

# Workers power

**INSIDE**

Number 187 March 1995

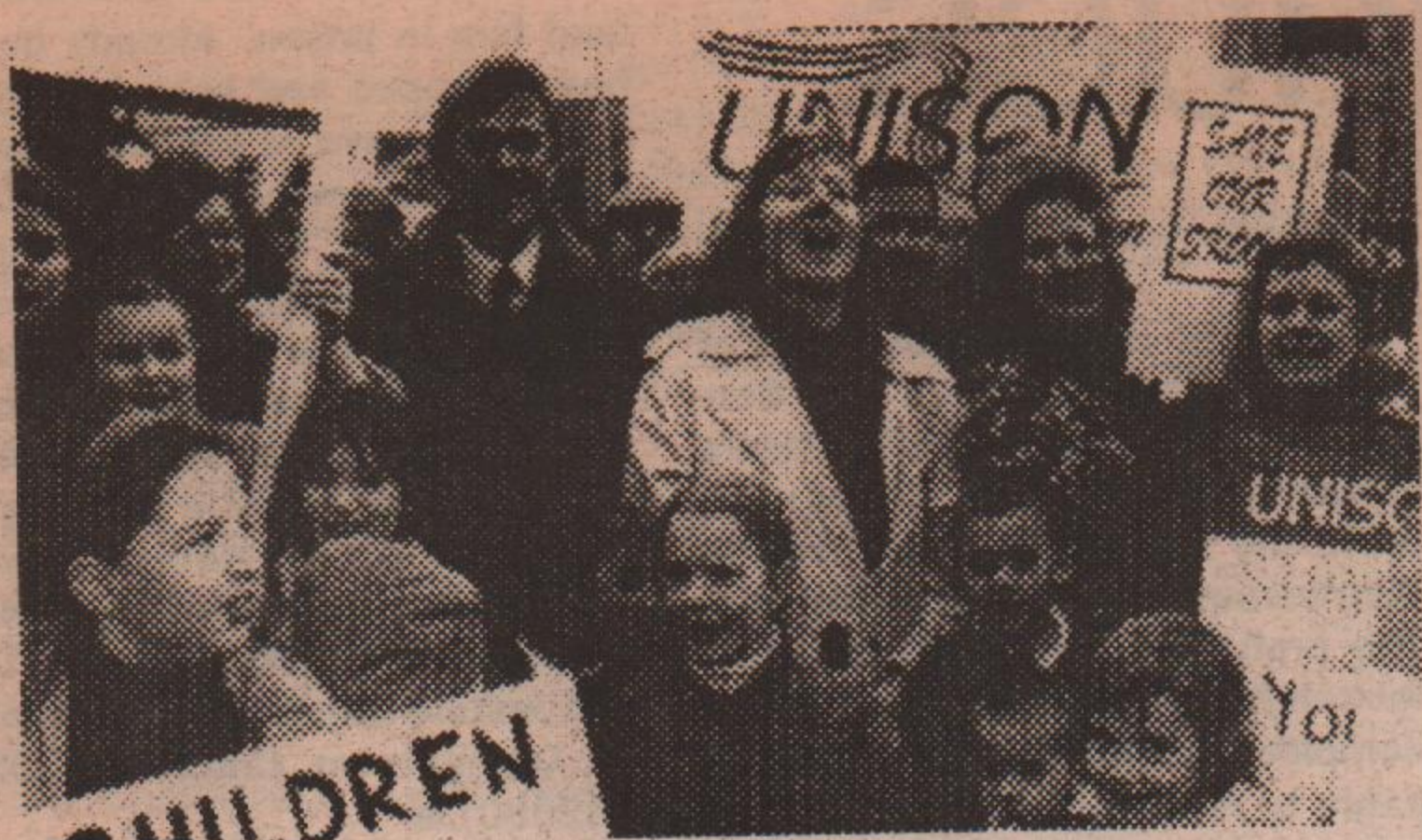
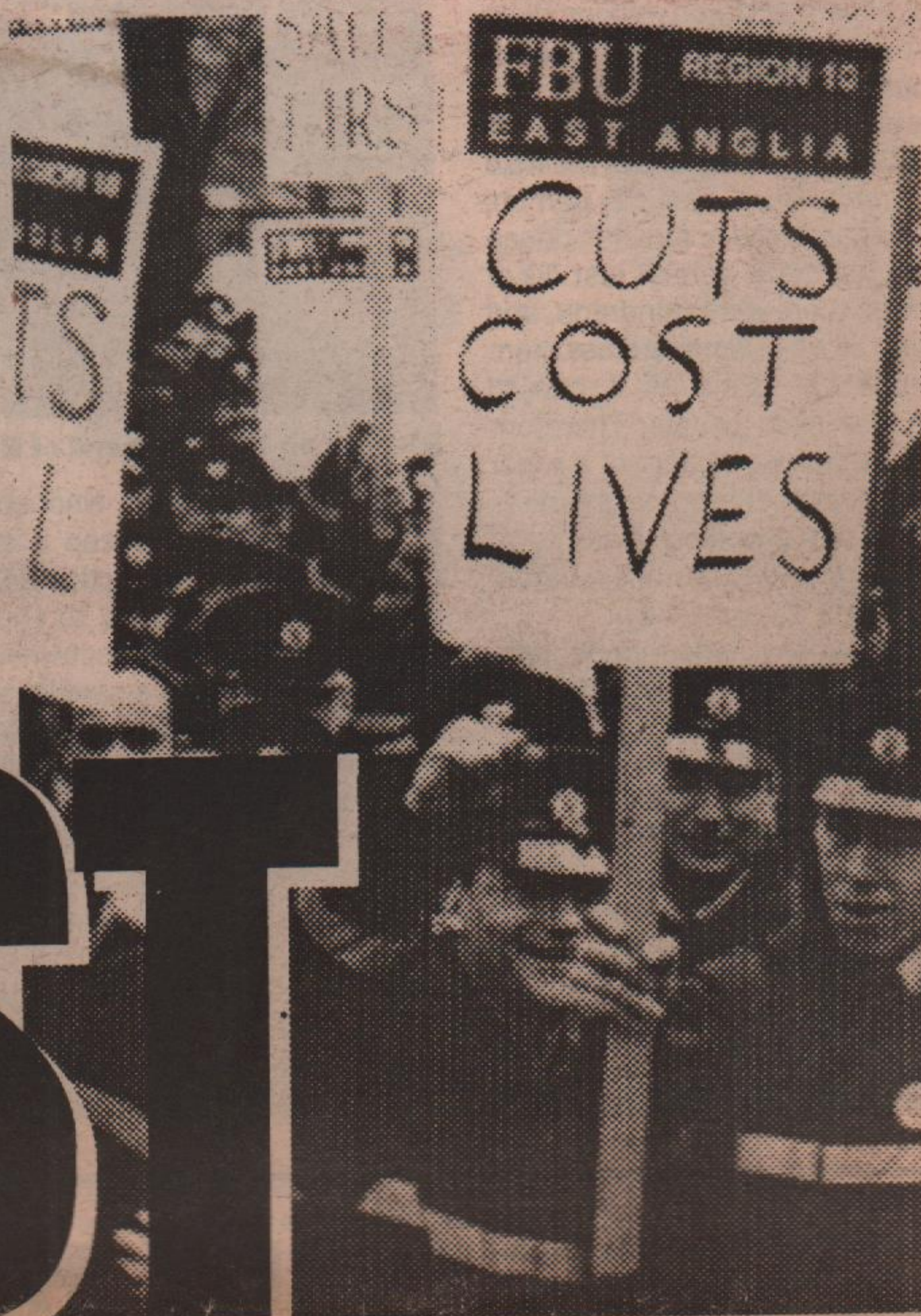
**Ireland:  
Peace  
without  
justice?**



BRITISH SECTION OF THE LEAGUE FOR A REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

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# STRIKE AGAINST



# THE

**DEMONSTRATE!  
Saturday  
25 March  
1pm Embankment  
London**

# CUTS!

**“W**E ALWAYS get doom and gloom at this time of year,” said Education Minister Gillian Shephard, last month. Just for once she was telling the truth.

She hopes this misery will evaporate in March. She is hoping that councils will agree budgets, arguments about who gets what will be settled, and protests will be silenced.

But this year the announcement that up to 10,000 teachers face the sack has provoked a massive explosion of anger across the country. So have plans to cut libraries, youth centres and fire services.

Bradford has been told to cut £18 million.

This includes over £6 million from the education budget. They want to charge five pence more for school dinners, reduce nursery education, cut school transport services and stop paying clothing allowances to anyone who isn't on income support.

This devastation is being duplicated across the country.

Liverpool social services are facing £40 million cuts. Tower Hamlets' Labour council are to cut £20 million.

A school in Warwickshire has to sack six full time and three part time teachers to stay within the budget.

The Tories have the cheek to say that all this is scare-mongering, and that there is plenty of money around to avoid these cuts.

**Who do they think they are kidding?**

Councils and schools have been cutting back for years. The so called "surplus" money in schools includes reserves to fix the heating if it goes wrong, replace equipment and even buy books.

Shephard argued that councils should cut nursery provision in order to pay for schools—and this woman is in charge of education!

Each year councils have squealed about how unfair it all is. And each year they have let the Tories off the hook. Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat alike have gone on to implement the cuts.

But the Tories and councils are fooling nobody this year.

Union members, parents, school governors, youth, the disabled, the elderly—tens of thousands of people have lobbied council meetings and demonstrated in town centres.

Ballots for strikes and industrial action have been called by fire fighters, teachers, council workers,

in Strathclyde, Aberdeen, Leicester, Derbyshire, Rotherham, London—the list is endless.

All these actions need to be built, linked up and spread into national strikes against all cuts. Fighting each cut separately has been the downfall of previous struggles.

Councils and school governors

must be forced to set illegal budgets, and make the Tories foot the bill for the services we need.

We to make sure that the doom and gloom does continue—not for schools and council workers—but for the Tories.■

**A middle class revolt?  
Editorial, page 3**

**More on the anti-cuts revolt: pages 4 and 5**



THE CROWD violence at the England-Ireland "friendly" at Landsdowne Road showed that, just like British society as a whole, English football is riddled with racism, ignorant nationalism and wanton violence. TV coverage dramatically revealed to the nation what thousands of working class people in the East End of London know already: that a small minority of fascists can latch onto working class frustrations and ruin things for everybody.

So who is to blame, and what should be done?

In the media a familiar theme emerged: the blame lay with the supposedly violent, drunken working class street culture that John Major labelled "yob culture".

This is how the argument goes: yes it was started by Combat 18, the Nazi terror group, as a political demonstration against the Anglo-Irish peace deal... but there weren't just 40 or 50 rioters, there were hundreds, and they were all white working class men.

Football has done all it can to marginalise such people. Therefore the problem must be part of a wider social malaise—the same sickness that sees many working class town centres turned into drunken battlegrounds on a Saturday night.

Eamon Dunphy in the *Independent on Sunday* typifies the twisted logic of this line of thought:

"The single most potent symbol of English soccer today is Eric Cantona whose malevolent spirit haunted many souls in Dublin last Wednesday night. What an inspiration Cantona must be for those young men, alienated to the point of derangement, who vented their fascist rage on the innocents around them."

Hold on a minute! Cantona attacked

## FASCISTS

# Boot them out of football



Irish fan on the sharp end of British racism

a fascist sympathiser who abused him. The bloke is, to cap it all, an avowed socialist and active anti-racist. And that brings us to the real issue raised by the Landsdowne Road fiasco: should we let a small group of fascists, with the passive support of hundreds of brain dead racist fans, ruin football? No.

What is it that breeds fascism, and what allows its agitators to get a hold on the minds of a minority of young working class men? It is the virulent nationalism, and in particular the anti-Irish hatred, that is the lifeblood of the tabloid press and Tory politicians. The same gutter tabloids

that rightly branded the C18 thugs as "scum" have simultaneously howled with indignation about the possibility of a "sell-out to Dublin" in the Irish peace process.

Furthermore, when "our boys" fought wars against Argentina and Iraq, the tabloid press spared nothing in its praise for a group of men from working class backgrounds, acting considerably more violently, with roughly the same attitudes as the "scum" of Landsdowne Road.

British nationalism breeds fascism. British imperialism, which has denied the democratic wishes of the majority of the Irish people for centu-

ries, is ultimately responsible for the anti-Irish contempt which flowed out of the upper tier of the Landsdowne Road stand.

So what can be done about it? Ultimately, racism will only be overthrown with the system which breeds it. But what about 1996, when England is due to host the European Championships? Then we will have to deal not only with hundreds of organised British fascists, but potentially thousands more of their German, Dutch and Italian counterparts. How do we stop Euro '96 becoming a fascist jamboree?

Certainly not by cancelling it. While German anti-fascists hailed the cancellation of the Germany-England match on Hitler's birthday last year as a victory, any cancellation of the Championships would be seen as a victory for the fascists.

There is, however, a tried and tested method of dealing with fascists, inside and outside a football ground. Working class and community organisations have to get together and deny them—by force where necessary—any opportunity to spread their views. While they are still a tiny minority they can be easily crushed.

And that is where we part company with the hand-wringing liberals with their denunciations of "male working class culture". As most of the pathetic pacifists never tire of telling us: most active anti-fascists are "white males". They view violence against

the fascists as every bit as bad as violence by the fascists. And with this outlook they will only help one set of people—the fascists.

We are going to need a movement of thousands of males and females, white and black, to stop the Nazis hijacking Euro '96. We will have to unite with hundreds of thousands of genuine anti-racist football fans from all over Europe to do this, making clear that our opposition to Nazis from every country goes hand in hand with working class internationalism.

The basis for such a movement exists amongst the very people Dunphy and others blamed for Landsdowne Road—the working class. It is working class fans who have spearheaded the campaigns against racism in football, through fanzines and networks around these. It is working class fans who have scored enormous successes in minimising the monkey chants and banana throwing that used to greet the appearance of every black player.

Cantona, far from being an inspiration to the ugly flag-waving racists, should be an inspiration to every anti-fascist and internationalist football fan. What he did to Matthew Simmonds, we've got to do to football's Nazis—only we've got to do it in teams of more than one person, making sure we have the backing of the majority of the fans, and—for reasons Cantona will find out when he appears in court—off camera. ■

FOLLOWING THE open verdict recorded at the coroner's inquest into the death of Mark Harris, we warned that police harassment of campaign activists was far from over. Sadly, events have proved us right.

Paul Harris, Mark's brother and leading campaign activist, has been given three concurrent six-month prison sentences, suspended for 18 months, effectively putting him out of action. Meanwhile the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) have produced another, supposedly independent, report on the case.

The PCA report takes up several of the questions raised by the campaign.

Was Mark Harris assaulted by police? The report states "Although efforts were made to recover a small plastic bag from his mouth independent witnesses confirm that there was no unreasonable force". Strange, when other witnesses saw a violent struggle involving a police boot on Mark's throat.

The report says nothing more about this mysterious plastic bag. Why? Because if Mark had swallowed drugs, this should have been reported to the custody officer at Trinity Road police station. He should have been taken to hospital.

Did Mark have suicidal tendencies? If Mark was known to be suicidal, he should have been closely supervised and his belt removed.

The PCA's explanation is a masterpiece of creative writing. They claim that "on a previous occasion in South Wales... there were indications that he had suicidal thoughts at the prospect of custody". However, it was not recorded on the Police National Computer, so the police at Trinity Road knew nothing about it: "nothing in Mr Harris' mood or attitude... indicated the suicide risk to the officers responsible for his custody".

Why was Mark allowed to keep his belt, with which he supposedly hanged himself? According to the PCA, the custody officer needs to

## MARK HARRIS

# Cover-up continues

balance the safety of the prisoner against "an individual's need to maintain his self-respect"!

All this, of course, leaves aside the fact that Mark Harris never wore a belt.

The PCA report says nothing new. All this nonsense was presented by the police to the coroner's inquest, where a jury took less than five minutes to reject it.

Police lies can be countered. Po-

lice harassment, however, presents greater problems. Following their bungled attempt to pin a charge of malicious wounding on Paul Harris (see WP184), police have sought desperately to make another charge stick. On 13 February, in Cardiff Magistrates Court, they finally got their way. Paul Harris received his suspended sentence relating to driving offences and "handling a stolen Whitney Houston tape"—an offence

apparently worth six months in itself!

Paul was originally convicted of these offences five years ago. Sentenced to more than a hundred hours community service, he did not complete the last twenty hours due to distressing personal circumstances. The probation service happily overlooked this at the time. But failure to complete the sentence rendered Paul liable to reconviction.

The police aims are clear. They want to discredit the campaign by branding Paul a criminal. They want to put him out of action through fear of arrest, which would automatically land him in prison. Already he has been stopped and searched by police on the eve of travelling to the National Assembly Against Racism.

But despite this police harassment, the campaign, which does not rely on any one individual for its survival, continues. The police action has increased the determination of those involved to bring the murderers of Mark Harris to justice.

Send donations and messages of support to: The Mark Harris Truth and Justice Campaign, 45, Allerton St, Grangetown, Cardiff (Tel. 0222-462080). ■

## NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AGAINST RACISM

# New Campaign Launched

BY LAURA WATKINS

LAST MONTH 700 activists attended a National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR) in London. It was organised by those who finally gave up trying to redirect the work of the Anti Racist Alliance (ARA).

NAAR aims to recreate another passive cross-class campaign in place of the irreparably split ARA. The day centered on a draft document—"An Anti-Racist Charter for the new millennium". But little time was given over debating its contents.

The Charter is a direct descendant of the documents and outlook of ARA. It proposes a broad, cross-class anti-racist movement under black leadership. The key focus is winning friends among reformist politicians, trade union officials and media celebrities.

The Charter sets out to do this, not by a programme to get rid of racism—or at least challenge its fundamental roots—but by modifying racism and

limiting its impact.

