralysis in the face of the right wing has been shown dramatically in relation to the referendum. Instead of setting out to smash this racist referendum which allows the whites to decide whether the black majority should have the right to rule their own country, the ANC leadership has been content to passively denounce it as a "racist charade". At the same time they are encouraging their white supporters to participate in it!

The workers' organisations must immediately organise a general strike against the referendum and paralyse the country with strikes and demonstrations to show the majority's determination to rule. The stay-away against VAT in the autumn brought out over three million black workers. It showed the potential power of the black working class.

Against the betrayals of the ANC, socialists must demand the immediate convening of a sovereign constituent assembly, democratically representing all sections of the masses.

Whether to fight the fascists or De Klerk's forces, black workers need defence organisations and workers' committees to oversee the convening of constituent assembly. These are the only real alternative source of power to the racist state machine which otherwise will remain intact to usher in the new imperialist South Africa. ■

ON 15 March 1990, 7,000 Madrid bus drivers broke the bureaucratic stranglehold of their trade unions, the CCOO and UGT, and went on strike for across the board pay increases for all drivers. For 22 days not one of the 1,700 buses of the city transport company, EMT, moved. The strike was led by an independent platform of trade unionists, the Plataforma Sindical (PS). The strike forced the management to cave in to the majority of their demands.

Following this victory for the PS the old works' committee bureaucracy was swept away. The PS won 36 of the 42 seats on the committee.

Since these victories the PS has responded to each management threat with lightning militant action. On New Year's Eve 1990, all the drivers stayed at home refusing to drive because management would not consider special overtime payments. Last summer, with temperatures rising above 40°C, drivers parked their buses in the middle of the city when the management refused to install air conditioning in the old buses.

Now the PS faces a real test of strength.

Since late 1991, when the city council was taken over by the right wing bourgeois party, Partido Popular, its leader Alvarez de Manzano made it clear that the days of workers attacking managers "right to manage" had gone. First, management refused to even discuss collective bargaining on the pay issue. Then, in response a lightning strike on 15 January this year, management sacked all the PS members on

SPAIN

Madrid bus strike

In early February all Madrid's buses came to a standstill. In a massive show of solidarity 7,000 bus drivers struck against the management's sacking of the leaders of their union, demanding their immediate reinstatement. LRCI supporters in Madrid sent us this report.

the works' committee, accusing them of organising an illegal strike. In February all the Madrid drivers came out on all out strike demanding that the members were reinstated.

Predictably the drivers received no support from the so-called workers' representatives on the city council. The strike was condemned as "reckless" by the spokesperson for Izquierda Unida, the United Left that includes the old Communist Party. Joaquin Leguina, the Spanish Socialist Party leader, warned the workers that the EMT would not be hijacked. The CCOO and UGT unions have remained silent.

Action from the drivers in defence of their right to organise is crucial for them to be able to resist further attacks and privatisation moves in the future. To guarantee success they need to spread the strike and

avoid isolation. The first task was to get other transport workers out on strike.

Union leaders on the underground did call stoppages during peak hours from mid-February. This was not in solidarity with the bus workers, but for their own claim. Rather than link the struggles together, refusing to return until both strikes were won, the underground workers' leaders, the CCOO and UGT, quickly sold out their strike and organised a return to work. Instead of the 20,000 peseta rise demanded, the unions settled for 13,000!

With the underground back working the management are trying to break the bus strike by mobilising scab drivers. One hundred and fifty of the 7,000 were persuaded to break the strike last week.

As we go to press it looks as though the isolation of the strike by

union leaders and bosses may have forced the PS into some kind of agreement to return to work. Rather than take this course the bus drivers need to redouble their efforts to stop the underground because while it still runs Madrid can still work. The PS must set up roving pickets, armed with bulletins and leaflets explaining their struggle to the workers affected by the strike. They must try and reach rank and file underground workers and set up a co-ordinating committee to try and neutralise the bureaucrats and bring out all the underground workers.

