

Workers power

INSIDE

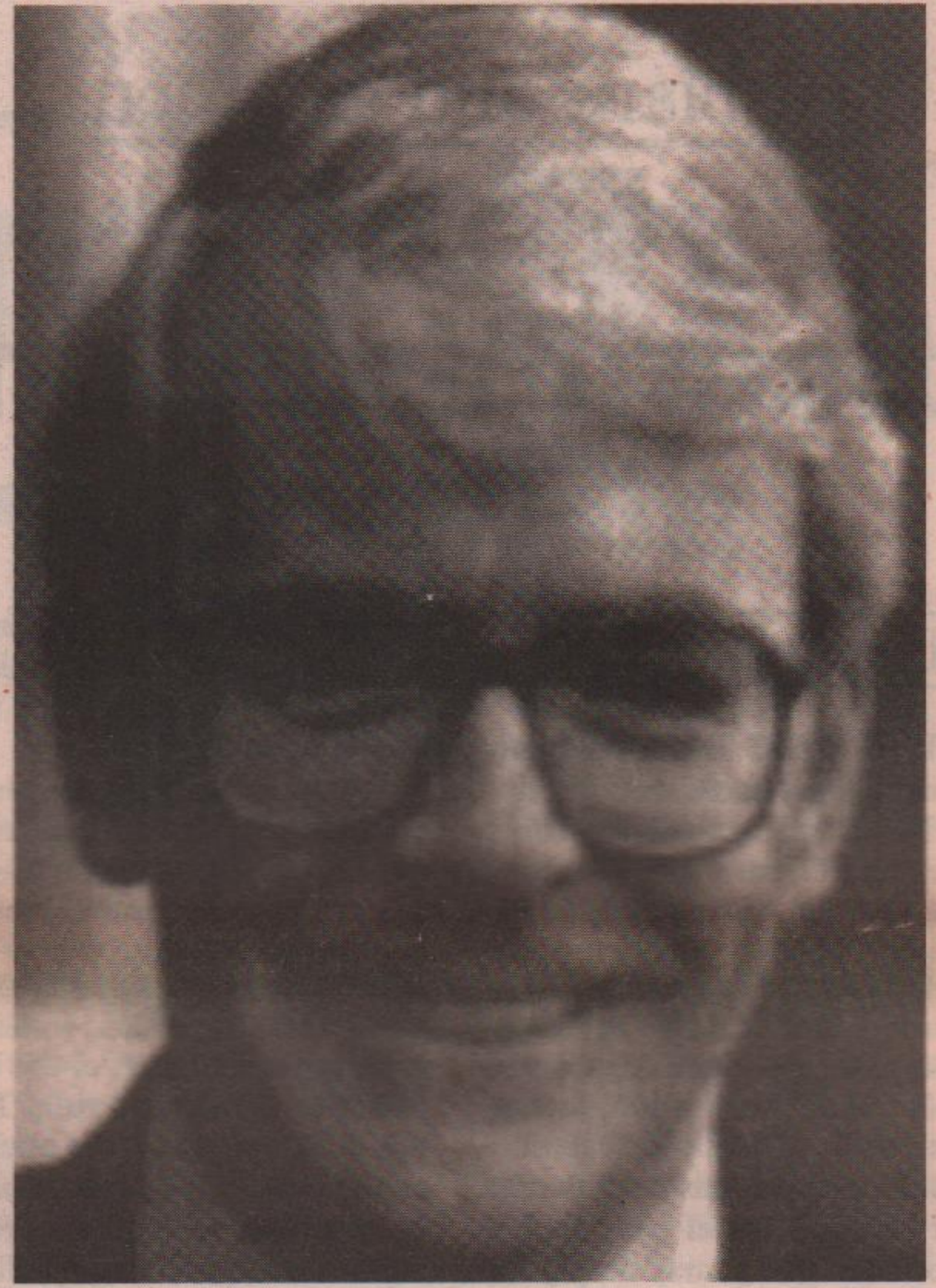
- Socialist Labour-launch conference report
- PFI: the new privatisation
- Asylum Bill: the fight for non-compliance
- Labour's racist record
- A to Z of Marxism
- Bolivia: strike report
- Ireland: Stormont revisited
- Letters, comment.