The basic weakness of the Charter is immediately revealed. It states that the "cumulative effects of racism cannot be overturned overnight". This truism serves as an alibi for not linking the struggle against the effects of racism to the root causes of it in Britain. There is not even a commitment to fighting each and every manifestation of racism, let alone its underlying causes.

There is no connection established between racism and its underpinning in class society, so there is naturally no programme that links the end of racism to the struggle for a socialist society.

Instead we get seven key proposals. Racial violence, police racism and the inequity of the criminal justice system are countered with a vague

pledge to fight injustice and inequality. It proposes a new criminal offence of racial violence and seeks a commitment to "effective and just processes in the implementation of existing and future legislation relating to racist attacks, discrimination and civil rights". Once again, we find the need to make the police "accountable to the communities they serve". But the police force is racist by its nature since it exists to defend capitalism which is racist to the core.

On immigration and asylum the document wants a fight against "the patently unjust aspects" of the relevant legislation and "fair methods of considering asylum requests". But this approach is based on an unrealistic assumption; namely, that immigration laws are not in essence designed to deter the entry of black people into Britain.

We cannot endorse this pro-

gramme. It is no use for this or any other millennium.

We need a fighting campaign rooted in the estates and working class communities, one prepared to organise permanent organisations of self-defence against racist and fascist attacks, committed to scrapping all immigration laws and giving real meaning to the UN and EC paper commitment to the free movement of individuals around the world. ■

### Taslima Nasrin

the Bangladeshi feminist writer threatened by Islamic Fundamentalists is speaking in London.

Date: Wednesday 15th March  
Venue: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London.

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## EDITORIAL

# Revolt of the middle classes?

IT'S BEEN dubbed the "green welly revolt". The middle classes in the shires are up in arms against the government. They are mad about education cuts, indignant about big pay rises for industry and civil service chiefs and demanding an end to the veal trade.

The media applauds as school governors set "needs budgets". These governors may have stood by as provision has been cut to the bone, but they have balked at sacking teachers and further increasing class sizes.

The middle classes are on the march. Tory MPs with slim majorities are looking on in trepidation; some of them are even on the lobbies themselves.

But who are the protesters? Many school governors are not the professionals and business men that the press would have us believe—they include a lot of working class parents and trade unionists.

The people lobbying the councils in "middle England" include a large proportion of teachers, local council workers, firefighters and parents. They too are working class. But who is it that too often gets to speak on behalf of these local rebels? The middle class professionals, such as the head teachers or Liberal Democrat county council leaders.

Likewise with the nurses. The RCN and RCM have always paraded their no-strike positions as evidence of their "professionalism". But ordinary nurses are workers who are wage slaves on the wards. In fact the RCN has always weakened nurses' union strength, scabbing on strikes and helping the employers to erode working conditions and pay.

But, whilst we can point to the working class character of many of the demonstrations, there is no doubting the fact that hundreds of thousands who think of themselves as middle class are alienated from the Tories. Many people who have voted Tory when they saw the attacks fall on others have woken up to the damage being done to their children, to their elderly parents, because the cuts are now affecting them.

We say to workers involved in this popular upheaval: beware! Some of the new friends on the lobbies will be reliable converts. But others will betray—particularly those who are trying to put themselves at the head of the struggle.

Teachers are fighting to save their jobs, and to defend the quality of education by refusing to allow increased class sizes. Governors are supporting them. But headteachers, trying to



THE ANIMAL rights movement is part of the middle class revolt the press are hailing. Unlike the people fighting the cuts, these protesters are largely middle class. This fact is not wasted on the police. One police chief argued that they should be going easy on these protesters as they are "our people—middle aged and middle class". You can be sure he won't be saying that if hundreds of thousands of workers take to the streets in the fight to kick out the Tories!

get in on this popular cause, are urging governors to run up overdrafts (legal) rather than set deficit budgets (illegal). Their advice is to avoid "understandable but macho" protests. If teachers vote to strike, demand illegal budgets and launch a direct confrontation with the government, these "allies" in the National Association of Head Teachers will rapidly switch sides.

The councils that are setting deficit budgets are also betraying the fight against the cuts. Gloucestershire County Council, Liberal Democrat and Tory, has voted to set a budget of £304.8 million. The government cap was £300.7 million. This extra £4.1 million will fall far short of the amount needed to prevent cuts—even a standstill budget would have been £320 million!

These people—the Lib-Dem and Tory councillors, the leaders of the RCN, the NAHT, businessmen who are school governors—are false

allies and workers should break from them. Is this ultra-left posturing? No, we have only think back to 1992 to see the dangers of these alliances or "popular fronts". In October of that year there was a similar mass revolt against the pit closures. That too included Tories, bosses and wide layers of "middle England". The trade unions welcomed the broad support. They saw it as the way to win.

What happened? Instead of organising mass strike action by miners and all their millions of supporters, the trade union leaders let the professional politicians lead the struggle. The result? A drawn-out review, the anger dissipated and all the pits earmarked for closure have closed.

We face the same danger with the present crisis. The trade unions and Labour, eager to please these new allies in the middle class, will avoid any action that might alienate them. NUT

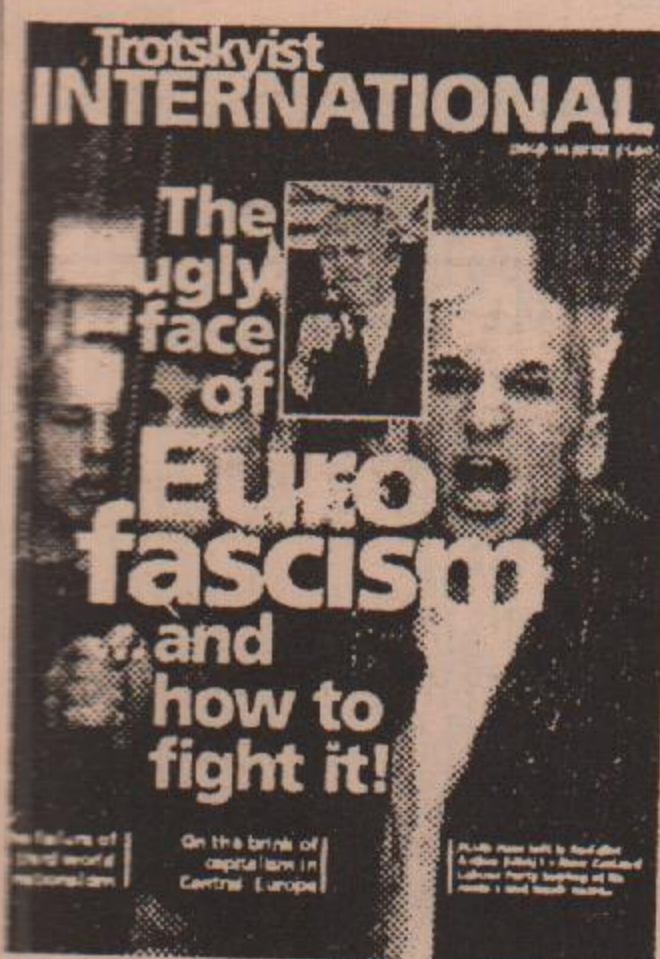
chief Doug McAvooy is a perfect example. When the teachers pay deal was announced and it became clear that this had to be funded locally, he raged that over half of primary pupils would soon be in classes of over 30 kids. But he added that teachers would "not be bounced into disruptive action"!

The teachers need to respond by taking as much disruptive action as necessary to reverse the cuts, win a decent pay rise and get the Tories to invest in education! ■

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### MEETINGS

#### BIRMINGHAM

Monday 20 March 7.30pm  
*How long can the Tories survive?*

Venue: Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Selly Park.

#### LONDON

Thursday 6 April 7.30pm  
*Defend Clause Four!*  
Room A157, London School of Economics, Clare Market, (off Aldwych), London WC2.

#### SHEFFIELD

*Open branch meeting*  
Wednesday 1 March 7.30  
*Women in Eastern Europe*  
See seller for venue

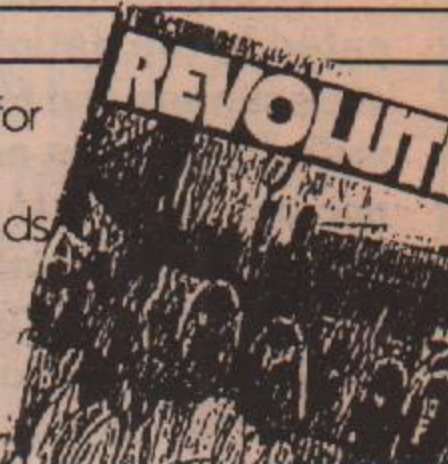
#### LEEDS

*Debate with Socialist Organiser*  
Thursday 16 March 7.30  
*Ireland and the peace process*  
Swarthmore Centre, Leeds ■

## £3000 FUND DRIVE £1768

Thanks this month to Birmingham branch of Workers Power who raised £65, a reader in the North East who sent £20, readers in Lincolnshire who donated £40 plus our standing order payers. We are forging ahead in the technology fund. We have plans to put Workers Power on the Internet (see page 12), to buy new printing equipment and to carry on updating our technology. Please keep the money coming. We still need more than £1000 to meet our target by 1 May. ■

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# EDUCATION

# Save our Schools!

**"S**CHOOL GOVERNORS in mass unrest threat", "Shires in Revolt", "Cap-busting county leads revolt". The headlines tell their own story: resistance to Tory attacks on education is spreading like wildfire.

Even traditional Tory constituencies such as Shropshire, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire are in open revolt over cuts in education, the result of yet another year of squeezing the council budget. The Tories are imposing cuts of £11.9 million in Oxfordshire, £10 million in Shropshire, £12 million in Devon, £6 million in Warwickshire and £7 million in Kent. In response, Shropshire council unanimously agreed a budget which breaks this year's Government-imposed spending ceiling by £6 million. Gloucestershire, Strathclyde and Newcastle have also set illegal budgets. Up and down the country school governors are resigning in protest, refusing to set budgets, or, as in Wheatley Park in Oxford, setting a "needs-related and responsible budget".

The amount councils can spend on education is determined by Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). The Tories reduced the SSA by 5% this year. SSA is calcu-



lated according to a complicated formula, varying from area to area, whose main purpose seems to be to let the Tories cut school budgets at will.

Oxfordshire was badly hit by the formula, losing £62 for each primary school pupil and £207 for each sec-

BY DIN WONG

ondary pupil. The shires in general have suffered badly this year, with many councils restricted to an increase in spending of just 0.5%. Not that the urban areas have escaped the Tory axe. Newham, for example, lost £105 per primary pupil and £326 per secondary pupil.

To make matters worse, the government have also refused to fund the meagre 2.7% pay increase for teachers awarded by the independent pay review body. Last year, schools footed the bill for the teachers' pay rise, without support from the Treasury, by shedding 5,400 jobs.

This year, to meet the government's spending targets, a further seven to ten thousand jobs would have to go. With school rolls expected to grow by a further 120,000 children in the autumn, this would be disastrous.

Class sizes will shoot up. Subjects will be dropped from the curriculum due to the loss of specialist subject teachers, support staff for children with special and language needs, welfare assistants and technicians. Spending on books and other equipment will, at the very least, be frozen.

Building maintenance funds will be plundered to keep members of staff.

And that's only in schools. Education authorities will also carry out the further destruction of Adult and Community Education and end discretionary grants for 16-19 year olds in further education.

In parliament, Education Minister Gillian Shephard insisted that there are "surplus" places in many schools and pointed to the £700 million reserves that schools have in their contingency and development fund, fat that could be trimmed. She derided the claims of protesting governors as annual budget-season exaggeration. She even claimed that having a few extra children in a class has no effect on standards!

Researchers at the Institute of Education in London give a different picture, proving a clear link between improved performance in reading and maths and smaller classes in the early years of schooling, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Why else, you might ask, would private schools, where the Tories send their own children, have small classes and one-to-one tuition? At the moment, there are over a million chil-

## Parent power?

**F**OR YEARS, the Tories have appealed to parents as "consumers". Their policy of "parent power" encouraged parents to get involved alongside teachers and (non-elected) business representatives in running school governing bodies.

The aim was not so much to empower parents as to undermine local authority control of education. It did not concern the Tories that many governing bodies, especially in working class areas, were hard pushed to find willing parents to take on the onerous tasks, and often co-opted non-parents onto the governing body. All that matters is that the 350,000 governors in the country are unaccountable to the local electorate, allowing for more direct control by central government.

The Local Management of Schools initiative (LMS) transferred financial control from local authorities to school governing bodies.

Tory ministers told us that allowing parents to choose which schools their children would attend and subjecting schools to market forces, would improve education. Most parents are now finding out that the opposite is true.

The most popular schools have become selective; the others have gone downhill, with the new parent-governors being forced to do the dirty work of making cuts and sacking their children's teachers, then taking the blame for the Tories' action.

So it is not surprising that the policy of devolving powers to the parents has blown up in the face of the Tories, with governors all over the country rising in protest. ■

## Limited action solves nothing

**C**AN THE TORIES be forced to change their mind about extra funding for education? Where would the money come from?

A caller on a Radio 4 phone-in suggested that teachers should voluntarily forfeit their pay rise and just be glad they still have their jobs. In reality the 2.7% award already means a pay cut for teachers, since it does not even match inflation.

Some Tory MPs in vulnerable seats and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) have called on the government to end the capping of councils' budgets, allowing them to increase the burden on council tax payers. Birmingham Council, meanwhile, intends to fulfil the teacher's pay award by making £41m worth of cuts in the other services it provides.

Yet another strategy was advocated by the National Association of Governors and Managers, which urged governors neither to resign nor set an illegal budget, but to exercise "financial brinkmanship" and set an "optimistic" budget instead. But brinkmanship did not work. The Cabinet decided not to fund the teachers' pay rise on 7 February.

The Campaign for the Advancement of State Education has a more combative approach, proposing mass lobbies of Parliament. The National Confederation of PTAs, on similar lines, will ballot parents to mobilise their support for a campaign of civil disobedience. The Fight Against Education Cuts (FACE) has called a national demonstration on the 25 March.

Hearkening as it might be to mobilise masses of parents and education workers to demonstrate and lobby parliament, such protests in themselves guarantee

nothing. The danger is that, if the government or councils give in to such pressure at all, the result will be cuts in other areas.

Rank-and-file teachers and other education workers, must lead the fight, uniting with working class parents to demand a working class solution to the schools' funding crisis.

At present, the NUT, NAS/UWT and even the Secondary Heads Association are in favour of teachers refusing to take oversize classes—but that assumes that the battle for teachers' jobs has already been lost. The NUT's position of rejecting compulsory redundancies is in truth just that—a position. If teachers want to strike over job cuts, they must first consult with the union's "action committee", who at best will sanction local action, and that of a limited nature.

Limited action will achieve nothing. Only decisive, all out strike action, with the Tories reeling under the weight of parental protest, has a chance of winning.

The attack on schools is a national one. It demands a national response. The fight for jobs, the fight for pay, and the fight to maintain services are one fight. The teaching unions must be forced by their members to call all-out indefinite action until adequate funding is allocated according to needs. What these needs are should be determined by committees involving all those directly concerned: parents, teachers, pupils and accountable representatives of the local community.

Some might feel this is unrealistic. But then, many derided Workers Power for calling on councils, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to ignore government guidelines and set illegal budgets based on need. Now even Tory councillors are talking in these terms! ■

## POST OFFICE

# Strikes send bosses running to the judges

BY GR McCOLL

**R**OYAL MAIL management have wasted little time in pressing home the attacks against postal workers and their newly merged union, the Communication Workers' Union (CWU).

After January's defiant strike by thousands of London sorting and delivery workers, the bosses first port of call was the courts—with predictable results. Barely a week after the strike ended, Royal Mail's legal team were in court seeking damages. In Cardiff its lawyers sought an injunction on 12 February against a wildcat walk-out. The Tory anti-union laws are designed to stop effective strike action. And Post Office managers are making full use of them.

On 8 February, Mr Justice Drake—ex-public schoolboy and Oxford graduate—ruled in the High Court that the former Union of Communication Workers (UCW) was legally responsible for the wildcat strike which shut down

the Royal Mail's London operations for 48 hours. He fined the new CWU the "symbolic" sum of £7,500 and ordered it to pay 90% of court costs exceeding £100,000.

Describing his action as "very lenient" (cheers, m'lud!), the judge issued a stern warning that the CWU would not get off so lightly next time. These words of warning were aimed at a union rulebook so bureaucratic that, according to one legal pundit, "you have to ask permission to sneeze". Drake's judgement is ironic given that the union's national bureaucracy did its best to wash its hands of the strikes and herd its members back to work.

The ruling confirms the dangers faced by any trade unionists taking strike action, in the Post Office and elsewhere.

The outcome of the case means

that not only is strike action illegal without a "properly constituted" ballot, but that a national union could well face the sequestration of all its assets.

In order to avoid sequestration the union may decide to take action, including expulsion, against lay officials. Union bureaucrats like Alan Johnson, now joint general secretary of the CWU, may well choose this course of action. It is possible that two local officers at London's North West District Office, Andrew Curran and Bill Sexton, who were specifically named in court as "instigators" of the original strike, will face disciplinary action from national bureaucrats wanting to appease the judges.

In Tory Britain, a trade union cannot legally expel scabs, but could be obliged to expel shop stewards for the "crime" of defending their own members' jobs, wages and conditions. ■



# LOCAL GOVERNMENT CUTS

## A strategy to fight—and win!

BY PAUL MORRIS

avoid upsetting Tony Blair's cosy relationship with the bosses' media, go out of their way to avoid mass struggle flaring up.

Meanwhile, the anger of parents and governors escalates, crying out to be politically focused, but the union leaders sit in their offices content that their members, in their town at least, have avoided a fight.

It is vital that we break out of this self defeating and complacent attitude. The annual round of cuts, deeper this year than for many, should be seized as the opportunity for a national and, yes, political fightback against the Tories.