Finally the drivers must organise themselves against the strike-breaking activities of the police. The scab buses are accompanied by police wagons where ever they go! The bus drivers and other workers in Madrid must organise picket defence squads to stop this scab herding operation.

Any settlement that does not reinstate the PS members and force management to negotiate with the union would be a defeat. And a defeat in this strike will not only mean the end of the independent drivers' organisation. It would also be a severe set-back for other workers in Spain who dare to challenge not only their management but also the strangle hold of their trade union bureaucrats. ■

THE MAIN organisers of the demonstrations and the major forces on them are fragments of the banned Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). After the August coup the CPSU shattered along its political fault lines. Its "ultra-Stalinist" wing remains active in a variety of different parties. Each carries the virus of Great Russian chauvinism. It is a crushing indictment of Stalinism that out of 15 million former "communists" only a few tens of thousands now rally behind the red flag of the former USSR. And when they do it is not as a symbol of international working class solidarity or of proletarian revolution. Rather it expresses a yearning to restore the old Russian centre's domination over now supposedly independent peoples.

In their upside-down world the *Internationale* has become a war song of Russian aggression against these peoples. As the CIS has continued to fragment, threatening the unity and the power of the Soviet Army, the so-called "National Bolshevik" current has focused more and more on the symbolism of the USSR to mask its goal of creating a Great Russian superpower.

The social base of this movement lies in the lower levels of the former bureaucracy plus the CPSU activists who stand to lose most from Yeltsin's purge of the state and their military counterparts, the lower officer corps (colonel and below) of the Soviet Armed Forces.

Restorationist

Allied to the Stalinists in the organising of these demonstrations, and sharing many of their key objectives, is an openly bourgeois national chauvinist movement. Under Gorbachev religious nationalism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism grew rapidly amongst the intelligentsia. The KGB directly fostered and sponsored this. But until recently organised fascism remained in disarray. Pamyat, the most brazenly fascist movement, split into four or five groups. Since the failure of the August coup all of these movements have grown rapidly. Recently Pamyat was confident enough to invade a conference of the centre-right Assembly of the Russian People, being addressed by Alexander Rutskoi, the Vice President of the Russian Federation. The Pamyat *fürher*, Dmitry Vasilyev, and his black-shirts disrupted the proceedings until they were granted the right to speak from the platform.

More influential is a united front of semi-fascist, monarchist, National Bolshevik (military Stalinist) and even workerist organisations called *Nashi* (Ours). It concentrates its fire on the alleged horrors and humiliations being suffered by the Russian minorities and the Russian servicemen in the newly independent states. Its leading figures include the populist chauvinist demagogue Vladimir Zhirinovskiy who came third in the Presidential elections of 1991, and the "black colonels" of the former Soyuz group, Viktor Alksnis and Nikolai Petrushenko.

Alliance

Since Yeltsin's price reforms this unholy alliance of Stalinists, fascists and monarchists has come together on three major demonstrations. Those on 12 January and 9 February failed to rouse significant numbers of independently organised workers. The participants were predominantly elderly and were prepared to tolerate the filthiest anti-Semitism and organised fascism in their midst.

Placards blamed the ills of Russia on the "Jewish-Masonic" con-

ANTI-YELTSIN PROTESTS

Stalinists' unholy alliance

Armed Forces Day in Moscow, 23 February, saw serious clashes between demonstrators and Yeltsin's riot police. This was the third major demonstration organised by an alliance of Stalinists and far right forces. A retired general has since died as a result of a heart attack brought on by the fracas, the first "martyr" for the organisers of the demonstrations against Yeltsin. **Paul Morris** analyses the political forces involved, and below we print a report from LRCI sympathisers in Moscow.



Militiaman beating up a demonstrator on 23 February

spiracy as well as on the IMF and Wall Street. The Star of David was carried with the letters NATO scrawled inside it. Chants against the Jews mixed with quavering renditions of the *Internationale*. Pictures of Lenin and Stalin rubbed shoulders with pictures of Jesus and the Tsar.