For Internationalism, Socialism and Workers' Revolution

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Beef war election gamble:

Reject Major's Euro madness



THE TORIES' war of non-co-operation with Europe is a cynical election ploy. They hope it will be John Major's Falklands, rallying the nation in time for another election victory. They must think we're as mad as the cows they're trying to make us eat! ● Turn to page 3

No to little
England
nationalism

Fight for a workers' Europe!

Euro 96

You'll wish it *was* all over...

by Colin Lloyd

WHEN EVERY shop on the high street dresses up its wares in the Union Jack this can mean only one thing: an international sporting event is about to be staged in Britain. Euro 96—the European football championships—takes place here this month.

The competition is supposed to be an opportunity to display everything that's good about the country. Predictably, it's turned out to be a display of the sickness of the system. And this goes much deeper than the terrible "official" team songs and the hideous Euro 96 cravats, socks and underpants on sale at Tie Rack.

In the first place there is the nationalism. Throughout June we will be invited to consider the national defects of our

footballing rivals: the "arrogant" French, the "dope-smoking" Dutch, the "dirty-playing" Italians, the "ruthlessly efficient" Germans and the "barbaric" Turks. Every racist stereotype will be trotted out by tabloid reporters and TV commentators alike. Particularly if England gets knocked out midway, as seems inevitable without the help of match-fixing.

Orgy

With Euro 96 coming on top of Major's anti-Euro beef war (see opposite) we are in for an orgy of anti-European nationalism. And because the UK has not one but four international sides (only England and Scotland have qualified) the London-based press will have the opportunity to add the "tartan hordes"

to its list of xenophobic stereotypes.

The general patriotic hype could turn really nasty if, as is probable, a parallel kick-about develops between the far-right thugs of Europe, with heads instead of footballs as the focus. The press will be hard pushed to choose between "our nazis and theirs". But once the police wade in—indiscriminately coshing the majority of peaceful fans as well—the tabloid rags will do their "patriotic duty".

For a country whose public purse is brimming with Lottery receipts Britain is spending very little to celebrate Euro 96. The £2 million in government funds allocated for local celebrations hasn't been spent because cash-strapped local

authorities could not afford to match the spending.

And the fans can expect to taste the full generosity of English soccer ground culture: massive queues for blocked toilets, sky-high ticket prices boosted tenfold by the touts, long waits and cattle-truck treatment before and after games. And for the hungry, the good old British beefburger, flambéed with stale onions in two inches of ancient fat.

It is a supreme irony that the chance to stage a real international Euro-competition should fall to Britain at the very moment that its government ministers cannot say "Europe" without spitting. The hapless BBC chose the theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to introduce its Euro 96 broadcasts. Tory ministers proclaimed themselves shocked at

the use of a tune that is "the anthem of Euro-federalism", and written by a German to boot!

Euro 96 could have been about brilliant football, cultural exchange, government-funded improvements in sports and public transport facilities.

But racist, xenophobic British capitalism, with its services in decline and with a penny-pinching Tory government, is incapable of staging such a tournament.

Instead, our big cities will put on a display of municipal mediocrity as only they know how and this will be accompanied by a disgusting tide of jingoism. Millions of us love football, but by the end of June many will be hoping and praying we never see the World Cup staged in Britain. ■

Lesbians and gay men

Fight discrimination at work

by Lisa Collingwood

SOUTH WEST Trains currently faces a legal battle over sex discrimination against a lesbian employee. Lisa Grant made headlines in May as she took the recently privatised company to an industrial tribunal over workplace discrimination.

The former British Rail's equal opportunities policy proclaims opposition to any form of discrimination, including on the basis of same-sex relationships. But Lisa Grant has been denied her right to a rail travel pass for her partner of over two years, simply because her partner is also a woman.

In complete contradiction to the company's paper policy Nicholas Underhill, QC for South West Trains, told a tribunal hearing that "It is not for private companies or public companies to trailblaze by trying to change social attitudes", arguing that South West Trains was merely reflecting "social norms".

As we go to press, Lisa Grant and her partner await the results of last month's hearing. Whatever the eventual decision, the case appears certain to go to the British and possibly European

courts. The question remains: do laws against homophobic discrimination fundamentally change the reality of homophobia?