We need strike action. We need to force the Labour councils to set defi-

cit budgets. Above all we need unity between workers and consumers at local level. And the three things go together. Strike action has to be focused around demands that can really solve the problem of council cuts. One section striking while another stays at work can often lead simply to the cuts being shifted onto workers who are less well organised. To focus all out strikes across the council the aim has to be political: it has to be to force the council to set an illegal, deficit budget, to meet the needs of local people.

But that in turn leads to the question of organising the mass of local

people to fight back—something neither a Unison branch nor a moribund Labour Party ward is designed to do. You can only hope to successfully defy the government if you go out and organise mass resistance from the consumers of council services—as Liverpool and Lambeth showed in the 1980s.

The labour movement and its current leaders are a million miles from wanting or being able to organise the kind of resistance that's needed. But, as this month's national anti-cuts demo will show, there are masses of people ready to take action.

What we need, in every town, is an action committee, including representatives of the council unions, la-

bour parties, community organisations and local service consumers, along with any Labour councillor prepared to defy the law and vote for an illegal budget. The action committees should draw up a basic outline of a budget to meet local workers' needs. They should plan and co-ordinate a campaign of strikes, demos and the occupation of services under threat.

If that seems far fetched and utopian, that is because the Labour and trade union leaders have succeeded for far too long in telling us that nothing can be done. ■

## Coventry

**LABOUR CONTROLLED** Coventry City Council has announced £21 million cuts over the next three years. Education will be the main target.

In January opposition to the planned cuts grew, culminating in a mass lobby of the Council, supported by the NUT, Unison, the Trades Council, the Socialist Alliance, Militant, the SWP and Workers Power.

Despite the widespread anger, the ruling Labour group managed to get the cuts agreed and diffused the opposition. They achieved this result with a clever strategy, of which they are no doubt extremely proud, combining scare tactics, divide and rule, and complicity.

The Labour group began with a wily public relations exercise—a "public consultation"—carefully drawing the local unions into the process of deciding where cuts should fall. Unison shop stewards were invited to a meeting where they were asked to list the proposed cuts under two headings—"politically acceptable" and "politically unacceptable".

At the same time the council suggested that teachers and council workers might like to take a pay freeze to offset the cuts. This was a brilliant solution—for the Council. It allowed opposition to be deflected from the cuts toward opposition to the pay freeze. The local union leaders appeared radical in fighting the pay freeze, meanwhile doing nothing to stop the cuts! A fine example of how Labour and the union leadership can work hand in hand to do the Tories' dirty work.

On 6 February, its "consultation" exercise complete, the Council announced that 1995 would see £6 million cut from council spending. Three schools will close and five others will have classrooms shut. A total of 2,562 school places and 180 council workers' jobs will be axed. This "solution" won support from the Chair of the local governors association, who said it was "ingenious", and from the leader of the local NUT, Joan Ivens, who said:

"It looks like a really good balancing act between meeting the needs of Coventry children and satisfying the penny pinching regime in Whitehall". Since then opposition to the Coventry Council cuts, has largely petered out. This is despite the fact that the biggest opposition movement to the Tory government's cuts for years has been centred in the outlying towns of Warwick, Leamington and Stratford. Here, a middle class-led campaign, involving local Tories, has launched a campaign of illegal budgets and lobbies.

Instead of recognising the weakness of the Tories and being prepared to break the cap and go for an illegal budget, the Labour councillors in Coventry have ensured an opportunity to fight back has been squandered, workers will be sacked and services will be lost. And these Labour councillors will be the ones to carry out the cuts—how "ingenious"! ■



## Lambeth

**LAMBETH** IS one of the poorest boroughs in Britain. But it receives an ever smaller grant from central government. At present the council is "hung" between the Liberals and the Labour Party—each trying to foist more cuts onto the local population.

The council is proposing to cut £27 million from its own services and the same from education. Likely cuts include: 113 jobs in Central Services, the closure of three old peoples homes and three nurseries.

The council have also begun to victimise those who are fighting back. Four consumer advice workers have been charged with gross misconduct for the crime of informing their clients of the cuts. A demonstration has already taken place against this blatant attempt at intimidation by the council.

However, a "No" vote within Unison for industrial action has set-back the possibilities of a campaign against the cuts. Only a third of members voted.

But this setback is reversible. There have already been well attended lobbies calling for the defence of particular services. What is needed is a way to coordinate opposition to the cuts, linking up the various different struggles and presenting the council with a united fightback.

This position was raised at the last Unison branch meeting by a Workers Power supporter but was met with the argument that until a stronger Unison branch was built, little could be done.

*Mounting an effective fight is the way to build strong union branches.*

**We need an action committee against the cuts that could unite the various struggles. The strength of such a body is that it will overcome the section-by-section struggles.**

**We need to build a public meeting against all the cuts to link up workers prepared to take action against the cuts with users of the services. Out of this workers and local residents must convene an anti-cuts committee to begin to coordinate and centralise the struggle. ■**

**L**OCAL GOVERNMENT unions in Leicester are fighting the cuts.

On the day the council set the budget 500 workers and service users staged a loud and angry demonstration against a cuts package expected to result in over 400 redundancies mostly in education and social services. Hundreds of teachers took strike action on the day.

As expected Liberal and Labour councillors stitched up a deal. They had played the usual trick of suddenly finding a little extra money and hoped that they might get away with pretending that reduced cuts were no cuts.

They refused to break the spending cap but managed to find some money. But local workers have not been fooled. They continue to insist that fighting for no cuts means accepting no cuts.

The agreed budget will result in the closure of 30 old peoples homes and two day-care centres for people with

## Leicester

learning difficulties. At least 150 jobs would go. On top they are making the service users pay for the Tory cuts, charging the old and sick more for services such as meals on wheels.

Workers Power supporters have argued for strike action to force councillors to break the cap. Opposition to this position has come for members of the Socialist Workers Party and Militant. SWP members argued that there is no mood for action amongst workers in Leicester. But this time they have been proved wrong.

Leicester County branch of Unison voted to support a motion put by Workers Power for a ballot for all out, indefinite strike. The branch recognised that it would need to have hard arguments with members to win the ballot and so they agreed to launch a campaign to convince the member-

ship.

Their leaflet clearly spells out the reason for taking indefinite action:

"Experience shows that management can "sit out" limited strike action, it doesn't pose the threat that an all out indefinite strike does. They will be quite content to sit it out and wait for strikers to get tired and demoralised. The chance to play a second card rarely arrives, that is why our first card must also be our best card. We are not playing poker—we are fighting for jobs and services."

The union's campaign to win a "yes" vote will include leafleting, workplace meetings and stalls to win support from other workers and service users. They are determined to spend this month patiently building support.

The SWP could certainly learn a lesson or six from Leicester County Unison, lessons about how to relate to the mood of workers and how to fight for a strategy that can win. ■



## DEVOLUTION

# Labour flirts with nationalism

**T**HE DEATH of Nicholas Fairbairn last month has dealt yet another blow to that endangered species—the Scottish Tory MP. Not having adapted to its environment the impending total extinction of this species will be a source of little mourning.

The by-election caused by Fairbairn's death will, however, ensure that the question of Scottish devolution continues to stay in the spotlight, not just in Scotland but throughout Britain.

At the start of this year Tony Blair outlined Labour's proposals for regional government.

This provoked John Major to call on all true patriots to rally to the defence of the Union. Major's reasons are not difficult to fathom: when in a bind beat the nationalist drum in the hope of diverting attention away from the anger directed at the Tories over the mess they have made of everything else.

The Labour Party's proposal suggests devolving powers from central government to ten regional assemblies.

In Scotland a regional assembly would take on the powers of the Scottish Office. Westminster would retain control of foreign affairs, defence and central economic policy. The assembly would have the right to vary the amount of income tax paid by the Scots by up to three pence in the pound.

The Welsh assembly would have no powers over tax at all. English regional assemblies would probably only be able to supervise regional quangos.

Blair's reasons for opening up a devolution debate are, just like Major's nationalist rhetoric, more to do with hoped-for electoral benefits than a reflection of the national aspirations of the Scottish or Welsh peoples.

Blair is hoping that his proposals will win him more votes amongst middle class voters and the bosses.

Part of the consultation exercise is aimed at local employers. Many business people believe that regional government can help them prosper.

Already bosses like Sir Bruce Patullo, chief executive of the Bank of Scotland, have announced that they are interested in Blair's plans.

They have their eye on the range of business grants and subsidies available from the European Union (EU). Experience shows that the EU is more likely to respond to regional bids. For sections of the bosses, devolution could provide a more flexible and immediately responsive tier of government.

The electoral base of the nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales—the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru—is predominantly middle class: just the kind of voters that Blair is determined to win for his new look Labour Party.

Both the SNP and Plaid have enjoyed something of an electoral revival in recent years. The SNP succeeded in winning a seat from Labour in the European elections last year. Overall they secured 33% of the vote

*Both Major and Blair have their own narrow electoral reasons for stoking up the debate over devolved government. Sheila Phillips explains how socialists should respond.*

in Scotland.

Blair hopes that the plans for a Scottish and Welsh Assembly will undermine nationalist support. This is, however, a high risk strategy.

The current Labour proposals fall well short of the aspirations of the nationalists and they may even add to the strength of nationalist feelings. Alex Salmond, leader of the SNP, has already made it clear that the SNP would use the Scottish Assembly as a platform from which to fight for Scottish independence.

Blair clearly wants to use the devolution issue as a safe means of distinguishing the Labour Party from the Tories. On an increasing number of issues—privatisation, education, law and order, taxation—it is difficult to see what difference electing Blair's party would make to most people.

While right wing Tories demand that Major put some clear blue water between the two parties, Blair hopes to

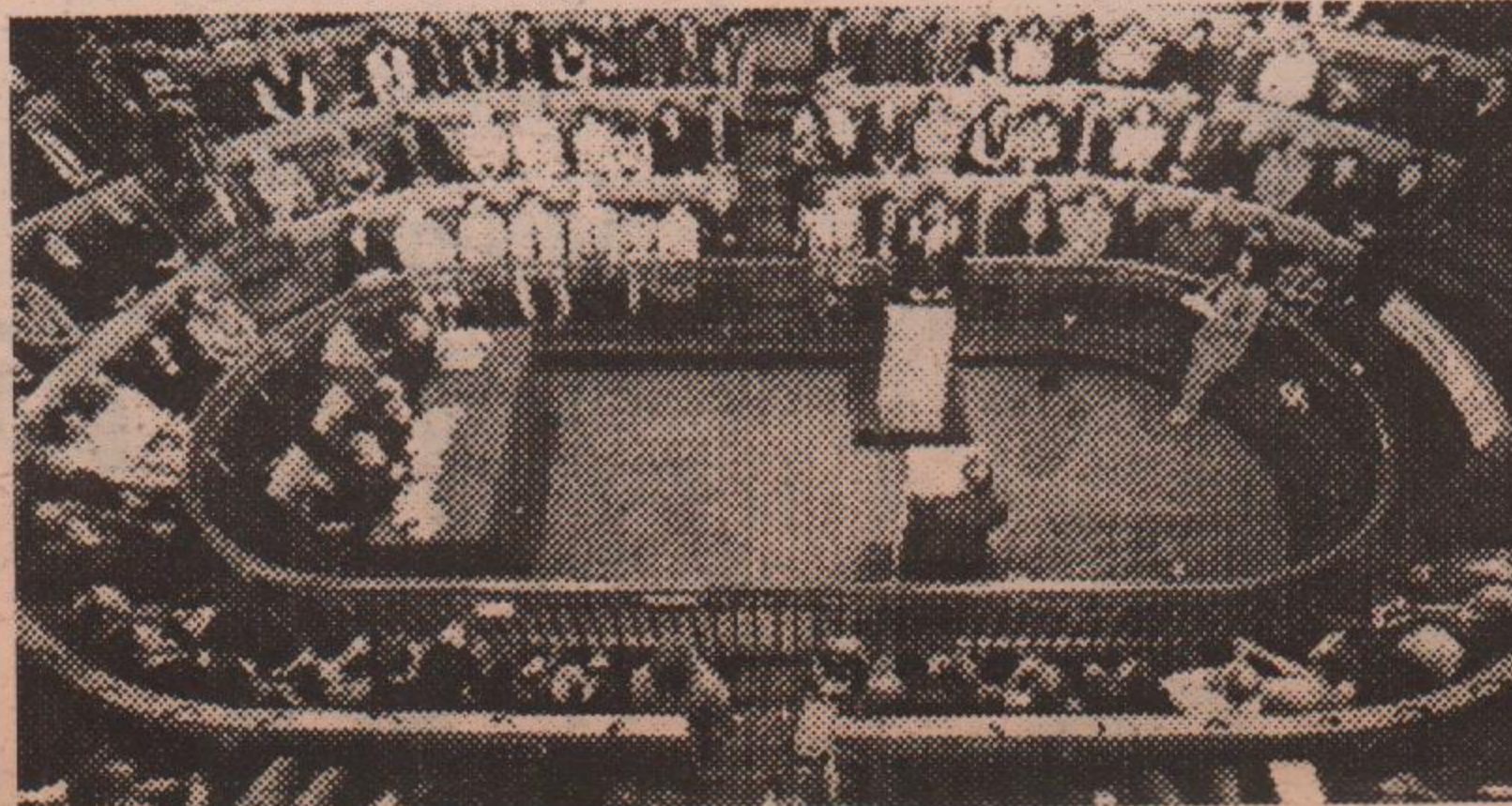
create a pale pink puddle.

But Blair runs the risk of causing a devolution deluge.

Nationalism is enjoying a revival in Scotland and Wales. The most obvious reason is that, despite consistently voting against the Tories, the Scots and Welsh have suffered from

sixteen years of Tory government. Local industries—steel and shipbuilding in Scotland, mining in Wales—have been decimated. And Scottish people were used as guinea pigs for the poll tax.

But this is only part of the story. Labour also has a sorry history in Wales and Scotland. Despite huge local electoral support, Labour has done little to protect workers from the attacks of central government. Instead, they have mostly helped to implement the cuts, close factories and privatise industries.



The "great debate"—Scotland's future parliament?

## REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

# Diversion from real issues

**LABOUR PROPOSES** to set up ten new regional assemblies. **Should workers support regional government? No.** Nothing in these proposals would increase the power and control of working class communities over local government. In many ways it is a diversion from getting that control.

Some have opposed regional assemblies within England on the grounds that it would be artificial. After all, while Scotland and Wales have their own national identity, few argue that there is a Midlands or an East Anglian equivalent.

But this is not a substantial objection. The truth is that forms of regional government already exist.

The Scottish and Welsh Offices are extremely powerful bodies. In 1994 the Tories set up regional offices throughout England. These are run entirely by civil servants, controlled by central government, not local people. Their responsibilities include trade and industry, transport, employment and the environment.

Alongside these offices, local authorities are increasingly coming together to form regional organisations, such as the West Midlands regional forum and the standing conference of East Anglian authorities. They act as coordinating bodies between local authorities.

Both of these initiatives are being driven by the need to relate to developments inside the EU. The Maastricht Treaty established the



EU Committee for the Regions. At present this body has only advisory powers but it is acting as an organising centre for regional lobbyists who have established offices in Brussels to obtain regional grants.

None of these regional bodies are representative of local communities. None are elected.

We do get to vote for local councils, but the extent of their power and control has been limited year after year by central government since the Tories were elected in 1979. Regional assemblies as proposed by Labour will not resolve this problem. Blair does not propose that such assemblies stop the opting out of schools, reverse Local Management of Schools, abolish hospital trusts and give control of the NHS to local authorities.

Another limitation on the power of local authorities is the development of totally unaccountable and undemocratic quangos. Staffed in the main by the friends of Tory politicians and local businessmen, these bodies only

represent the Tories and the interests of its business backers.

That is why commercial interests encroach more and more on the NHS, that is why more and more well-paid jobs are created for their managerial mates, while nurses are denied a decent wage.

Education has been similarly affected. With the introduction of Local Management of Schools, governing bodies have been given enormous power in schools. Yet the majority of governors on every single governing body are not elected.

We oppose all attacks on existing local government, all narrowing of their powers. We should oppose increasing centralisation of government and the proliferation of unaccountable, unelected organisations. We need to fight for local government which is fully accountable to its electorate—one which cannot hide behind the excuse that they don't raise the taxes, so they can't stop the cuts.

Locally elected councils should have control over education, health, environmental and social services. And these councils should be made accountable to the local community which uses these services. Councilors should be made recallable so that if they do not carry out the wishes of their electorate, they can be removed from office before their term up. They should have the right to control their own finances, raising money through a steeply progressive local wealth tax.

Blair's determination to change the Labour Party's Clause Four is a further bit of evidence for many, if any were needed, that Labour has no intention of fighting for even the most limited form of socialism.

Naturally, many look to the nationalists for answers.

The danger is that workers in Scotland and Wales will decide that they are better off throwing in their lot with their "own" local bosses, rather than having to suffer under English bosses.

This would be a grave mistake for the working class. Nationalism divides workers, so that instead of fighting with other workers in a common cause against all the capitalists, workers side with one set of bosses against another.

But it is not good enough to respond to this danger with a flat denunciation of nationalism. Nationalist illusions can't be dispelled simply by telling people they are illusions.

If workers in Scotland and Wales want independence from Britain, obstructing their right to break away would only increase their feelings of national oppression.

That is why Marxists support the right of all nations to self determination, providing that doing so would not in itself oppress others. This may be the only way that workers will come to see the true rapacious nature of their "own" bosses.

But do a majority of workers in Scotland and Wales want independence? Opinion polls would suggest not.

Recent polls show that in Scotland 61% are in favour of some kind of devolution. But only 36% favour independence from England.