Support

Though these demonstrations opposed Yeltsin's price rises and the privatisations there could be no question of revolutionary Marxists supporting them. Their overall character was a national chauvinist one. Even the economic programme of the nationalists and the fascists coincides with that of the Stalinists: a return to centralised control of a state-owned economy, but at the same time as increased integration into the world market. In short, a state capitalist dead end which stands no chance of defending the remains of the workers' state let alone revitalising them.

It borders on criminal irresponsibility for groups like the Spartacists and the Militant to puff up the size of these demos, grossly exaggerating their working class composition and the significance of their "Bolshevik" symbolism. Militant has reported 150,000 on some of these demonstrations, the Spartacists 90,000. No serious on-the-spot estimate puts any of them at more than 40,000. This in a city of 8 million, including 4.5 million trade unionists, does not constitute a mass workers' demonstration.

Moscow, the capital of the gar-

gantuan Soviet bureaucracy, contains vast numbers of current and retired state and party officials. To assemble between ten and forty thousand of them is indeed no great feat.

The 23 February march was the most nationalist of the demos so far. Called for Army Day, small posters appeared in the railway stations inviting people to a meeting about "our country's national interests". On the door of the Lenin Museum a poster urged "officers" to defend the integrity of the Red Army. It was the break up of the Red Army that excited the fury of the organisers, not the spectacle of pensioners digging through rubbish for food.

Dominated

This 23 February demonstration was the biggest so far and the most heavily dominated by the Stalinists. Yeltsin was clearly fearful that the march might attract mass support and used the media to suggest that the "Red-Brown bloc" was contemplating some sort of *putsch* or uprising. He banned the march and deployed 10,000 police within the two square kilometre area around the Kremlin to stop it taking place.

Whilst it was impossible for Trotskyists to support such a march it was our clear duty to intervene, to offer those under the sway of the Stalino-fascist bloc an alternative answer to the crisis facing the workers of the former USSR. In addition we have to defend the right of all, bar of course the fascist scum, to demonstrate against Yeltsin's bans and repression. ■

REPORT FROM MOSCOW

"Ring upon ring of barricades"

IN THE week prior to 23 February LRCI supporters joined with revolutionary anarchists and other groups which consider themselves to be Trotskyist, to produce an agitational leaflet against capitalist restoration, fascism and Stalinist chauvinism. It also called for an open air meeting on 7 March. On the day few of the organisations which signed the leaflet were able to mobilise forces to distribute it. As a result LRCI supporters were the main force giving out leaflets to the demonstration.

Our first inkling that something unusual was going on came when we arrived at the metro station. At one station after another we found the escalators blocked by lines of police. In Okhotny Ryad station an angry crowd built up on the platform.

Eventually they stormed the escalators. The scene was repeated all over central Moscow. When we got to street level a pitched battle was about to begin.

Only small groups of demonstrators had reached the very centre of the city but gradually they united and tried to march to the huge Manezh Square which lies along one side of the Kremlin. Their way was totally blocked by line after line of trucks barricading Gorky Street, each controlled by the militia.

All at once the crowd of mainly elderly and middle aged demonstrators, many wearing their medals and carrying Soviet red flags, charged the police barricades. Against them the police deployed young troops armed with metal riot shields and rubber truncheons. Though they

ISRAEL

USA – friends of Labour?

BY RICHARD BRENNER

TO CALL Israel's current negotiating stance "tough" would be something of an understatement. Over the last weeks Israel's right wing Likud government has

- sanctioned the assassination of Hizbollah leader Abbas Moussawi
- repeatedly bombed Palestinian camps in Lebanon
- arrested two of the Palestinian negotiating team
- invaded Lebanon outside its so-called "security zone"
- made offers at the talks amounting to less than the Camp David promises

The current proposals from Israel for Palestinian "self-determination" include a nebulous "interim self-governing authority". However there would be no withdrawal of Israeli troops to specified security zones, no elections, no Palestinian responsibility for security, no power for the Palestinian authority over Jewish settlers in the occupied territories and "full co-operation" between the Palestinian body and the Israeli government. Meanwhile the development of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza proceeds apace.