Important as it is to extend democratic and legal rights, the obvious answer is that legal reform is not enough to uproot homophobia. Just as racism and sexism continue to be a part of the whole system of capitalist exploitation and social oppression, so homophobia is an important part of the bosses' capacity to divide and rule. The system has not given up on the nuclear family as the best way of reproducing its labour power, so anti-gay prejudice remains a weapon for the ruling class.

While Lisa Grant has every right to continue her fight in the courts, her union, the TSSA, and other rail unions should be footing the bill and mobilising support against this blatant act of discrimination. No amount of court battles will actually stop the violent homophobia and discrimination faced by lesbians and gays, unless there is a return to mass campaigning and a fight in the labour movement for solidarity. ■

Queer bashing—the reality. See page 16.

Private Finance Initiative

The parts other privatisations failed to reach

DESPITE THE supposed economic recovery of the past four years, Britain's private sector bosses have continued to invest precious little of their capital "at home". Meanwhile, the Tories' obsession with the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) has meant huge cuts in state spending. The result has been a further crumbling of the country's infrastructure of bridges, roads, hospitals and schools.

In the November 1994 budget, Chancellor Kenneth Clarke unveiled the Tories' supposed solution to these and other problems: the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). The 1995 budget indicated that PFI had become a cornerstone of Tory policy.

In a nutshell, the PFI offers potentially massive subsidies from the state's coffers to private sector firms. At the same time, it offloads traditional areas of public sector responsibility onto capitalist companies. A typical PFI project would involve a private sector company building a hospital, recruiting the ancillary staff and then leasing the facility to the

local NHS trust.

Little wonder then that Sir Alastair Morton, chairman of that very successful concern "Eurotunnel", has dubbed the PFI the "Heineken of privatisation"—it reaches the parts other sell offs cannot reach.

All government and NHS projects above a certain value have to consider private finance first. Many local councils are looking at PFI out of desperation caused by the borrowing limits imposed by central government. Ironically, the PFI involves an additional costly layer of consultants and contracts—and still more public subsidy to the private sector. Despite this, the bosses still complain about bureaucracy and the costs of preparing a bid. To counter these complaints from its dwindling band of construction industry backers, the Tories have suggested that public bodies should refund the bosses' bidding costs.

PFI supposedly transfers risk between the public and private sector. This is a bit of sleight of hand by the Tories. Because of the huge sums involved, the government wants to paint a picture of private sector bosses taking a chance. Otherwise, this expenditure would be defined as public debt and the government wants to shrink the PSBR to allow space for tax cuts.

Risk

How much risk transfer is there really? The Isle of Skye bridge illustrates what is happening. When the bridge to the Scottish mainland was opened, the government shut down the state-owned ferry service. There is now a cosy monopoly for the private toll collectors on the bridge.

PFI also increases long-term public debt through the back door as there is no systematic monitoring of the future financial liabilities the state might have to pay for a failed PFI project.

The government's views on debt have conveniently changed. In the 1980s Tory ministers regularly castigated Labour-controlled councils for "creative accounting" such as "leaseback" arrangements whereby council buildings were sold and then "leased back". The government put a halt to these practices. Now the Treasury building itself is the subject of "leaseback" proposals.

The PFI also has serious implications for workers' pay and conditions. A leisure centre, opened under PFI will employ staff through a facilities manage-

ment company at even lower pay rates than those of local councils. Obligatory payments to the private sector will also mean that NHS trusts and councils will need to look elsewhere—their workforces and patients—for cuts.

PFI projects can also be "dual-use". For instance, a private company could build a school and lease it to the local education authority during the day, but then run it as a private sports facility in the evening.