A referendum in Scotland and Wales would be the best way of assessing the desire for national independence. A campaign around such a referendum—in which socialists would vote No to devolution or secession—would allow the arguments for a working class, not a nationalist, solution to gain a hearing. ■

Large conurbations, like London, Strathclyde, and Greater Manchester should have elected local government bodies, along the lines of those the Tories have abolished or want to abolish.

But we do not need regional assemblies across the country to achieve effective local government. We need a party committed to giving powers back to the cities and towns that have been taken away from them.

If Labour really wants to be more "democratic" than the Tories, it should commit itself to the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords, a written constitution and a system of proportional representation.

Blair would die rather than do that. But even a Labour Party with such a programme would not deliver real democracy. Democracy—local, regional or national—under capitalism means the intermittent election of professional politicians who, once in power, can largely ignore the needs of the people they represent.

While we fight for the greatest democracy possible under capitalism, and demand that Labour implements this, we know that this will not give power to the majority, to the working class. We argue for a workers republic, with the mass of the population organised through delegates to directly elected permanent councils—workers' councils—to decide on political and economic questions. ■



## FILM

## Bolshie bandit



**A** MILLION girls went through what she went through, and I wanted to make it the story of those millions, to give you the experience of being an oppressed, raped, low-caste woman for two hours."

Shekhar Kapur, the director of *Bandit Queen*, has certainly achieved his aim. Going into the cinema, I braced myself for a harrowing tale. Just as well I did. The film is based on the life of Phoolan Devi, an Indian peasant girl successively abused by her husband, local high-caste village men, police and a bandit leader.

I also expected to leave the cinema feeling good about seeing a woman, for once, giving as good as she got, beating her husband and shooting the high-caste rapists. Yet somehow I didn't. The horror at the

Clare Heath reviews  
*Bandit Queen*  
directed by Shekhar Kapur  
On general release

suffering of this girl, and all the other girls and women who are subject to child marriage, and then rape and ridicule if they refuse to conform, never left me.

Each of the rapes left me in no doubt about the fact that rape is about power not about sex. Phoolan Devi had to be put in her place, as a wife, as a low caste peasant and as a woman in a man's gang. Never an equal.

Escaping her husband, she finds little sympathy in her family. Nor does she get much solidarity from other women. Ground down and op-

pressed themselves they are, at best, unmoved and at worst complicit in the abuse she suffered.

Having teamed up with bandits Phoolan Devi became a heroine for masses of low caste people. She eventually surrendered to the authorities, but in so doing exacted promises of improved education and welfare for the "lower castes". Her ability to inspire these people is not shown in the film. It concentrates instead on her own apparent indestructibility and determination to fight back.

The social role of the bandits in the film is not really clear—some are shown to be corrupt and immoral, others operate as Robin Hoods, robbing the rich and giving to the poor. At one point, Devi hopefully exclaims that "bandits have no caste" but this turns out to be a utopian dream. There was a suggestion that Muslim bandits were more progressive than their Hindu counterparts, but I was not really sure why.

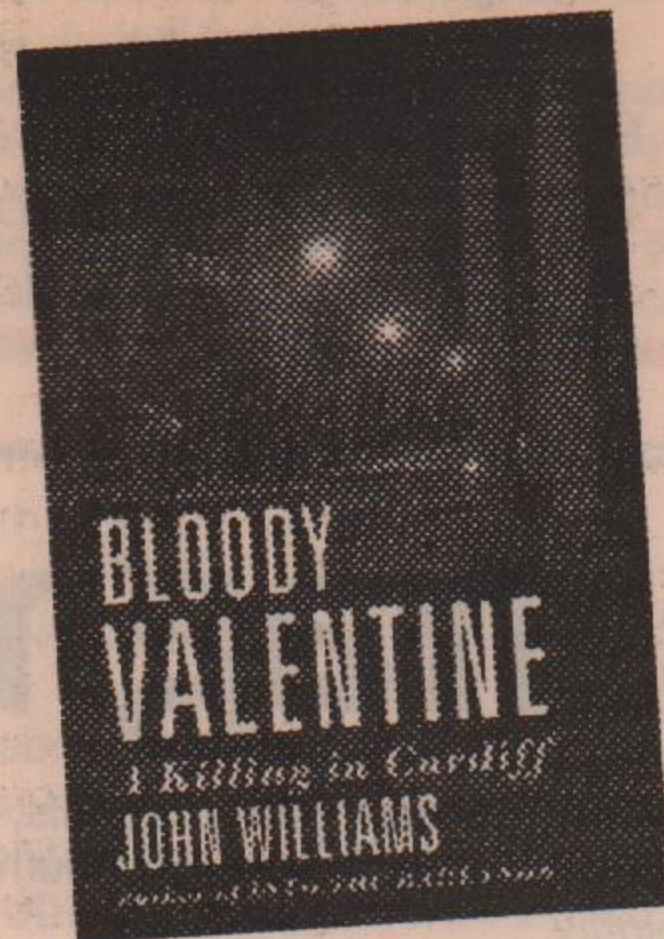
At the end of the film I was left with other questions: wondering at the continued violence that women and low caste people are subject to in India and whether this episode of rebellion led to any improvements in their lives.

This film is well worth seeing. It is a film which exposes the oppression of women, but it also reveals that there are always people who will resist. And, for once, we have a film which shows a true story where the men who perpetrated the abuse of women got what was coming to them.■

## BOOK

## Chandler meets Cardiff 3

John Underwood reviews  
*Bloody Valentine*  
by John Williams  
(Harper Collins, 1995 £5.99)



**I**T SOUNDED extraordinary: like a plot from a penny dreadful... it was too perfect."

John Williams is a fan of American crime fiction. The case of the Cardiff 3 had all the ingredients: a young prostitute horrifically murdered; five innocent black men framed for the crime; drugs, pimps and a knife-wielding maniac litter the pages.

Lurking in the background is the shadowy presence of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC), desperately needing to have the murder solved so as to get on with obliterating the colourful Butetown community. John Williams cares about this community. He was a frequent visitor during his youth, and again more recently to write this book.

Indeed, this personal odyssey forms a large part of the book, recording, Raymond Chandler style, his every step in the company of Malik and Lloyd, leaders of the Cardiff 3 Campaign. You get the feeling he would like to have been beaten up just once during his investigations, so as to sit with his Marlboros and battered old Remington banging out the Story the World Must Know.

Yet the book deserves to be read. For those who do not know the basic details of the Cardiff 3 case, they are all here, including information about the life of Lynette White, the victim whose killer is yet to be found. The

case was the longest murder trial in British legal history and revealed in full depth the racism of the police and legal system. As Williams points out, it was the multi-racial community of Butetown itself which was put on trial.

Williams attempts to bring that community to life, and through lengthy interviews with the accused men, their friends and families, carries it off with some success. He certainly spares no details of the backbiting and domestic violence among the docklands prostitutes. However, while this may grab the attention, it far from conveys a complete picture of the area.

The main weakness of the book is that, despite the important political ramifications of the case, Williams has practically nothing to say about politics. He shows state racism at work, but gives no insight into why it exists. Having little involvement in the campaign, he devotes pages to

the one demonstration he attends, but reports nothing of the extensive efforts of campaign activists to win support within the labour movement. He makes numerous sideswipes at the "Trots" who, as he saw it, climbed aboard the Cardiff 3 bandwagon, whilst never recognising the central role that these "Trots" (including Workers Power) played in the campaign, nor how readily they were accepted by local activists.

The political opinions Williams does express, are infected by his usual vague, elegiac romanticism: somehow, if the Cardiff 3 Campaign wins, the community may be strengthened enough to save Butetown from the developers, and even gain the confidence to turn the Bay Development to its own advantage.

This is nonsense on two counts. In the first place the Cardiff 3 Campaign, for all its merits, was essentially a legal struggle backed by a publicity and fundraising machine. This type of campaign, enthusiastically endorsed by the SWP, does not build a mass activist base and does little to change consciousness. In the second place, the Bay Development will never serve the needs of Butetown: it will destroy it. If Butetown is to survive, it will need the kind of organised community defence which the campaign failed to build.

Still, John Williams has fulfilled his own ambition now, and can no doubt leave Butetown behind him. Anyone who compares local hard man John Actie to his pet Rotweiler is obviously not considering a long term stay in the area.■

## BBC heads downmarket

**I**N ANY REVOLUTION the first target is the TV station. Counter-revolutions tend to head straight for the TV station too, for similarly obvious reasons.

So what's going on at the BBC—revolution or counter-revolution?

The current debate about the future of the BBC has assembled some strange allies and enemies.

John Birt, head of BBC, is the spearhead of Thatcherism in the corporation: slashing jobs, attacking the unions and introducing privatisation by the back door. But Birt, together with Radio 4 controller Liz Forgan, has recently produced a document demanding that the BBC turns to the working class, to non-London audiences, to youth, and to ethnic minorities. Under Birt, the BBC has also recently established positive discrimination quotas through which it aims to employ 50% women and 8% from ethnic minorities by the year 2000.

## Motley

Against Birt is ranged a motley coalition of educated, liberal TV pundits, a collection of young, right wing Conservative ideologues, known as "The Group", and a stage army of outraged middle class viewers and listeners, mainly from London and the south east. They claim that Birt's commitment to a "more populist tone" is an excuse for churning out patronising pap, and is needlessly annoying the middle class audiences of BBC2 and Radios 3 and 4. Basically it is an alliance of *Guardian* readers and *Telegraph* readers.

A sinister note emerging from within this camp is the argument that black people are over-represented, both in specialised programmes and in the BBC workforce.

So which side should socialists take? The short answer is neither. Fundamentally this is a debate within the ruling class about how best to fill our heads with pro-capitalist propaganda and charge us £84 a year for the privilege.

The BBC is one of the few survivors of the post war capitalist consensus. As a non-profit making, nationalised industry, it was designed to be a "public service" with a mission to improve our minds and help forge a common British national culture.

Under its first boss, Lord Reith, the BBC pursued its mission to educate, and to achieve "excellence" in broadcasting standards, with a vengeance. The problem was, since the working class had no control at all over what was produced, we were simply fed what our rich and educated "betters" thought good for us. As a leading member of "The Group" recently put it, "the BBC's job is to better people, not pander to what they want."

Like school dinners, the expansion of the BBC was part of the post war gains of the workers. But, just as many children prefer McDonalds to school dinners, many working class people prefer the brash populism of ITV to the squeaky clean preaching of the BBC.

That does not mean commercial TV is more working class. It only provides a more trashy version of capitalist culture for working class consumption.

Now the BBC, under Birt, has decided to follow ITV down that path. If you want a vision of that future, imagine the national lottery programme, or Noel's House Party—both praised in Birt's new document—every night of the week!

Birt is moving to popularise the BBC for sound capitalist market reasons. His market researchers have told him that the BBC is particularly unpopular amongst "black and Asian viewers", workers and youth. His avowed intention of playing to these audiences has provoked howls of anguish from the white middle-class, suburban audience which tends to think of the BBC as "its" station.

## Solution

To divide the viewing public into "market sectors" also goes against the Reithian ideal of serving the whole nation, inculcating the same values across the class divide.

So what's the solution? The BBC should have an equal opportunities policy—in broadcasting and employment. We should fight to defend everything that is progressive, informative and challenging about the BBC's output, just as we should for ruling class culture in general.

But to make programmes that really serve the working class, youth and black people we have to do something Birt and Forgan are not contemplating. We have to seize hold of the BBC and place it under the control of its workers and its viewers.

At present the BBC is run by an appointed quango of the great and good—from bishops to right wing union leaders. They make the overall policy. Programmes are made and commissioned solely by graduates—who now include a majority of women, apparently, and many black people. Such people, however liberal or "in tune" with workers and youth, should not be left to monopolise broadcasting.

## Technology

The technology exists to make a real revolution in broadcasting. Talk radio could be taken into your workplace and community but minus the restrictions which allow right wing Tories to sound off but "politics" to be banned.

A whole network of video journalists and activists is already recording youth struggles and youth cultures on video, but is denied access to the airwaves. Instead of a single, large monopoly making programmes "targeted" at different sections of the working class, from above, we could have—using cable technology—hundreds of channels, with programmes produced by, for example, black people, Scottish youth, Birmingham car workers.

Would this mean a decline in "quality". Does it mean abandoning the notion of "excellence" and refusing to recognise, as one pundit complained, "that Bach is a better composer than Gary Glitter"? No. All the expertise in programme making and planning—which exists in ITV and Channel 4 as well as the BBC—could be put in the service of the working class. The creativity this could unleash would further the advance of culture enormously.

Now that *would* be public service broadcasting!■



## BRITISH STATE

## No strategic interest?

“THE BRITISH Government reaffirm that they will uphold the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland. On this basis they reiterate that they have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland.”

The Tories now admit what socialists have always insisted upon—that Belfast and Derry are not ordinary cities within the United Kingdom, like Birmingham or Dundee. They are Irish cities ripped away from a united Ireland in 1921.

Decades of uninterrupted struggle by the anti-Unionist population in these and other cities testified to the desire of many to be part of a united Ireland again.

The majority of Irish people, who voted for independence in the election of 1918, never accepted the violation of their democratic rights. Britain went to war to prevent independence. Now, hypocritically, using the rhetoric of the right of self-determination for the people of Ireland, the British government is engaged in a protracted process of de-colonisation, as self-interested as any that it carried out in the 1950s in Africa or Asia.

In 1921 the partition of Ireland was not the preferred option of the British government. But the protestant minority in Ireland had powerful allies in the British ruling class and the profoundly undemocratic partition was carried through.

Despite their reticence at the time there were sound reasons for the British bosses keeping part of the North of Ireland. Today it is a dwindling asset. There are no military reasons for securing the “western approaches” to Britain by garrisoning the six counties. Economically, Belfast is no longer an important part of an engineering, shipbuilding and defence sector, integrated into the political economy of British capitalism within the wider Empire.

For the last 25 years the British state has been engaged in a low intensity, expensive war that, by its own admission, it cannot win—even if it can avoid defeat at the hands of the IRA. Periodic bombing campaigns in



Britain have been embarrassing, disruptive and on occasion very damaging to business.

In the early 1990s the IRA approached the British government and signalled its preparedness to cut a deal and lay down its arms. The Tories grabbed the opportunity. As long as Britain was not pushed out of Ireland by a revolutionary struggle there was much to be gained by a settlement.

The framework document builds on the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 but goes further. First, the Tories have agreed to amend or replace the Government of Ireland Act (1920) in order to enshrine the principles contained in the new framework document in legislation.

Secondly, the agreement sets up a North-South body. This would include representatives from the new assembly in the North and representatives of the Irish parliament. Those elected to the assembly would have a duty to serve on the North-South body so the Unionists could not boycott it.

They would meet to “discharge or oversee delegated executive or consultative functions, as appropriate” on issues they decide they want to include.

Moreover:

“the British Government have no limits of their own to impose on the nature and extent of functions which could be agreed for designation at the outset or subsequently between the Irish government and the Northern Ireland administration.”

As regards “harmonisation” the document suggests a whole range of possible areas for agreement: training programmes, vocational qualifications, agreed standards in transport, education, health, and economic and agricultural policy. Immediate executive powers could be adopted with regard to EC programmes, tourism, culture and the environment.

Of course, all these powers could only be exercised if both sides so desire. There can be no majorities and minorities, only unanimity. This is to placate the Unionists who would be a minority in any such cross-border body. Despite this, the measures are designed to inch the Unionists towards as much of a united Ireland as they see in their self-interest.

No doubt the £1 billion of EU funds likely to be made available for North-South use up to the end of the century as a “peace dividend” will be a large incentive.

The real obstacle to the British state’s plans are not, in the short term, Sinn Fein, but the Unionists. If they refuse to agree to anything but their own idea of a devolved government, that will be unacceptable to Sinn Fein and the SDLP. Then the British government will have to decide whether it will go over the heads of the Unionist politicians and appeal to their supporters in a referendum, or simply by-pass them and increase London-Dublin co-operation. ■

Peace,  
no just

With the publication of the framework document, the Irish into a new stage. Despite its soothing language it has had at the mouth because of its commitment to cross border ins it falls far short of a united Ireland. Why has the British gove

strategic interest” in Northern Ireland? Why has Sinn Fein made positive noises about a deal that will require the IRA to disarm and leaves the final decision on any deal to a “majority” within an undemocratic northern state? Why are the Unionist politicians so at odds with the protestant capitalists of Northern Ireland? And what should anti-imperialists say about the framework document? On these pages Keith Harvey explains the precarious balance of class forces within and between the parties to the peace process, and argues that the framework document can only mean peace without justice.



**M**OST BUSINESSMEN in Northern Ireland are Unionists. Yet the Northern Ireland CBI Chairman, Doug Riley, welcomed the framework document:

“Growing the economy of the whole of Ireland is in everyone’s interests... where an all-Ireland context is seen to be the most effective approach, then we will support it.”

Pat Duggan, chief executive of Mackie International and leading Ulster manufacturer, was even more strident:

“I am not afraid to say I favour cross-border bodies. We need to integrate our economy with that of the south.”

In contrast, Unionist politicians were denouncing the framework document weeks before it was published. When it finally emerged Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Ian Paisley attacked it for pointing down “a one-way street to a united Ireland”. His deputy, Peter Robinson denounced it for serving Ulster with “an eviction notice to leave the United Kingdom.” The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) were hardly friendly.

Why is there such a difference between the economic and political leaders of Northern Ireland?

On the face of it the framework

document gives the Unionists a number of guarantees against a united Ireland. Any changes need the consent of all the parties, the consent of a majority of the people in the six counties and the consent of Westminster—the so-called “triple lock”. But the shrill denunciations by Paisley on each radio interview, the walking out of TV studios by UUP leaders when a Sinn Fein spokesperson comes on the phone, all reflect the fear that real economic and political changes are underway which will erode the privilege of the Unionists. This is precipitating the fragmentation of Unionism along class lines.