Threat

Given the threat that the latest Zionist measures pose to the US-sponsored peace process, it is not surprising that Washington has responded with an uncharacteristic challenge to Shamir. Secretary of State James Baker has threatened to withhold \$10 billion in loan guarantees unless Israel halts the building of new settlements.

This backing is essential if Israel is to raise the funds necessary to provide accommodation for the large numbers of Soviet Jewish immigrants, one million of whom are likely to increase Israel's population by 20% before the end of 1994.

But Likud's pro-settlement policy not only aims to provide land for Soviet immigrants. It is an answer to the demographic crisis which affects the status of the occupied territories and the future of Israel

itself. The very notion of a Zionist state depends on maintaining a majority of Jewish inhabitants. If Palestinian Arabs were permitted to become a voting majority they would seek to abolish the systematic discrimination that follows from the very notion of a Jewish state in Palestine.

That is why since 1967, despite the demands of the ultra-right, Israel has not annexed the West Bank and Gaza. To do so would require the Zionists to follow one of three options; extend voting rights to the Arab population, introduce formal political discrimination against potential Palestinian voters, or expel the Arab population entirely. The first is a non-starter for the Zionists, and the other two would be unacceptable to Israel's major international backer, the USA.

The policy of settlement aimed to avoid these problems by keeping the territories under Israeli control without threatening the nature of the Zionist state. The current offer to the Palestinians aims to maintain this status quo while providing the fiction of Palestinian self-government.

The USA has a different solution. It knows that continued settlement of the West Bank by Israel will quickly unravel any peace agreement; it therefore wants settlement ended. The USA favours the stabilisation of the region through limited Palestinian autonomy, and sees Likud as a major obstacle to securing its regional foreign policy goal. Knesset elections are looming in June, and as one Senate source has stated candidly, "If Labour wins the election Washington will be dancing in the streets".

Support

Newly elected Labour leader, Rabin, has the military background and record of hard-line policies that could be crucial in gaining the support of the Israeli voters in order to push through Washington's plans.

He was, after all, Chief of Staff in the 1967 war, and at the onset of the *intifada* urged the use of "force might and beatings" to crush the insurgent youth revolt.

Unlike Shimon Peres, his defeated rival for the labour leadership, Rabin has not declared an intention to halt the settlement building programme. But he has said that he will implement Palestinian self-rule within nine months of taking office. But needless to say Rabin and the USA's plans have nothing in common with genuine self-determination for the Palestinian people. The Zionists would police this "self-rule" militarily and retain economic control. The sop of a toothless Palestinian authority is aimed to take the heat out of the *intifada*, while leaving the masses of the occupied territories at the mercy of the Israeli military authorities.