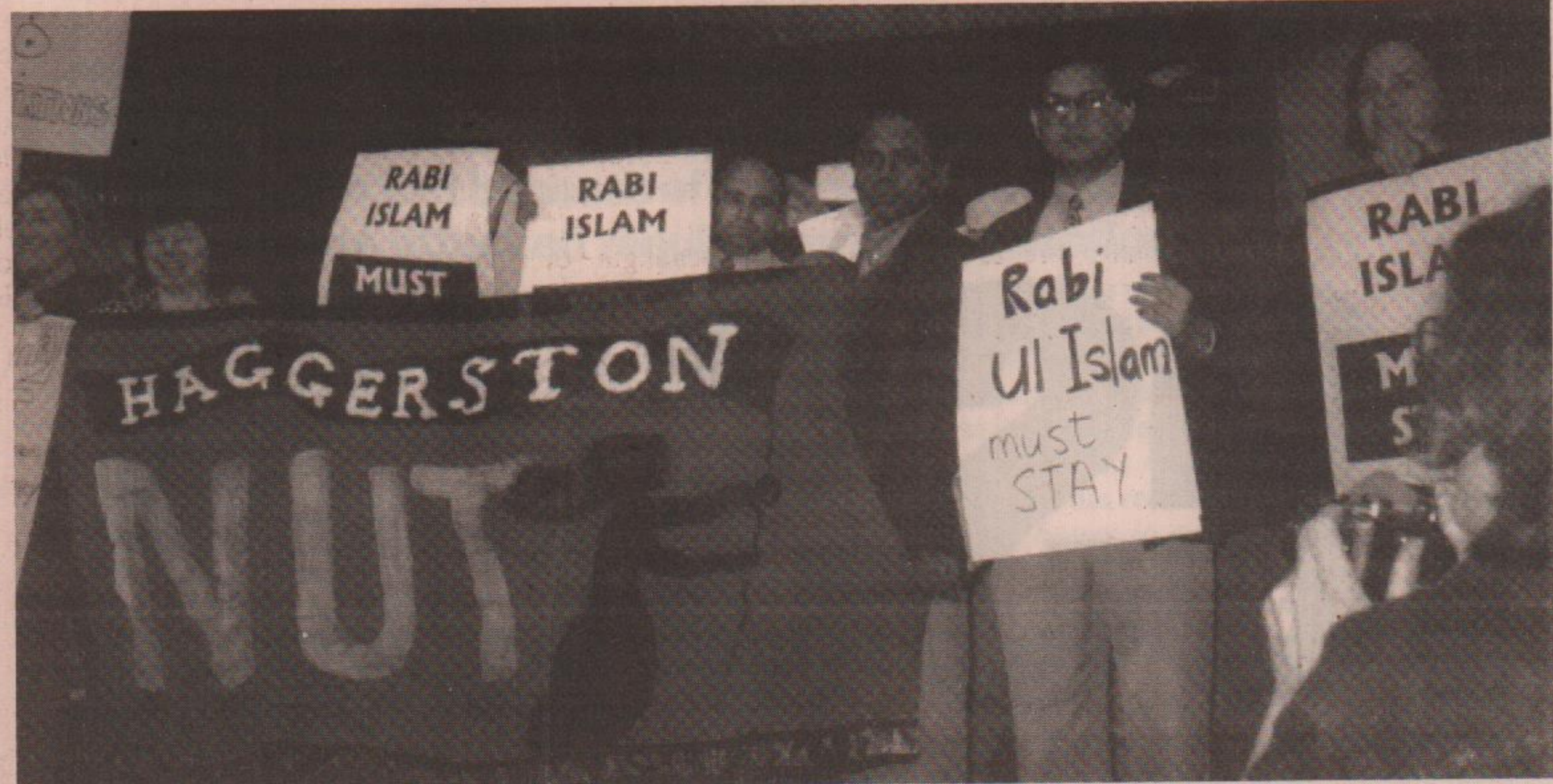
New Labour's predictable response has been to go along with the concept of PFI, and gripe about the mechanics of its implementation. They have complained that there is too much red tape and not enough PFI projects have yet gone ahead.

David Blunkett, shadow education and employment minister, told this year's NUT conference that public-private partnerships would be key to tackling a backlog of school repairs. The private sector would refurbish and then effectively own schools, leasing them to the education authority.

Private housing companies running a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of former council stock get the stamp of approval from Nick Raynsford, Labour's housing spokesperson. LSVT is an example of PFI in its infancy. Reports suggest that 5% of the purchase price of council housing transfers goes to pay for consultants' fees, legal costs, etc. Estates with low debt will be cherry-picked by local housing companies that will merge into large national conglomerates. Housing company rents will rise to market levels.