During the early years after partition, Unionism spoke with one voice. The anti-Unionist population faced a unified bloc of reactionary classes, the so-called “Orange bloc”. The Unionist bourgeoisie sponsored and nurtured this cross-class alliance with the protestant labour aristocracy and middle class from the 1880s onwards as a bulwark against the growing claims of the nationalist movement for independence.

Independence (i.e. separation from the United Kingdom) spelled doom for the Unionist bourgeoisie since they were, at that time, a relatively well integrated part of the British ruling class. Their fundamental wealth and property were based on British and Empire markets. Continued access to these was essential. When the British could neither retain the whole of Ireland as a colony, nor grant all of it independence (both considered as better options in Westminster), then they conceded to the partition claims of the Unionist bourgeoisie.

Pogroms, ethnic cleansing and gerrymandering were all after effects of the birth of the Six County state of Northern Ireland in the 1921-23 period.

It was specifically a “protestant state for a protestant people”, designed to defend and extend the “protestant ascendancy”. Hence its permanent and inherent instability.

The local state machine, with considerable autonomy and devolved powers, persecuted its “disloyal” minority—republicans, Catholics. It could

neither integrate them as equals, nor allow them to unify with their southern majority.

The Unionist bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy promoted all this so long as they needed this state as a necessary political arrangement to guarantee their continued economic power.

But the pattern of trade and production of the Unionist bourgeoisie has changed considerably since the Second World War. Its main markets are not the rest of the UK but elsewhere in Europe or North America. Most foreign investment into Northern Ireland does not originate in the UK. Common membership of the EC since 1973 has harmonised many business rules and regulations between Northern Ireland and the South, despite the low level of trade between the two.

Thus there is no obvious reason why the Unionist bosses could not consider alternative political arrangements if these arrangements create the prospect of greater social stability (and investment). The key would be that this outweighs the definite advantages that currently arise from having

a permanently divided working class, with the lowest wages in the UK, amongst them..

But it is not simply within the power of the Unionist bourgeoisie to dissolve the Orange bloc. There is the small matter of the protestant working class and presbyterian middle-class.

While the dominance of protestant Unionist big business in Northern Ireland is assured whatever the political arrangements, what cannot survive the dissolution of the old institutions of protestant rule are the privileges of the protestant working class and lower middle class.

Important and previously dominant sections of the protestant middle class and working class are desperate to keep a hold on to the machinery of privilege in order to keep themselves above the conditions of their catholic counterparts.

The DUP see proportional representation, and any voice for Dublin, as inevitably weakening their ability to maintain those privileges.

The DUP’s middle class following are mostly fundamentalist presbyterian

## Unionist bloc fragments



# but ice

peace process has moved  
Unionist politicians foaming  
titions. At the same time  
government declared it has "no



## SINN FEIN

# Anti-imperialism disarmed?

**I**N 1974 Gerry Adams was commander of the IRA's West Belfast Brigade. That year Sinn Fein and the IRA denounced the Sunningdale proposals for a Council of Ireland and a power-sharing executive in the North. They said that it was a betrayal of republicanism's goal of a united Ireland.

Twenty-one years on, the new framework document contains very similar proposals to the Sunningdale Agreement signed by the Tories, Dublin and the SDLP. But this time Gerry Adams has welcomed the framework document because "its ethos is for one-Ireland and an all-Ireland arrangement."

So what has changed? The short answer is, Gerry Adams and the republican movement's view of British imperialism.

Sinn Fein no longer see a united Ireland as an immediate revolutionary democratic demand, realisable by smashing the RUC and kicking out the British troops by armed struggle.

Rather, a united Ireland is a long term aspiration, part of their maximum programme. They believe it will draw closer because the British want to withdraw. Adams and McGuinness came to the conclusion several years ago that their own armed struggle, whilst it helped create this desire to go, had become dysfunctional, since it gave the protestants the pretext to blackmail successive British governments.

Sinn Fein has accepted the need to persuade the Unionists rather than use violence to coerce them into a united Ireland. They expect a future British government with the support of the USA to play a role in persuading the loyalists. This means that the republican leadership have in fact accepted a constitutionalist perspective.

In the end, what they failed to achieve in the last 25 years through the ballot and the bomb, they hope to achieve in the next 25 years through demographic changes and economic co-operation in a deepening European Union federal state.

But that is the music of the future. What really animates Adams today is the desire to get Sinn Fein involved in direct all-party discussions on the framework document. This is crucial if the republican rank and file are to

feel that the ceasefire has put their leaders in a position of influence in bourgeois politics.

To get even this far Adams will have to negotiate with the IRA on demilitarisation. Without this the Unionists will simply block Sinn Fein's integration into all-party talks. If and when such discussions get under way, Adams will have to be seen to be making progress on clearing up the wreckage of twenty plus years of war.

In return for demilitarisation Sinn Fein will push for an amnesty for republican prisoners. This will probably be conceded, in tandem with the release of loyalist prisoners to assuage any danger of a protestant backlash, in a series of stages, based on the seriousness of the offences. Sinn Fein will also need to secure a major reform of the military-police presence in the catholic ghettos. Again this will probably take the form of a timetable of troop withdrawals,

to follow on the "back to barracks" move.

A reform of the RUC, its "desectionarianisation", will also be necessary. As events in late February in Derry illustrated, the RUC remains a loyalist state machine, still capable of running amok. But its reform to the satisfaction of republicans could only be accomplished by mass recruitment of catholics, possibly of former IRA volunteers, and a community policing system.

Last but not least, Sinn Fein will have to participate in any "power-sharing" assembly in order to get a share of EU and US grants for the community it represents.

The barriers within the republican movement against Adams implementing his side of the "bargain" are at the moment very weak.

They consist of the republican hardliners—the one third or so of the IRA army council that opposed the ceasefire, and marginal elements like



republican Sinn Fein and Bernadette McAliskey. But the anti-Unionist working class at the moment is still, by and large, enjoying the immediate results of the ceasefire too much to feel disillusioned by the limited fruits of political negotiations about a long-term settlement. ■

## ABOLISH THE SECTARIAN STATE

**T**HE IRA CEASEFIRE began on 31 August 1994 and that of the loyalist paramilitaries on 13 October. British Army daytime patrols ceased in November. Since then, apart from the odd IRA punishment shooting and RUC provocation, the streets have been quiet. Catholics and protestants drive their cars to the city centre again for a night out. The pubs are fuller than they have been for years.

The peace is real, if fragile. The fact that ordinary working class people enjoy peace is completely understandable. But at what price is peace being bought? If the peace does little or nothing to alter the fundamentals of most workers' social and economic existence then the peace will not last.

Revolutionary socialists never advocated the strategy of armed struggle by a few hundred IRA volunteers against a huge military force such as the British Army. It could never achieve its declared aim of forcing the British out. Eventually, Adams and the Republican leadership accepted this fact.

But they have drawn the wrong lessons. They are prepared to hand over the arms accumulated by the IRA, provided that there is demilitarisation on the British side. They are prepared to do this because they think that it is inevitable that, some way down the road, the British will leave the North and Ireland will be united.

This is totally naive. To enter the talks the IRA will be made to surrender much of its weaponry. The British state will have a monopoly of armed force again in Northern Ireland. Once disarmed it will be difficult for the nationalist community to defend itself from loyalist or state attacks. The same is not true of the British, or the protestants with their close connections to the British state.

That is why revolutionary socialists opposed the ceasefire. We do not want a continuation or a resurrection of a low level, ineffective guerrilla campaign. We want a mass political movement, against British rule and for a 32 county Irish workers' republic.

But the ceasefire was not designed to place the weaponry under the control of the anti-unionist community or to switch the anti-imperialist

struggle over to mass political protest.

It is naive to disarm and place your faith in a policy of self-interest on the part of the British government before substantial political reform is in place.

Sinn Fein will argue that demilitarisation by the IRA is the price that must be paid for the release of prisoners, the reform of the RUC and the dismantling of Army observation posts. But there has always been another way to achieve these things other than trade-offs around the table, one which Workers Power and our Irish comrades in the Irish Workers Group have consistently fought for: mass action, strikes, demonstrations and an all Ireland fight against exploitation and oppression.

But justice is not simply or mainly about retaining a capacity for an armed defence of an oppressed community.

Many workers in Derry and West Belfast commented, on reading the framework document, that it said nothing about jobs or services. When unemployment in parts of Catholic communities is doggedly stuck at levels of 20% people can be forgiven for wondering what's so great about more political rights.

If there is no commitment to use them to improve the lives of people, no commitment to give an elected assembly the resources for education and job creation, what use will these rights be? And what is so great about unity with the South when its government cannot guarantee jobs for 20% of its own population, when it insists on holding wages down year after year in the public sector? These are also legitimate concerns of protestant workers.

When peace means freedom from the fear of being attacked by a loyalist death squad or of having your house ripped apart by the British Army this can only be welcomed.

But it would be a mistake to extend that peace to the Unionist and British bosses in the North, or capitalists in the South. It is necessary to take advantage of the present peace to wage a war—an economic and political class war—against all the enemies of social justice.

Revolutionary socialists fight for a united Ireland. The division of the workers into two states and two antagonistic communities within one of

those states has served no one but the Orange, Green and British bosses for the last seventy years.

But a united Ireland will not come about by reconciling churches or "traditions". The Protestant workers can only really fight for a decent life if they break their ties with their bosses. Above all, this means breaking with the defence of the sectarian statelet and their privileges over the catholic workers. That this is possible can be seen in the present divisions within the unionist camp in the reaction to the peace process. Unfortunately, because the protestant workers have the least to gain from a capitalist united Ireland, at present many are amongst the most solid opponents of the peace deal. But a class-based appeal to break with the orange bloc could persuade sections of protestant workers to side with their catholic brothers and sisters, against all bosses, and all reactionary religions, north and south.

In breaking with their reactionary past protestant workers do not have to reconcile themselves to Irish nationalism. On the contrary, they can only be won over if anti-imperialists place themselves in the forefront of the fight against all that is reactionary in the Irish Republic, especially the overbearing influence of the church in the affairs of state and on the conduct of private life.

Neither protestant nor catholic worker has anything to fear from an Irish workers republic. It would be totally secular while providing for all religious faiths to be pursued privately without fear of persecution or defamation. A workers' republic could even grant to any part of Ireland any form of autonomy that the democratic majority living there wished, providing this did not entail privileges for that community or oppression for another community.

None of this is to be found in the framework document since its purpose is to bring about a political accommodation between the various interests of British, Orange and Green capitalists within Europe. Its aim is to stabilise a regime of capitalist exploitation for the 21st century. It seeks to placate and soothe the antagonistic "traditions". Our aim is to replace them all with working class international solidarity and the all-Ireland workers' republic. ■

bigots who will not be persuaded to accept reform under any circumstances. The DUP's working class following could face massive lay-offs from the scaling down of the British and Ulster security machine and the final application of rationalisation to the "old" industries of the North East. That is why Paisley and the DUP are intransigent opponents of the framework document.

In 1974 Unionism was united and strong enough to launch a reactionary general strike to destroy the Sunningdale agreement, which was very similar in many respects to the latest initiative.

Today things are different. First of all, the Unionist ruling class does not speak with one voice on relations with Dublin and the benefits of growing economic co-operation within the EU.

Second, the raw industrial muscle of the protestant working class has been much reduced.

Third, and most important, the Sunningdale agreement was denounced by the IRA and protestant paramilitaries of the UDA. Sunningdale was meant to get agreement to bring about an end to the armed struggle. It failed. In 1995 the framework document is launched after the armed struggle has been conditionally abandoned,

on both sides.

This has further divided the protestant community, with many workers placing the continuation of non-violence above constitutional issues. The enthusiasm of the loyalist paramilitaries and their tiny parties (PUP, UDP) to come in from the cold, and their conditional welcome for the framework document, further erodes Unionist unity. The DUP could be outflanked in the inner city areas by the overtly "working class", if totally reactionary, paramilitary parties. As a result of these divisions at the moment the Unionist opponents of the peace process are utterly unable to halt it and have so far been unable to mobilise significant forces to protest against it.

The bigots in the DUP and UUP have to be prepared to exercise their vetoes in full knowledge that they will be blamed for a resumption of the armed struggle. In the months ahead pressure will mount on Molyneaux, or his successor, and on Paisley: from their rank and file, from the CBI and from the British government.

But, if "Ulster Says No" again then direct rule, renewed anti-Unionist revolt and further Dublin-London collaboration over the Unionists' heads are the likely alternatives. ■

## FOR AN ALL-IRELAND WORKERS' REPUBLIC





Unions and popular organisations protest against the austerity package.

**F**OLLOWING THE devaluation, investors started pulling their funds out of Mexico, sending the peso into free fall. The government begged the IMF and US government to step in and help. In February President Clinton finally obliged, organising a rescue package of some \$20 bn without waiting for the go-ahead from Congress. He then twisted the arm of the IMF to match this sum, and pushed aside the objections of the USA's imperialist partners in Europe.

By the end of February a \$50 bn package of guaranteed credits was made available to prop up Mexico's currency and calm investors' fears.

Why did the markets panic like this? Why did the USA rush to provide all this support for Mexico, while Russia continues to beg the White House for paltry handouts? What does the whole episode tell us about Mexico's role in the world economy?

The immediate cause of Mexico's difficulties was, ironically, the same one that had seen it marked down in the 1980s as a great success story—open and unrestricted markets. For the last ten years its economic growth relied upon attracting foreign capital into the country. Since 1988 investment from abroad totalled \$48.8 bn.

This investment has been primarily in stocks and government bonds rather than for building factories or employing people.

### Interest rates

It came largely from US pension funds and Mutual Funds (like unit trusts in the UK). Most of it has been short-term investment, attracted to Mexico by the high interest rates. At the time interest rates in the USA, Japan and Europe had been dampened down by recession.

The crisis was precipitated by growing fears that the Mexican government would not be able to meet its obligations to pay on the government bonds the US companies had bought.

These fears were well founded. Mexico has a chronic trade deficit, another consequence of the economic strategy devised and overseen by the IMF and the US government. Cheap imports flooded the market, while overpriced exports dwindled, unable to compete. Last year the trade deficit grew to 8% of GDP. US investors did not believe that the government could honour its debts. They got edgy.

When the peso was devalued in December they panicked, since this indicated their investments were unsafe.

The implications of this crisis are vast. This was not just any old place for US financiers to invest. This was a model neo-liberal regime, promoted,

# Down – the Mexico way

*On 20 December last year the Mexican government devalued the peso, the country's currency, against the US dollar. All hell broke loose.*

*Mark Abram explains what went wrong with Mexico's neo-liberal "miracle".*

backed and applauded by the imperialists, and not so much in America's backyard as on its front doorstep. Neo-liberal policies have plunged the country into financial chaos and almost certain recession this year.

The peso has fallen from 3.5 to 6 to the dollar. The cost of imports has risen sharply. At the same time there has been an equally sharp contraction in demand for them. In order to defend the peso against speculation, and hence further collapse, the government has raised interest rates to a staggering 50%.

This, in turn, has plunged companies into the red with their banks and has smothered the growth of personal credit. A conservative estimate is that Mexico's economy will contract by 2.6% this year.

Nothing better illustrates the no-win situation for a semi-colony like Mexico than the nature of the "rescue package". Its size and swiftness are easily explained. The US holders of Mexican bonds told Clinton how much they risked losing. Mexico, unlike Russia, is virtually an extension of the USA, almost its 51st state in economic terms. So the rescue package is aimed at US and other overseas investors.

Meanwhile Clinton is making sure that Mexico will pay dearly for this rescue. Its semi-colonial character will be reinforced as a result.

First of all, Mexico has had to agree to pay premium interest rates for the credits it has been given—at least 10% on the \$50 bn deal. This boils down to yet more of the sweat and blood of the Mexican people being siphoned to the US banks.

Secondly, the package will further increase Mexico's foreign debt. This is because the loans will be used to ensure that the domestic debt is reduced. Again, it is estimated that Mexico's foreign debt could increase in 1995 from \$85 bn to between \$102 bn and \$180 bn.

In 1982 it was the uncontrolled growth of foreign debt that the USA and IMF set about "resolving" by the imposition of neo-liberal policies. Now, as a result of those policies, it is set to return!

Thirdly, the USA has demanded that Mexico's government deposits all the revenues of its state owned oil industry into an account at the Federal Reserve in New York. The Mexi-

can government has agreed to mortgage yet one more asset as an insurance against failure to pay the interest on the new \$50 billion of credits.

Finally, the agreement reached between the USA and Mexico provides for a further spate of privatisations in order to raise finance. In addition they have agreed to remove the restrictions on foreign ownership of Mexican banks. The result? More US

## Blazing the trail to disaster

**I**N THE mid-1980s Mexico was hailed by the bankers and stockbrokers of the world as a model for all Third World countries to follow. In 1982 Mexico was the first Latin American country to declare its inability to pay the interest payments on its foreign debt. The government volunteered Mexico for the role of guinea pig in an economic experiment directed by the international banks, the IMF and the US government.

To "rescue" the country it would be necessary to abandon all economic measures aimed at protecting the economy from the import of cheaper goods and services. Instead, Mexico should seek economic development and prosperity by concentrating production on those goods and services that the country was good at. It should export them and stop trying to produce goods that other countries made better.

It should also play to its other "natural" strengths, like a cheap workforce. The working class should be herded into new factories set up by US companies. They would provide jobs, as long as pay could be kept at less than \$3 an hour and trade union rights were renounced.

Finally, the government should privatise the bulk of its best state owned industries. This would bring

in money for spending or paying off foreign debts. It would also attract new investment into these industries since foreign, mainly US multinational, capital would now own a big stake in these industries. They would become more efficient, more profitable and Mexico would benefit.

This economic strategy—known as neo-liberalism—became the new orthodoxy for all developing countries. The world is divided up into a few rich and powerful countries and several score of poor, and not so poor, dependent nations. The former, grouped together in clubs like the OECD (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development) account for the majority of world's output and investment funds. They monopolise the latest hi-tech production methods which guarantee higher productivity and a superior competitive edge.