Racist

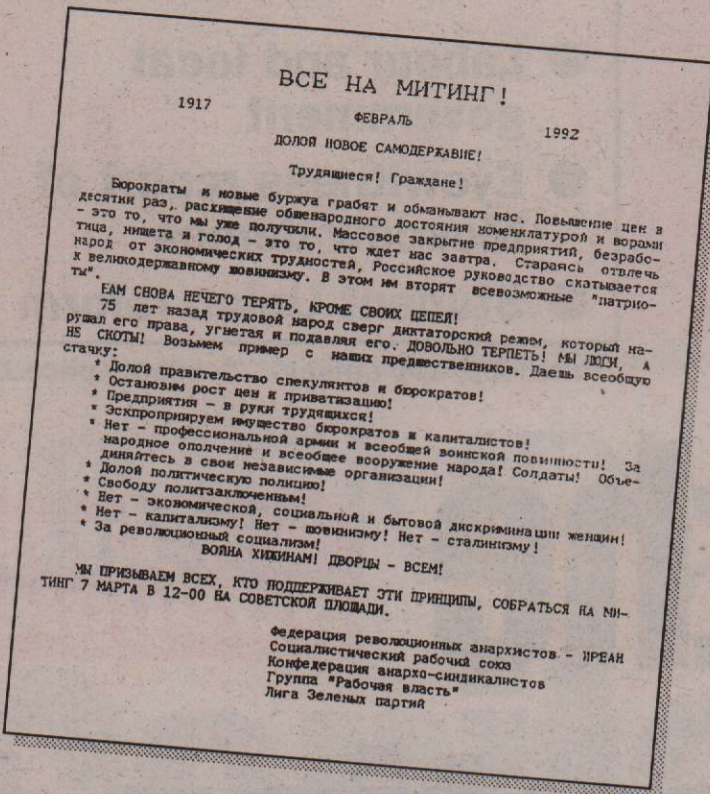
All Palestinian workers, students and youth committed to democracy and national liberation must reject the capitulation of the PLO leaders and their bourgeois fellow travellers in the negotiating delegation. The USA's negotiated solution would preserve the racist principle of the Zionist state together with its vast, highly trained and funded army.

At the same time the powerless system of self-government proposed would nurture a pliant administrative apparatus of the Palestinian bourgeoisie ready to sacrifice the interests of the national struggle in favour of its own class privileges.

Against the bankruptcy and cowardice of Palestinian bourgeois nationalism and the dead end of Islamic reaction, an internationalist workers' party must be built around a programme of permanent revolution. The national question must be solved under the leadership of the working class through a workers' council republic in Palestine and a federation of socialist states in the Middle East. ■



Israeli soldiers



Leaflet given out by Rabochaya Vlast on demonstration

charged the demonstrators, lashing out with their batons, they proved confused and ineffective in breaking up the crowd. Within minutes they had been engaged in face to face argument: "I could be your mother... I fought in the war... why are you defending a man who has cancelled all your holidays?" This all went on accompanied by repeated chants of "fascists" and, in German, "nicht schießen" (don't shoot).

Faced with this treatment the militia and their officers looked distinctly unhappy. The demonstrators, led by some army officers, linked arms and repeatedly charged the police lines.

The OMON squads of the Interior Ministry were a different matter. They had helmets, full riot gear and their own vans. But even they seemed wary of antagonising the regular militia and refrained from really smashing into the crowd. No attempt was made to deploy the army. In fact as the day went on it became clear that the ring of repressive forces protecting Yeltsin, though large, was quite fragile; enough to restrain and intimidate this relatively small demonstration perhaps, but not willing or able to confront the masses if they had appeared in real force. Then of course the army would have to be used and whether it would be more enthusiastic to protect Yeltsin than the militia or the OMON must be open to severe doubts.

Eventually about 15,000 assembled around a makeshift platform on a scaffolding. In the midst of all this we were able to hand out our leaflet and sell our paper *Rabochaya Vlast* (Workers Power). Its headline said "Revolution: the way out of the crisis". It was in stark contrast to the bureaucratic euphemisms of the Stalinist propaganda and people crowded around us. Within a few minutes we had distributed all our leaflets and sold all our papers. We cursed our meagre resources since clearly we could have sold or distributed many times what we had been able to produce. We also cursed those self-proclaimed revolutionaries who refused to intervene on the demo, those like the supporters of the British SWP who had refused to support the joint leaflet on the grounds that "a few people can't do anything".

In fact there were clearly many people on this demonstration willing to read and hear ideas other than those of the Stalinist organisers or

their fascist allies. Revolutionaries bore an absolute responsibility to confront the anti-Semitic and chauvinist rhetoric and the reactionary perspective of creating chaos in the streets in the hope that the army would intervene. It was our duty to put forward an alternative course of action to resist Yeltsin's restorationist government and tactics to break up his as yet shaky machinery of repression.