The latter group of countries—semi-colonies—are oppressed by the imperialists. Many were occupied by the imperialist nations for many years, and stripped of their resources.

Now, they find it is difficult or impossible to catch-up. The imperialists only provide access to investment funds and markets on condition that the semi-colonies open their

ownership of Mexican productive and financial assets.

Although it is a direct contributor to Mexico's crisis, US finance capital will ensure that it protects itself from the consequences and will strengthen its grip on the country in the process. Similarly, the Mexican bosses and ruling politicians will seek to off-load the crisis onto the Mexican workers.

Neo-liberalism in Mexico meant dropping all obstacles to US and other foreign investment. The government removed trade barriers, exempted the foreign companies from tax, and agreed to a package of privatisations and cuts in social spending. The result? The miracle of 1.6 million new jobs. But low pay means that Mexican workers saw their real wages plummet by a third under the neo-liberal regime of President Salinas (1988-94).

### Neo-liberalism

The Mexican workers have suffered immensely from neo-liberalism, forced into these low paid insecure jobs, with little or no social services, education or health care. Factories owned by US firms escape health, safety and environmental legislation that apply in the USA. The result? Mexican workers who suffer from poor health, high rates of accidents at work, and a polluted environment.

And now these Mexican workers, having paid dearly for neo-liberal "success", are now paying for its failures.

In the run up to the agreement with Clinton, the newly elected PRI government (campaign slogan—"Prosperity for the Mexican Family") secured an agreement with the bureaucratic trade union federation it controls, the CTM.

This agreement allowed for those on the minimum wage (10% of the population) to get a 4% rise that takes them up to \$3 an hour! That was on 3 January. On 14 January the government announced that it was allowing price rises on most goods of between 10%-30%! They had already hiked electricity prices by 16% a week earlier. The original agreement with the CTM also included a 5.2% package of spending cuts aimed at social programmes.

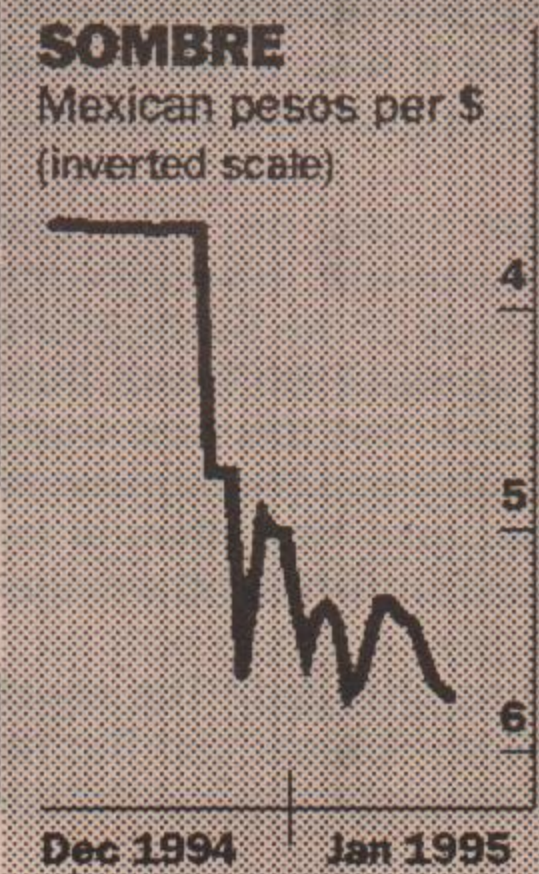
The market is king, say the gurus of neo-liberalism. Events in Mexico may not have dethroned it but perhaps a few more have come to realise that this particular ruler has no clothes. ■

domestic markets to them.

The developed countries set the terms and conditions for trade. Interest rates and exchange rates for currencies are determined by the imperialists in collaboration with each other. In return for credits and market access they demand that semi-colonial governments enforce strict ceilings on the amount of government spending and borrowing. In short, all the key mechanisms for capitalist economic development inside a country like Mexico are, in the last analysis, in the hands of international agencies over which the country has little or no control. That is why Marxists call such countries semi-colonies.

But the truth remains that in the late twentieth century the world is divided into oppressed and oppressor powers. No amount of spontaneous economic development, whatever levers are pulled to influence the direction and pattern of trade and industry, will overcome relative backwardness for the majority of humanity. Nor will it be able to guarantee a decent standard of life for the majority of the population.

Only the overthrow of the profit system can avoid future crises and continued impoverishment for the Third World. ■





# GERMANY Strikers take on the bosses

The first all-out strike in Bavaria for forty years started in late February, part of the German engineering union's campaign over wages. Markus Lehner from the Gruppe Arbeitermacht (the LRCI's German section) sends us this report from Berlin.



"6% is not too much" say striking FG metal workers

WHEN GERMAN workers got their wage packets in January they got a shock. On average skilled workers found themselves £86 short. The costs of German unification had already been dumped on the workers through increased unemployment insurance and social security taxes. In January the government introduced a special tax—a "solidarity donation"—to finance government policies in former East Germany.

And the bad news does not stop there. Transport costs are escalat-

ing. Health and rent costs have exploded. Special benefits, such as the Berlin weighting allowance have been abolished.

All in all, the real wages of western German workers are now at the same level as in 1980! In the same period employers' income has doubled. In the last year alone it grew by about 17%.

It was no surprise to anyone that workers should demand compensation for all this in this year's wage negotiations. Workers know that order books are full for most industries

and profits are improving.

As always the metal workers' union (IG-Metall) with its three million members (85% of those employed in engineering) is in the forefront of the dispute.

In November the union leadership had problems getting agreement from the rank and file for their predictably moderate campaign strategy. The mood in the factories was that a few percent increase was simply not enough after years of stagnating or declining real wages.

Workers' committees at factory

level demanded that low paid workers should get at least £130 a month more before any percentage increase was negotiated. The union leadership finally managed to get their own "6%+ demand" endorsed by several important committees—in some cases by a margin of only one or two votes.

In contrast to other European countries Germany has maintained a system of "social partnership". The strength of the trade unions in wage bargaining and in negotiating better working conditions has not been broken in a decisive battle equivalent to the British miners' and print strikes. The last time it was put to the test in 1984 the unions won.

In the 1994 wage round the employers made their first serious attempt to get rid of national wage agreements and replace them with a system of "concessionary bargaining" on a company by company basis. But this attack was defeated by massive "warning strikes". Last year, because of their economic difficulties, the employers shrank back from an all-out offensive. But they had put down a clear marker. As one employer said then:

"It is not easy to smash IG-Metall, but it would simplify things enormously".

This year the employers seem poised to strike a heavy blow against IG-Metall. At first they didn't respond to the 6% demand. Instead they demanded concessions on "cost reduction" proposals before talking about wages. They insisted that the 1990 agreement to reduce the working week from 36 to 35 hours from this October should be scrapped. They demanded more flexible hours—Saturday work and unpaid overtime on special occasions.

Millions of workers saw this response for what it was as an outright provocation. In January and February about 800,000 workers have participated in short warning strikes and demonstrations. The union flexed its muscles in the most important factories and industrial sectors of Germany. The anger of many workers on the demonstrations was very clear. Many felt that the strikes should have been larger, longer and without warning. As always Turkish and Kurdish workers were at the forefront of the action and socialists took heart from the fact that there was a strong anti-racist sentiment among the ranks of

the strike activists.

On 19 February talks with the bosses broke down. IG-Metall called a ballot for an all-out strike in one part of Germany. Surprisingly, the union bureaucracy chose Bavaria, where there has been no big strike since 1954. But it was decided to strike first where the enemy is strongest. Over the last thirty years the most modern and profitable industries (BMW, MBB, Siemens,) have been sited in Bavaria and their employers are always the hardliners in any dispute.

A massive 88% of workers in the area voted in favour of an all-out strike. The employers reacted by threatening lock outs in several other regions. Brushing this threat aside, the strike started early on 24 February at the Siemens factories in Nu-remberg.

A short strike does very little harm to the employers. There is a fair amount of unused capacity in the factories and stocks are high. It is estimated that one strike day costs employers £86 million. But if the strike goes on for several weeks, the employers could take a pounding. IG-Metall has the equivalent of several billions of pounds in its reserves and the strikers are determined to win.

Naturally, the union leadership will try and make a compromise as soon as possible. While this would let IG-Metall survive this year's bosses' offensive, it would be another heavy blow against the confidence the workers presently feel for their union; it would lead to a further loss of membership. This will weaken the union's ability to fight against the next inevitable attack.

To stop this it is necessary to build a rank and file movement in IG-Metall, one that tries to take over the leadership of the strike. Unlike previous years, the main socialist party, the SPD, has seen its control over the shop stewards weakening. There are a lot of independent "left wing" shop stewards in the west and PDS (ex-Stalinists) sympathisers in the east. Revolutionaries should use this opportunity to build a trade union opposition around an action programme for the smashing of the employers' offensive.

This programme cannot be confined to bargaining over wage rates. Massive cuts in social benefits are coming. Workers have to fight for cuts in working hours and for more jobs to be created. But it is also necessary to bring this government down and replace it with a workers' government—one that meets the fundamental interests of the working class.

The first step to this is bringing other unions out on strike alongside IG-Metall. In the chemical industry for example, wage negotiations have already broken down. But the German left is in a weak position to intervene. Most left wingers think that the unions have been dead for years. One of the few exceptions is the Revolutionärer Sozialistischer-Bund (RSB). It is trying to build an oppositional rank and file movement. The Gruppe Arbeitermacht is working with the RSB to hammer out the action programme upon which such a rank and file movement must be built. ■

calling for Romani and Sinti self-defence.

Alone on the left our comrades called for support for Romani self-defence by the workers' movement, for a workers' united front against fascism and racism, for searching out the fascist underground structures and the smashing of their organisations.

Our leaflets stressed a point so frequently missed by the Austrian left today: that whilst we have to put demands on the whole workers' movement, we must not wait until the Social Democrat and trade union bureaucrats take up these demands. We have to start the fightback against racism and fascism now. ■

THE FASCIST murder of four Romani in Oberwart shocked Austrian society. It was the first political assassination in the country since 1965.

But it did not come as a surprise. Over the last eighteen months ten Social Democratic and Green politicians, among others, have been the target of letter bombs.

The fascists' plans are clear: more terror against ethnic minorities, the labour movement and anti-racist liberals.

A group called the "Bavarian Liberation Army—Salzburg Federation" claims responsibility for all the attacks. They are demanding the release of imprisoned fascists, Binder and Radl, members of Küssel's VAPO, (Volkstreue Ausserparlamentarische Opposition).

The fascists have been trained by officers in the German and Austrian armies. In Austria from the mid-1980s fascists turned towards more clandestine activities—individual terror rather than open street activity.

But with the rising tide of racism across Europe, and the growth in Austria of Georg Haider's racist FPÖ, these people think their time is coming. They are probably quite small in numbers but they are already threatening the lives of oppressed people and left activists. Should the class struggle intensify, they could get

## AUSTRIA

# Fascists bomb immigrants

much more of a hearing and begin to play a more important political role as the core of an open fascist combat organisation

The murders were condemned by the whole political establishment, including Haider's movement. The funeral of the four Romani was an occasion for a sickening display of hypocrisy. Ethnic minorities have been systematically oppressed by the Austrian state for decades.

They have been and are still systematically ghettoised in the towns in which they live. The Romani and Sinti who survived the concentration camps have not been recognised as Nazism's victims. Now the government and opposition pose as

spokesmen of "these four Austrian citizens".

The assassination also revealed how useless it is to rely on the police to fight the fascists. They started their "investigation" into the murders by searching the houses of the victims—since, they claimed "the whole affair could well have been a suicide"! It was revealed that the local police had already ignored the calls of the Romani, who had seen cars patrolling threateningly near their homes for days before the attack.

It is not accidental that the AUF, (Aktionsgemeinschaft Unabhängiger

und Freiheitlicher), a group close to Haider, is strongest in the police association.

But what do the Social Democrats, trade union leaders, anti-racist humanists, the Greens and so on call for? For more "anti-fascist" police and a "more democratic political culture"! For them, the biggest danger is not the fascist terror and the racist police, but people who defend themselves and thereby further "destabilise" the country.

Only a few groups on the left opposed this bankrupt strategy. The Gruppe ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (the LRCI's Austrian section) intervened from the very beginning into the demonstrations with leaflets



# SCIENCE

JACK TULLY

## The Internet: a web of intrigue?

A RECENT French opinion poll asked people what they thought was the most important invention of the twentieth century.

Antibiotics? The aeroplane? The computer? Genetic engineering?

No. The most important invention of the last 95 years, according to this sample, is television.

Perhaps this answer isn't as odd as it first seems. After all, television has changed the lives of hundreds of millions of people across the world. But its potential to become a mass democratic medium has been massively under-utilised. Why? Because television companies are either in the hands of government stooges or a narrow band of businessmen whose aim in life is to make money, not cultural artefacts.

This sad fact will probably be repeated in one of the latest developments in communication, the Internet.

This anarchic network of networks is rarely out of the news these days. Twenty five million computer users the world over—and not just bearded academics or anorak wearing hackers—use this system to communicate with each other. They enjoy legal, free and open access to an incredible variety of sources of information and are able to express their views to anyone with a computer and a bit of spare time.

Expanding at a rate of an extra four million users every month, the Internet has the potential to become a source of information, entertainment and communication even more powerful than television.

Like so many technological developments, the Internet has a strictly military origin. In 1969 the Pentagon decided to update its communications network to meet the threat of a direct nuclear attack on its key posts.

Instead of a highly vulnerable system in which a message going from A to D must always pass through B and C, the Pentagon engineers created a system that will function even if B and C are destroyed. Rather than a straight line or even a star, the Internet resembles a spider's web. Unless the whole thing falls apart, two points can virtually always be joined.

In the 1970s the principles and computer protocols established by the Pentagon were taken up by the academic world. With the advent of the personal computer, the Internet began to be used as a "bulletin board".

The next step was the explosion of "electronic mail" (e-mail). Sending messages via the Internet has now become a daily fix for tens of millions of people.

Why? Because it is free and virtually instantaneous. A message going from Sheffield to London may have to whizz via New York and Buenos Aires before it gets there, but given that it is travelling at the speed of light, this doesn't make much difference.

Everyone who is anyone now has their own e-mail address. Want to contact the Dalai Lama? Simply send your message to trcc@unv.t.in

The latest development has been the opening of a million and one multimedia databases to anyone who wants to access them. Want to look

at comet Shoemaker-Levy crashing into Jupiter? There is a whole file of images and information.

All it takes is a computer and a small box (a "modem") that you connect to your phone line. You only pay a local call to your nearest Internet node (there are 2.5 million of them round the world).

Potentially the Internet is a very exciting development for socialists. Already a variety of progressive charities, unions and left wing organisations, especially in the USA, are making use of it. In Britain the Manchester based HOST system specialises in "progressive" databases such as that run by Statewatch.

Perhaps the most startling "event" to occur on the Internet to date was the dramatic e-mail announcement of the Mexican Zapatista uprising on 1 January 1994.

Green-Net, another British based network, has become the home of the anti-road, anti-CJB movement and has already been accessed by 36,000 users.

The massive potential of the Internet, in a world where knowledge is power, makes the mind boggle. It is already being used to get round draconian censorship laws in South East Asia and Latin America.

The ability to communicate between branches of an organisation without having to go via the centre has huge implications for the trade union movement. The days of general secretaries refusing to circulate opposition material will look laughably outdated.

But before we get carried away we have to remember that it's the capitalist world we live in, not the "virtual" cyber-world of the Internet. And capitalism by its very nature undermines and misuses the potential of technological progress.

No matter how free and easy the Internet is for the left and progressive organisations we can be sure it will not stay that way. Business will move in. So will the state censors.

Already Microsoft, the biggest software company in the world and Apple, the second biggest computer company in the USA, have launched their own, private versions of the Internet. And guess what—you have to pay for them.

And the lawyers and legislators are already at work in the USA to see how they can censor certain data. At the moment you can access pornographic material/erotica not legally allowed into your own country. If you look at it you may be safe, if you download it you could be committing a crime. As soon as they work out how to make such laws they will apply them to politics as well.

The lack of security of Internet communications—virtually nothing is private—is so worrying to governments that the next G7 meeting is to have a special discussion of precisely this topic.

In other words, the Internet could very easily go the way of television. Its incredible potential could be sanitised, supervised and shackled. Monopolising the sources of information and profit is, after all, what capitalist politics and business is about. ■

## ALGERIA

# Civil war deepens

Over thirty thousand people have been killed in Algeria's civil war during the last four years. The past holds the key to an understanding of this carnage. **Christina Duvall**, of *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (French section of the LRCI), explains the background to the current crisis and points the way to a more progressive future.

**U**P UNTIL 1962 Algeria was a French colony. A heroic struggle won Algeria's independence but the country has never been able to shake off imperialist control.

Despite the widespread nationalisation of key sections of the economy after the liberation from French occupation, the ruling party, the FLN, remained a middle class nationalist party. It was ready to make deals with imperialism, whilst encouraging economic independence and isolation in order to develop native capitalism.

The FLN did not diversify the economy. Algeria continued to be dependent on the export of oil and gas which accounts for over 90% of its foreign earnings.

Algeria, which under the Romans was the granary of the western world, now relies on imports for 95% of its food. Not surprisingly the Algerian economy suffered enormously following the fall in petrol prices during the 1980s. The rapid drop in the standard of living and the growth of unemployment led to widespread unrest.

In 1988 the government savagely repressed a series of food riots. At the same time, it was forced to organise elections in order to placate the masses. This coincided with the desire of imperialism to establish more stable democratic regimes in the Third World which would be less of an obstacle to the imposition of neo-liberal policies.

The first round of elections was won by the Islamic movement, FIS. It was they who filled the vacuum created by the left's decline on the one hand, and the discrediting of the FLN on the other. The "radicalism" of the FIS which consisted of anti-western rhetoric, Islamic values and the promise of a better future, appealed to the most downtrodden sections of the Algerian masses especially in the countryside and the inner-cities.

Fearful of the imminent victory of the FIS, at the end of 1990, the government cancelled the second round of the elections and the army carried out a coup d'état. The civil war began

as the army carried out a "search and kill" policy while the FIS began to terrorise state officials and left wing militants alike.

Since then things have degenerated into ever greater violence. The latest bomb attack in Algiers left 38 dead and 256 injured. The murder of Nabila Djahmine, militant feminist and ex-leader of the PST, Algerian section of the USFI, followed soon after. Apparently the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), who are even more hard-line than the armed wing of the FIS, are responsible for both these outrages, but it is increasingly difficult to know who the perpetrators of acts of violence are.

The army has heavily infiltrated the Islamic armed units and uses the continuation of the attacks to legitimate its refusal to organise elections.

But the army is divided as to how to get out of the current bloody impasse. At present, it is the army hard-liners, the so called "eradicators", who are in the driving seat. They aim to defeat the fundamentalists by military means—the same means that they will no doubt use against the masses if they struggle against the regime.

The problem facing the government is that the IMF, along with the private banks, desperately want to see peace in Algeria in order to ensure their profits. They would even be prepared to accept a victory of the FIS if this is the price they have to pay for such stability.

The regime also recognises that it needs stability to attract imperialist investment for its privatisation programmes, and renegotiation of its foreign debt.

Virtually all the opposition parties, including the FIS, met in Rome last December. They signed an agreement opposing the army, and calling for the freeing of all political prisoners (including those of the FIS) and for democratic elections. The only opposition groups not present were the ex-Communist Party and the RCD, party of the oppressed Berbers, a non-Arab minority. They rightly refused to sit at the same table with the leaders of an

organisation which murders women because they dare to express themselves in ways contrary to the teachings of the Koran, as well as youth and intellectuals who dare to oppose fundamentalism.

Neither the army nor the FIS can be an ally for the working class. Both have led Algeria into a bloody civil war and both want either to maintain or to impose their class power over the masses who will be the inevitable victims whoever wins.

There is another alternative. The working class movement needs to build independently, including armed self-defence against the army and the FIS.

Already the workers and youth of Kabylie demonstrated that such a way forward is possible. Demanding cultural rights, the Kabyls have organised general strikes and school boycotts. As a non-Arab minority they are prime targets of FIS attacks: in many localities, armed defence squads have been organised to beat off the Islamic murder gangs.

This is the only way to ensure a progressive solution to the crisis in Algeria. The working class must support the mobilisations of the Kabyls, not only by taking up the struggle for their cultural rights, but also by following their example and building a massive struggle for democratic rights and decent living standards for all the oppressed.

Workers in the oil and gas industries have recently threatened strike action and forced the government to take on board some of their demands, whilst dockers went on strike for a week. But the workers must also take on the democratic aspirations of the masses as well as their own immediate economic aspirations.

It is up to the masses to impose a peace on Algeria by organising workers' militias and, faced with the refusal of the regime to hold elections, by enforcing elections for a constituent assembly, based on and defended by such militias and community organisations. ■



Soon there will be an Islamic state, FIS slogan



## ENGELS IN BRITAIN

# A school for socialism

*Frederick Engels died one hundred years ago this year. Together with Karl Marx, Engels founded scientific socialism. In the first of a series of articles Dave Stockton explains how Engels' early experiences in this country helped him to fuse his revolutionary political ideas with the struggles of the working class.*

**F**REDERICK ENGELS first stayed in Britain between November 1842 and August 1844. He settled in Manchester, working as a clerk in the office of the cotton mill belonging to Ermen and Emmill in which his father was a partner.

Twenty two years old, Engels was already an avowed communist and revolutionary. His father clearly hoped that hard work in Manchester, the greatest industrial city in the world, would knock all the terrible atheist, communist ideas out of his son's head for good.

Little did he realise that it would do the opposite, confirming Engels' lifelong commitment to them.

From his arrival Engels devoted every spare minute to revolutionary journalism—for British and Continental papers—and to investigating at first hand the life and work of the factory workers in the industrial areas of the north of England.

In the very first article which he sent from England, Engels asked, "Is a revolution in England possible or even probable?" He wholeheartedly answered yes.

He arrived not long after the high point of the severe economic and political crisis of 1842. Faced with a deep trade depression many northern manufacturers attempted to cut wages and resorted to lock-outs and factory closures. The workers had launched a regional general strike, which had merged with Chartist agitation for a democratic republic. Together they had raised the spectre of a workers' insurrection. The strike was defeated but only through lack of "preparation, organisation and leadership", said Engels.

## Contacts

He set out to investigate the various political currents and leaders of the labour movement. He made immediate contact with a wide range of working class leaders: trade unionists, Chartists and socialists who followed the teachings of Robert Owen.

He went to Leeds to see George Julian Harney, the editor of the main Chartist paper, *The Northern Star*, which Engels called one of the best newspapers in Europe. In Manchester Engels regularly attended Chartist and Owenite meetings.

Engels' companion and guide on his tours of Manchester, and other industrial towns, was the Irish mill worker Mary Burns, with whom he formed a relationship until her death in 1863.

It was almost certainly from her that Engels developed his knowledge and interest in the conditions faced by women as workers both in the factory and in the home. It was definitely from her that he learned about the Irish community in Manchester: about the terrible famine that had driven so many of them there and of the rebelliousness of the Irish. "Give me a thousand Irishmen and I will overturn the British monarchy", he enthused in his book *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, written in 1844.

## Attitude

Engels noted in his articles for continental papers, "the incredible frequency of strikes" in England in the early 1840s:

"Not a week passes—indeed hardly a day passes—without a strike occurring somewhere."

Engels drew from this a lesson that was to become the bedrock of the Marxist attitude to trade unionism; that it was a school of war, a school of the class struggle:

"These stoppages of work are a training ground for the industrial proletariat and a preparation for the next campaign which draws inevitably nearer."

Through the trade union movement the workers fought their employers

for better conditions and higher pay:

"They may be only minor engagements but they prove conclusively that the decisive battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is approaching."

Engels' positive attitude to the trade union struggle stood in marked contrast to that of many of the self-styled socialists and anarchists of the period. Amongst them there was a tendency to regard strikes as either irrelevant to the political struggle or as a wholly destructive activity.

Engels observed that the British workers were making enormous political strides too. In the Chartist Movement they were creating the first mass working class political party.

Though limited to a radical democratic programme, the Charter, the workers were trying to gain political power by winning universal suffrage. A House of Commons dominated by delegates from the workers' party would enact measures to resolve the social question at the expense of the aristocracy and the mill owners. This would constitute a social revolution against capital.

## Differences

Engels was aware of the differences within Chartism between those who advocated physical force to gain the Charter and those who renounced this in favour of so-called moral force.

He described the evolution of the Chartist movement since the Charter had been drawn up in 1838. At that time Chartism had been a radical democratic movement supported both by workers and by the middle classes. But the savagery of the class struggles of 1842 led the middle class radicals to desert Chartism. Engels wrote, over-optimistically, that:

"Chartism became a purely work-

ing class movement and was free from the trammels of bourgeois influence."

Engels concluded that:

"... it is the factory workers, particularly in the Lancashire cotton districts, who form the solid core of the working class movement. Manchester is the headquarters of the most powerful trade unions, the focal point of Chartism, and the stronghold of the Socialist movement."

Many people, including bourgeois historians, have praised *The Conditions of the Working Class* for its vivid depiction of the poverty, and terrible conditions of early industrial Manchester.

But it is pre-eminently an analysis of the working class and socialist struggle against those conditions.

Engels' purpose was to report on this phenomenon to the workers and communist revolutionaries of Germany, where capitalism was less well developed. He believed that it laid out the future course that the workers' movement should follow on the continent.

He pointed out the gains which the workers made as a result of struggle. In particular, he pointed to the improvement in the condition of the miners in 1844 as a result of great strikes in the Northumberland, Durham, and later the Lancashire coalfields. Engels wrote that before long:

"... the gap between the factory workers and the miners—the former being more intelligent and energetic than the latter—will be closed. In the future they will stand shoulder to shoulder with the factory workers on a basis of complete equality. Thus one stone after another of the fortress of the middle class is being knocked away."

He considered the emergence of a new kind of working class to be the



Engels plunged straight into the British socialist movement

most significant factor in the history of England and indeed the world.

Engels had come to Britain already a convinced communist and a revolutionary. But his communism, like Owenite socialism, had remained at the level of a utopia: an ideal form of society which should be introduced because of its moral superiority or greater rationality.

In the early 1840s most socialists or communists were middle class and rejected the class struggle as a mindless uprising of the ignorant. On the other hand, most revolutionaries were revolutionary democrats who rejected communism, seeking at best an egalitarian society based on small property ownership for all.

Engels was in the process of breaking down this division. In the next few years, together with Karl Marx, he was to lay the basis of a scientific

socialism: a communism based not on rationalism or ethics but on an understanding of the economic laws of motion of capitalist society and of its class struggle.

It was Engels who really initiated the analysis of capitalism, even if it was Marx who was to make the enormous breakthrough in the book *Capital*.

Before Marx had done so, Engels read the classical bourgeois political economists, Adam Smith and David Ricardo. He also read critiques of them by men such as the utopian socialist William Thompson and the radical follower of Ricardo, Thomas Hodgskin, both of whom tried to develop the "labour theory of value" as a weapon against capitalism.

In October/November 1843 he wrote *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, a work Marx was later to call a "brilliant sketch on the criticism of the economic categories".

Marx himself had hesitated to call himself a communist because he felt that communism lacked a material and scientific basis. After reading this article he changed his mind. Engels' work showed how the inherent laws of capitalism led to repeated crises and thus posed the need to bring about "the abolition of private property, competition and opposing interests".

Capitalism itself had created the means to do this:

"This immeasurable productive capacity, handled consciously and in the interests of all would soon reduce to a minimum the labour falling to the share of mankind... The community will have to calculate what it can produce with the means at its disposal."

## Struggle

This idea was a mighty step forward. The ethical socialists and egalitarians had envisaged small scale productive units as the only way for society to develop without exploitation. The utopian communists had proposed building ideal co-operative communities alongside capitalism or in the wilderness of America.

Engels realised that the great means of production created by capitalism—the factories, mines and railways—could not be broken up, and could not be recreated on a humane basis from the savings of "co-operatives".

They had to be taken from the exploiters and used for the good of all humanity. What is more, a class had been created with the direct interest in doing this. Engels realised that the class struggle impels the working class towards the abolition of capitalism and the struggle for socialism.

Engels achieved, in embryonic form, the fusion between revolutionary politics and scientific socialism. Decades later, he acknowledged the revolutionary development in his thinking that resulted from his stay in Britain in 1842-4:

"In Manchester it was forcibly brought to my notice that economic factors, hitherto ignored or at least underestimated by historians, play a decisive role in the development of the modern world. I learned that economic factors were the basic cause of the clash between different classes in society. And I realised that in a highly industrialised country like England the clash of social classes lay at the very root of the rivalry between parties and were of fundamental significance in tracing the course of modern political history."

Over the next three years, now in co-operation with Marx, Engels was to deepen these insights and to develop historical materialism as a method and scientific socialism as a basis for a new revolutionary programme. His own initial contribution was essential to this work, as was his experience in Britain with its working class, its struggles, its leaders and its thinkers. ■



Strikers versus soldiers, Preston 1842



**R**IGHT WING cynics often claim that there are more varieties of Trotskyist groups than brands of breakfast cereal. Even those who don't appreciate the joke have to accept that the number of organisations selling their papers on demonstrations can be a bewildering experience to those new to the left.

Nobody likes to be the butt of jokes. But then those involved in these groups are for the most part serious and intelligent people. They are dedicated to the cause of the working class and don't revel in isolation. It is a fact, nonetheless, that disunity exists amongst socialists, and in particular those who regard themselves as Trotskyists.

We try to deal with this problem in two ways. First, we explain the real character of the political differences that separate the groups claiming to be Trotskyist. Second, we seek to regroup the disparate groups that claim to be Trotskyist, to fuse them into a single, bigger and more effective party.

These two tasks are inseparable. It is essential to clarify the nature of the differences between groups in order to overcome them, both through discussion and through common practice. Small groups only have a right to exist at all if they can prove that theoretical, ideological and programmatic issues are key to the stable growth and success of any revolutionary organisation. Without solid foundations, all future growth and influence will count for nothing. Groups will fragment as unanticipated differences emerge in the course of struggles. This isn't speculation. It is the record of history. Look at the state of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI)—for a long time the major international grouping claiming to be Trotskyist. It is in apparently terminal crisis. It is losing members and sections in every continent.

This crisis is the product of a failed and unprincipled regroupment process that created the USFI in 1963. If unprincipled regroupment fails, the question then becomes, how best to effect principled regroupment?

One organisation that claims to know is the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency (LTT), whose British section is the Workers International League (WIL). The WIL shares many political positions with Workers Power. But it disagrees with us on the question of regroupment.

In response to a polemic by us on Stalinism's collapse, the WIL wrote that they suspected Workers Power had:

"... renounced their original project of regrouping revolutionary forces in Britain and internationally. Workers Power now sees itself as the revolutionary party (if in embryo) and its LRCI as the sole instrument for reforging the world Trotskyist movement. Revolutionary regroupment is thus reduced to the appeal to 'Join us!'... This method, we believe, will build only a small international sect." (*Workers News*, September 1991)

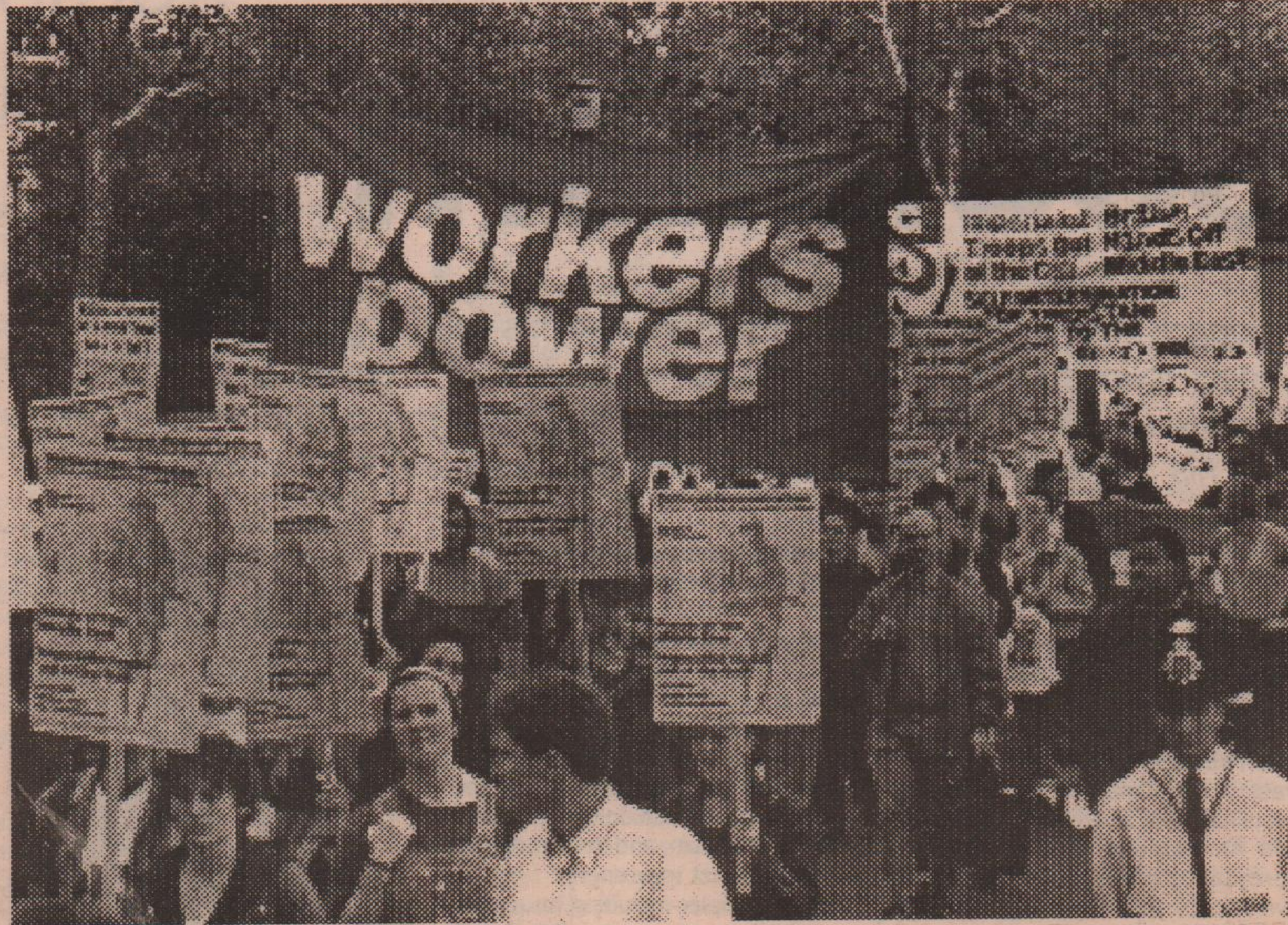
### Appeal

In a more recent appeal to potential dissidents within the USFI, the WIL repeat the essence of this message:

"Therefore we are not simply saying: 'Join us and everything will be alright'. What we think is necessary is a regroupment of those genuine revolutionary forces claiming adherence to Trotskyism." (*Workers News*, February 1995)

We do not agree—either with the false characterisation of our approach, or with the WIL's stated method of regroupment.