However, when the meeting started it was obvious why no principled revolutionary could support this march or its slogans. Speaker after speaker hammered home its central slogans "One army: one Soviet Union!" One of *Nashi's* "black colonels" received warm applause from the assembled Stalinists. Another hawk-faced colonel introduced a priest carrying a crucifix to the crowd. He spoke standing against a background of sailors in full uniform carrying red banners—a curious sight indeed, as if Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* and the *Battleship Potemkin* had somehow been scrambled into one film!

Some speakers talked left. The leader of the recently formed *Rabochii Parti* (Workers' Party) called for a strike but gave no suggestions or plan as to how to build for one. Throughout the meeting our nostrils caught the occasional whiff of tear gas drifting from other battles in the city centre.

When the demagogues had exhausted themselves the crowd, perhaps 20,000 strong, marched towards the Manezh Square once more. On approaching the first line of trucks a demonstrator climbed into one, started it up and proceeded to drive it away. The police simply smiled whilst the demonstrators poured through the gap.

Further down the street was a wall of steel; tipper trucks parked side by side with their backs raised. The OMON were defending this obstacle so, after a tense confrontation, the demonstration turned about and started to disperse.

Walking round Moscow later we came across ring upon ring of these barricades. This show of force was put on by Yeltsin to impress his western backers. In reality it reveals his fear and his weakness. But Yeltsin easily survived the day because the forces missing from the streets were the ordinary Russian workers, especially the young workers, the students and the rank and file soldiers. ■

Another hawk-faced colonel introduced a priest carrying a crucifix... He spoke against a background of sailors in full uniform carrying red banners... as if *Ivan the Terrible* and the *Battleship Potemkin* had somehow been scrambled into one

Workers power

INSIDE

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IRELAND

Irish
Workers
Group **Class
Struggle**

Scrap the anti-abortion laws!

TWO WEEKS of mass protest and outrage forced the Irish Supreme Court to revoke the virtual internment imposed on a 14 year old girl, pregnant as a result of a rape, to stop her having an abortion in Britain.

Both the government and the Catholic hierarchy openly told the Supreme Court that they wanted an escape clause from their own anti-abortion laws in this case. Yet only two weeks earlier the Attorney General—directly appointed to the Cabinet by new Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds—had tried to ban all media coverage of the case which he had personally brought against the young victim, arguing that public discussion would be in contempt of court.

What made the difference was a volcano of anger—demonstrations in Dublin, Galway, Waterford and other Irish towns, and at Irish embassies around the world. In Dublin 15,000 turned out at only a couple of days notice, showing the strength of feeling. The outrage was even reflected in the bourgeois media, and damning comment throughout the world embarrassed the Irish ruling class into a stunning, if temporary, turnabout.

Savage

Since 1983 the Irish courts have been pursuing a savage witch-hunt of pro-choice forces. That year a referendum led to an amendment to the Constitution which guaranteed to protect, by law, the rights of the unborn child. Although abortion was illegal before this amendment, the vigorous interpretation of the Eighth Amendment has led to the closure of pregnancy counselling clinics, and the distribution of abortion information has been made illegal. Student leaders who published such information still face court costs of over £30,000!

But this maniacal pursuit of the letter of the constitution to the point of hounding a raped 14 year old has blown up in their faces. She was only doing what an estimated 7,000 other Irish women do every year—travelling to Britain for an abortion—when the state intervened to stop her. The timid opposition denounced the ruling and called for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment and the freedom of women to travel.

Misery

But this was not the concern of those who demonstrated against the ruling. Why should women faced with the misery of unwanted pregnancy have to travel abroad? What of those who could not afford it? Why be forced to go in shame and secrecy as official pariahs? Why be denied counselling and after-care?

BY THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP

Women in Ireland don't just need the freedom to travel, they need access to good contraception and abortion in Ireland.