*Workers Power is part of an international organisation, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI). We want to build a mass international party. So do many other Trotskyist organisations around the world. Mark Harrison looks at the pre-conditions for revolutionary regroupment.*



# Uniting a divided left

There is absolutely nothing wrong with fighting to build your organisation, to appeal to all and sundry revolutionaries to join it. After all, the reason you are in one organisation—as opposed to another—is because you believe it is right. And if you believe that, you try to convince others that it is right.

This is not ultimatism, as the WIL suggest. It is elementary Leninism. The class struggle will not wait for the perfectly regrouped party or international to emerge from an endless round of open conferences, faction fights and tendency documents among small groups of Trotskyists. The need for a revolutionary party and an international is trumpeted in every struggle that goes down to defeat and in every betrayal carried through by reformist bureaucrats.

Moreover, there is an increasingly urgent need for an organisation to be built in opposition to organisations like the Socialist Workers Party, who have misled countless struggles, who peddle centrist confusion and who have demoralised and driven from politics thousands of revolutionary activists. If a revolutionary party isn't built, all too many of the newly radicalised layers coming into activity today will ultimately waste their efforts in the diaspora of single issue campaigns that, however worthy, cannot bring about a root and branch social transformation.

To strive to build such an organisation, to be convinced that it is right and worth building, is not ultimatism. It is a revolutionary duty. This was a view shared by

Trotsky. On the eve of the founding of the Fourth International somebody argued, in the interests of future regroupment with wider forces, that they should say "for the Fourth International" instead of the "Fourth International". Trotsky demurred:

"To you the little word 'for' seems an expression of political 'modesty'. To me it seems an expression of indecision and lack of self-confidence. A revolutionary party that is not sure of its own significance cannot gain the confidence of the masses... It seems to you that the name Fourth International will prevent sympathetic or semi-sympathetic organisations from approaching us. This is radically wrong. We can attract others to us only by a correct and clear policy. And for this we must have an organisation and not a nebulous blot."

We are not suggesting that we are a fully fledged revolutionary international party. We are saying that the only justification for our existence is our belief that we have a clear and correct policy, that we will fight for that policy and that we ask others to join us on the basis of that policy. That is not ultimatism. It is party building. And there is nothing wrong with party building.

To those who say, "we are in favour of regroupment, but we are not yet prepared to join you", we do not say, join us or be damned. We say, let us explore, both through discussions and through common practice, whether such a regroupment is possible. Nor is this a "once for ever" thing. Discussions

at one point may be exhausted only to be taken up again at a future date when the experience of the class struggle throws new light on old debates.

Because regroupment has to take place in the context of building a party and testing the programme in the class struggle, any group has to exercise a mature judgement about candidates for regroupment. The character of differences have to be assessed in advance of any proposal for regroupment. Are they fundamental or secondary? Are we dealing with a new organisation feeling its way, reassessing and challenging old orthodoxies? Or is it a stable group with an established leadership, endlessly repeating the same phrases and committed to repeating past mistakes? Is a group moving to the left or right politically?

For example, we do not favour regroupment with the USFI. We say its militants should break with it. It has a sorry record. As an organisation it is not going to change. Its centrism is ingrained. Regroupment has to mean fusion with its leadership. But they cannot be won.

The key to a successful regroupment today is an elaboration of a common programme. We insist on this because none of those on the Trotskyist international left command mass forces, deeply embedded in the large bedrock organisations of the working class. We have to approach this problem historically. Why did the movement, that once was unified, become so splintered? Since we do not subscribe to the "evil person" theory of history, we look for political explanations.

Trotskyism fell apart in the 1948-53 period because its leaders failed to understand what was happening in the real world. They inherited certain views and doctrines from the pre-Second World War period, and failed to adjust them to take into account the booming capitalist economy and the expansion of Stalinism. Basic Trotskyist ideas about Stalinism and about revolution in the Third World got horribly mangled.

We are still living through the consequences of those failures. A central part of regroupment for those who are products of these mistakes is to unlearn, collectively, all of this bad experience. That is what a programme is about. It summarises the lessons of the past, corrects the mistakes, builds on the positive experiences and focuses it all into practical proposals for the here and now.

That was the method that led to the formation of the LRCI. It was a method that produced not only a rounded programmatic document, the *Trotskyist Manifesto*, but also an organisation able to re-elaborate that programme five years after its publication, in the light of the collapse of Stalinism. It is a method that has allowed us to develop concrete action programmes, both for our sections and for countries in which we are seeking to build sections.

By contrast the fusion document that the LTT is based on is wafer thin as far as programme is concerned. We are informed that a democratic centralist international tendency has been set up on the basis of a common analysis of several general questions and a collection of principles. In place of a programmatic fusion document we get one that declares the constituent organisations recognise:

"The necessity of mobilising the masses behind transitional demands. Opposition to the oppression of women and all national, racial, and sexual minorities." (*Workers News*, April 1991)

With such a programmatic basis almost any so-called Trotskyist could join the LTT. Of course, there are positions against the USFI, for example, which distinguish the LTT, but the programmatic distinctions that flow from such positions are nowhere spelt out. Indeed, we are entitled to be even more suspicious of the LTT's method when we read their fusion statement with the Leninist Trotskyist Group of Canada (LTG). It lacks any serious programmatic points apart from national self-determination for nationalities within Canada. It is confined to the level of general principles.

### Errors

Far from being a way of clarifying the confusion that bedevils the principal organisations which claim to be Trotskyist, or creating a revolutionary alternative to them, such a method repeats key errors of past failed fusions and regroupment projects.

For us, regroupment is desirable, but not a substitute for building our revolutionary organisation. For us its success will depend on the willingness of potential regroupment partners to base any fusions on a firm programmatic foundation. Above all, regroupment will require a decisive break from the big centrist organisations like the USFI—not a reconstitution of them in a new guise.

To the extent that the possibility for such a regroupment is created in life, by real forces, we will work towards it positively and enthusiastically, with no ultimatums except—programme first. ■

**Workers Power invites responses to this article.**



## Slaves' charter

Dear Workers Power,  
Top managers at the Middlesex Hospital, Central London, have come up with yet another new scheme to make hospital workers work harder. It's called "multi-skilling".

Clerical workers, porters, domestics, technicians who take blood and maintenance workers will be required to do each others' jobs at the drop of a hat. Any hospital worker with a spare moment will be pounced on by management and directed to do something else. It is a slaves' charter, and hospital workers are furious.

Unison members at the hospital, who have refused to collaborate, are now planning to escalate the action with the backing of the union full timers.

Under the proposals ward clerks could find themselves sweeping up, porters could find themselves being made to take blood, and domestics will have to push beds. Of course the managers themselves are not planning to join in this collective effort. They will be sitting on their backsides thinking up even more ways to get one worker to do two people's jobs.

In other areas the unions have let in "multi-skilling" and the attendant job cuts without a fight. It's time to stop the rot. This is not about more skills. It will de-skill workers, exhaust them and ultimately provide a worse service. There should be a massive vote for strike action unless management backs down.

In solidarity  
Unison member,  
Middlesex Hospital.

# Reactionary Channel strike

Dear Workers Power,

When Meridian, the ultra-Thatcherite Channel ferry company, took on a Polish crew, paying them only £250 a month, French channel sailors went on strike. To get more pay for their colleagues, right?

Wrong. The two-day strike blocked Boulogne and Calais made headline news on both sides of the Channel. 500 French seamen battled with the riot police and stranded British holiday makers. But this was not about solidarity.

It showed the nasty side of Europe. It was about "European jobs for European workers".

Meridian ships fly under the Bahamian flag of convenience. That means that they can ef-

fectively ignore most of the EU's regulations, one of which stipulates that European shipping companies must pay European wage rates. On condition that they employ European workers.

And that's why the French

Agree  
 Disagree?  
 Got something to say?

Write in to:  
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WC1N 3XX

seamen went on strike. Because they were afraid of the Polish seamen undercutting their wages.

The right attitude would have been to fight for the unionisation of the Polish workers: to call a strike together with them to combat low wages in the shipping industry. Unfortunately the nationalist reflexes of some of the French seamen led them to fight against the Poles, not with them.

As "Fortress Europe" gets stronger, it seems probable that this kind of nationalist crap will come to the forefront in other struggles. Socialists must fight against it.

In comradeship  
Emile Gallet  
Paris

## Italy realigns

Dear Workers Power,

Since the Berlusconi government collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions, the political situation in Italy has merely thrown up new contradictions.

The new prime minister, Lamberto Dini (Berlusconi's former treasury minister), is essentially a compromise choice, charged with making a range of reforms to placate the left: making a new budget, reforming the state pension scheme, establishing an anti-monopoly law and (crucial in the light of the last election) establishing equal access to the media for political parties during election campaigns.

Ironically, Dini was the very

man whose previous budget brought hundreds of thousands of workers out onto the streets to defend their pensions.

The leaders of the main trade union confederation (CGIL) did their best to head off continued strike action in the December 1994 crisis.

Now they are lending support to Dini's reforms in the hope he will exploit the present economic upturn to create new jobs.

The former Stalinists of the PDS have been similarly craven, though the emergence of Romani Prodi as the potential leader of a centre-left coalition is causing them to reconsider their opposition to early elections.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC), a left-wing remnant of the old Stalinist party has, in contrast, made a turn to the left. Under new leader Fausto Bertinotti, they have attacked the PDS and unions for their support for Dini, opposed attempts to increase VAT and cut services, and proposed new wealth and property taxes alongside a shorter working week with no loss of pay.

Bertinotti says RC will only support the potential Prodi coalition if it takes up the new tax demands. It won't. It looks likely therefore that RC will go it alone, which hasn't stopped RC gaining increased public support, or Bertinotti from trouncing rivals in TV debates.

Meanwhile, the right has been realigning as well. Fini, through dissolving the openly fascist MSI into the populist fascist front Alleanza Nazionale, is making an all-out bid for the support of the bosses. But there is now a stark contradiction between Fini's social base in the poor Southern peasantry (demanding direct help from a strong state), and his neo-liberal political programme.

The Lombardy League is in serious trouble. The recent crisis split the party along pro and anti-Berlusconi lines.

The PPI (ex-Christian Democrats) are in no less of a mess. The "democratisation" of Fini meant the PPI could stop wavering between right and left and openly go with Berlusconi. However, the left wing of the party is fervently opposed to this, preferring alliance with Prodi. The PPI remains a state interventionist party however, which makes alliance with two neo-liberal groups problematic.

The crisis, then, is still smouldering; Italy's bourgeoisie are no closer to solving their problems than ever. Its about time the workers solved it for them, by sweeping them from power.

Antonio Lupo  
Rome

the fight for animal rights and we should encourage a debate with them. A majority do not yet see the relationship between animal abuse and exploitation by capitalism. We should educate them. These youth are militant, want change and are eager to demonstrate. We need this spirit and should harness it for socialism.

Adam  
South London

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## More on animals

Dear Comrades,

I am writing this letter in response to last month's editorial. I believe the editorial has got it wrong about animal rights. I accept that the immediate battles over the veal trade are not directly a working class problem, but I think that the issue of animal rights can't be completely ignored even if it is to be seen as a lower priority than workers' struggles.

It was said that animals have no rights because they have no duties; does this mean that anyone who has no duties has no rights? If this is the case then many people, such as children and the unemployed, would have no rights. Animals have no rights because they are denied them by us—humans.

I don't believe in brutality against animals either, but this

occurs through the exploitation and cruel abuse of animals every day in farming. Animals can't be used as products as with other raw materials in industry because they are living, feeling creatures, as we are.

I don't agree that there is no alternative to testing products on animals except on humans. They can be tested on cells and other tissues and on computer simulation models. Animals react differently to tests anyway and so they have to be tested on humans before they are marketed. We should call for the nationalisation of all drug and pharmaceutical companies and demand that the government funds new research into drugs and medicines.

We have to recognise that youth play an important role in

## 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 (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. 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!



# workers power

**INSIDE**  
Number 187 March 1995

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## AS BOSSES' PAY SOARS...

# We get poorer

*"income inequality has grown further and faster in Britain than in any comparable industrialised country." says report.*



## Richest 10% own half the wealth

**S**IR DESMOND Pitcher, who earns £170 an hour, has seen his pay and that of other water industry bosses go up 571% since privatisation.

Ed Wallis, boss of Powergen, is not worried about his pay rise this year. He has his share options to fall back on. He has made £876,000 profit on these since electricity privatisation back in 1991.

Meanwhile, nurses and midwives have been awarded a mere 1% on national rates of pay. Any additional rise, to a limit of 3%, has to be locally negotiated and funded.

No so with other public servants: Cabinet secretary Sir Robin Butler will get a pay increase of more than twice what most nurses earn—£32,000 more for him this year!

The growing disparity over pay under the Tories is just one reason why Britain is now

more unequal than at any time since the Second World War. According to the Rowntree Commission's recently published Inquiry into Income and Wealth:

"income inequality has grown further and faster in Britain than in any comparable industrialised country."

One in five people in this country live on less than half the average income.

Half of all wealth in this country is inherited—not a days

work was done to earn it! Some, like Ed Wallis have so much money that they have to stash it away in savings, stocks and shares. But however it comes, the top 10% own 50% of the country's wealth. Meanwhile, half of all families have less than £500 savings.

The Tories and their press don't even try to deny all this. CBI chief Howard Davies even took part in the Rowntree Commission that produced the report. But whereas as the Victo-

## Poorest half owns 8% of wealth



Third World city and urban nightmares like Los Angeles prove, the rich prefer to live shuttered behind steel grilles protected by round the clock private security patrols if the alternative is to give up a little of their wealth.

The Labour Party, true to form, just wants to plug a few loopholes in inheritance tax! It cannot bring itself to talk about raising taxes and guaranteeing a definite minimum wage set at a decent level.

Substantial changes can be made in the here and now by a government determined to end poverty and inequality.

First of all, they can concede pay rises that mean that millions of workers do not have to live on poverty wages.

Secondly, we need tax increases. It is a lie to suggest that the poor can only be helped by hitting middle income earners. A massive wealth tax could redistribute billions to raise benefits and pay for a decent minimum wage.

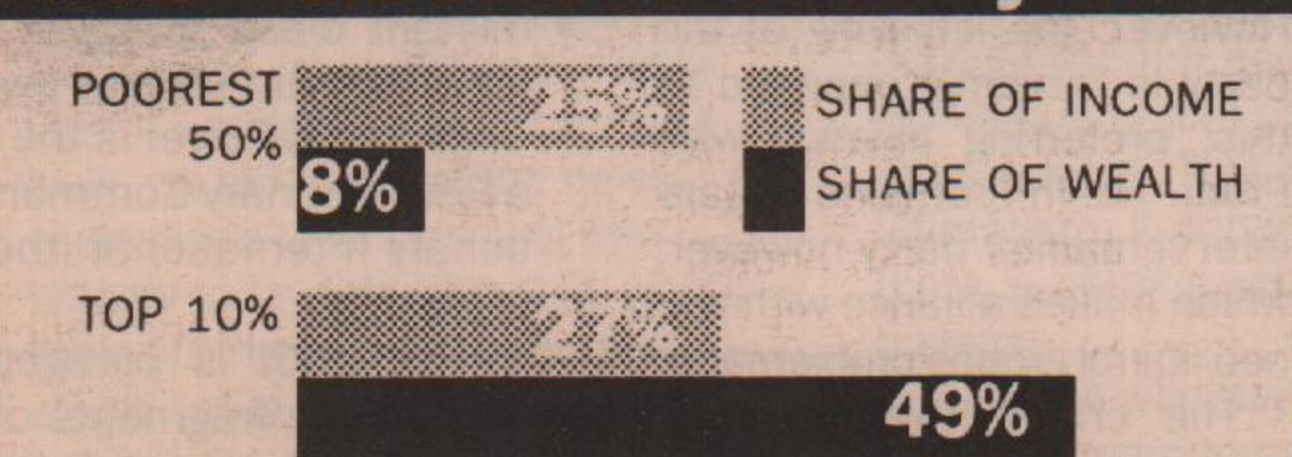
But a capitalist society that did not create inequality and depend upon it has yet come into existence.

Capitalism needs mass unemployment to create downward pressure on wages so as to boost profits. Lower benefits create pressure for low wages. Inequality is essential to capitalism, and increasing it is a conscious policy of the Tories.

Against the Tories, and capitalist reformers like Rowntree, we say that it is workers who create wealth, not the idle directors in plush offices. Inequality exists because under capitalism workers are systematically exploited, with the wealth we create being concentrated in the hands of these bosses.

To really tackle inequality and poverty, we have to get rid of the profit system and of private ownership of the means of wealth creation and replace it with a system where production serves the needs of many, not the greed of a few. ■

### This "classless society"...



Source: Rowntree Foundation

rian Tories accepted that "the poor are always with us", today's Tories believe that the poor are always necessary.

The *Economist* denounced Rowntree for its "obsession with fairness and redistribution". It derided the "politics of envy".

It insisted, like Thatcher and Major, that the poor are best served by giving a rich minority the incentive to create more wealth. This will eventually "trickle down" and benefit the poorest.

This is rubbish. Rowntree's report has proved that the huge growth in inequality over the past 15 years has not led to more wealth creation.

And the bottom 30% of workers in this country have not benefited at all from economic growth under the Tories. The so-called trickle doesn't go "down", it just gets diverted into huge reservoirs of wealth

in the bank accounts of the rich.

So how can the poor get richer?

The Tory answer is more of the same. The poor should be made to work for any pay offered; their "dependency" on benefits has to be ended. They think that wealth is increased when people strive to improve their own conditions, and therefore the mass of the population must be poor enough to "aspire" to better things.

The Rowntree Commission proposes increased benefits, better job training and educational provision.

It even appeals to the good sense of the rich themselves—"everyone shares an interest in the cohesion of society". No one wants to live in a "drawbridge society", they claim, sealed off from the poor and its demands.

Pull the other one! As every