By the time the Supreme Court did its masters' bidding, one junior minister, Mary Harney, along with other women deputies had for the first time been pressurised to broach the need to provide for abortion in exceptional circumstances in Ireland. This implies not only that the anti-abortion Eighth Amendment must go, but that anti-abortion elements of the British imposed 1861 Act should no longer remain intact either. The Taoiseach even had to rebuke his Minister for Social Welfare for saying in public that limited abortion provision is an inevitability.

Opposition

This prospect terrifies the Irish bourgeoisie and church, who are entrenched in their opposition to any abortion in Ireland. They wish to deny women any right to control their own fertility, whatever the effects is may have on the woman's sanity or general health. They know that to legitimise abortion in exceptional circumstances is to contradict the anti-abortionists' fundamental argument: that abortion is murder because life begins when the "soul" enters fertilised egg at conception. For them the sanctity of that life, based on this "soul" is paramount, and the wishes, or even the health, of the mother are irrelevant.

But if abortion is permitted for victims of rape and incest, if there is a congenital disease or in any other "exceptional" circumstances, then this concedes that there is in fact a difference between the "rights" of

the foetus and those of the mother.

The concrete example of a pregnant 14 year old who has been abused and raped, and would rather die than bear the resulting child, made many who are otherwise opposed to abortion see that the future of the girl is clearly paramount. They have subordinated any belief they may hold about the presence of a "soul" to the material circumstances of the pregnant woman. Once this is accepted, the whole question of abortion becomes not one of "murder" or "life" but of who decides when a woman can exercise the choice not to continue with a pregnancy.

It is not only in dire conditions of rape and incest that abortions are needed. Many women face unwanted pregnancies due to contraceptive failures, or to lack of knowledge or availability of contraception. Pregnancy leading to loss of work, increased poverty and dependence can also be compelling reasons for women seeking an abortion.

Only a woman can really determine the likely impact of continuing a pregnancy on her life, and therefore it must be her decision, not that of the courts or the doctors. Women need to have the right to choose, and that means providing free and safe abortion on demand.

The key task in the months ahead is to turn the mass anger of recent weeks into a campaign to compel the Irish state to repeal the Eighth Amendment and the sections of the 1861 Act which still criminalise abortion (and homosexuality) in Ireland—unlike Britain where they were long ago repealed. The demand to scrap the Maastricht Irish anti-abortion protocol must also be brought centre-stage in all European countries where the Treaty has yet to be ap-



proved by popular referendum.

The Treaty includes a provision which specifically excludes the possibility of European law overriding the sovereignty of the anti-abortion clause in the Irish Constitution.

The Irish Workers Group (IWG) argued on the demonstrations, with placards and leaflets, for the building of a united campaign of action independent of all the parliamentary forces whose first concern was merely to defuse popular anger. The IWG argues that real unity in militant action by the broadest number can be galvanised around smashing the existing legal obstacles—the Eighth Amendment, the 1861 Act and the Maastricht protocol.

Demand

But this is not enough. Free abortion on demand is the only way to guarantee a woman's right to choose. It means ensuring the provision of facilities for abortion, as well as guaranteeing that women and doctors will not be penalised by the law. Unless the state takes responsibility for providing these then legal abortion would remain a right for women with money, but

unattainable by many poor working class women.

In arguing for a campaign for free abortion on demand the IWG does not lay this down as a precondition for united action, however. At the conference on International Women's Day to found the Repeal the Eighth Amendment Campaign, we will argue for a united fight now to decriminalise abortion in Ireland and for the goal of free abortion on demand.

Organised women workers and rank and file of trade unionists must be central to any such campaign. The Dublin Council of Trade Unions has called for the repeal of the amendment and for "free and legal abortion" to be available in Ireland. They must be compelled to mobilise organised workers in demonstrations to scrap the anti-abortion laws and struggle for free abortion on demand. Only the political and industrial action of organised workers can guarantee real and lasting victories for the fundamental democratic rights of women denied by this clericalist, capitalist state.

- For a woman's right to choose!
- For free and legal abortion on demand!

Abortion Information Helpline: (Dublin) 01-679 4700