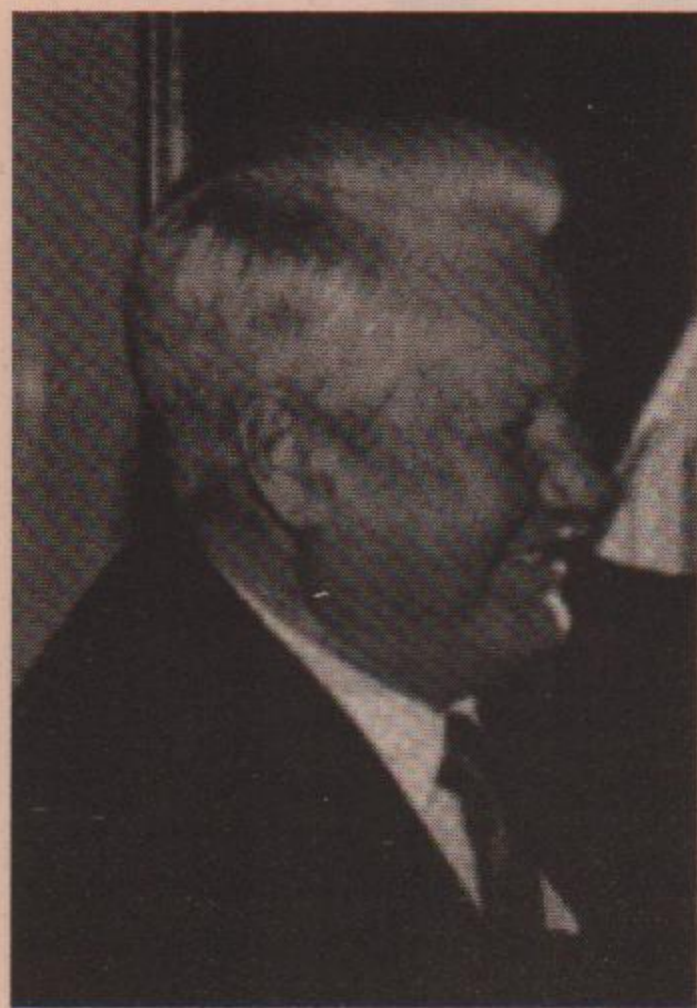
So far the leaderships of the public sector unions have maintained a deafening silence on PFI. They have not countered New Labour's arguments which suggest that PFI is some sort of alchemy to get the private sector to pay for public works. Union activists must alert their membership that PFI is no different to market testing and Compulsory Competitive Tendering—another attack on their jobs and pay.

Activists need to start the fight now to maximise the pressure on a Blair-led government to take back into public ownership, under workers' control, all the utilities hived off by the Tories. We need a state-run programme of public works to repair the tattered fabric of our schools, hospitals and transport systems, with the money coming from a steep wealth tax on the rich. ■



OVER FIFTY people joined a lively picket of the Home Office last month against the deportation of Rabi-ul-Islam, a teacher at Haggerston School in Hackney. Rabi was joined by fellow members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), other trade unionists and anti-deportation activists. The demonstration was addressed by Margaret Ilin, wife of Mircea Ilin, who had just been seized by immigration officials and detained in Rochester prison. Mircea has since won the right to take his case to judicial review, but he remains in prison. Rabi and Mircea's campaigns are supporting a demonstration called by Hackney NUT and Hackney Unison against all deportations on 15 June in Hackney.

Support the demo Saturday 15 June 11.30 Hackney Town Hall



Russia: on the brink of civil war?

Dave Stockton surveys the Russian political landscape in the run up to the presidential elections. Centre pages

M is for materialism

Paul Morris looks at materialism, what it is, how it can describe and understand the development of society and how ideas originate. Page 9

SLP: The party begins

Richard Brenner surveys the debates at the Socialist Labour Party's founding conference. Page 14

Le Pen's fascist turn

Serge Godard of the LRCI's French section explains why Jean Marie Le Pen's Front National has turned to spouting "social" rhetoric. Page 11

Bolivian strike wave

Mass struggles broke out once again in Bolivia, this time in response to the government sell off of the oil industry. Keith Harvey reports. Page 10

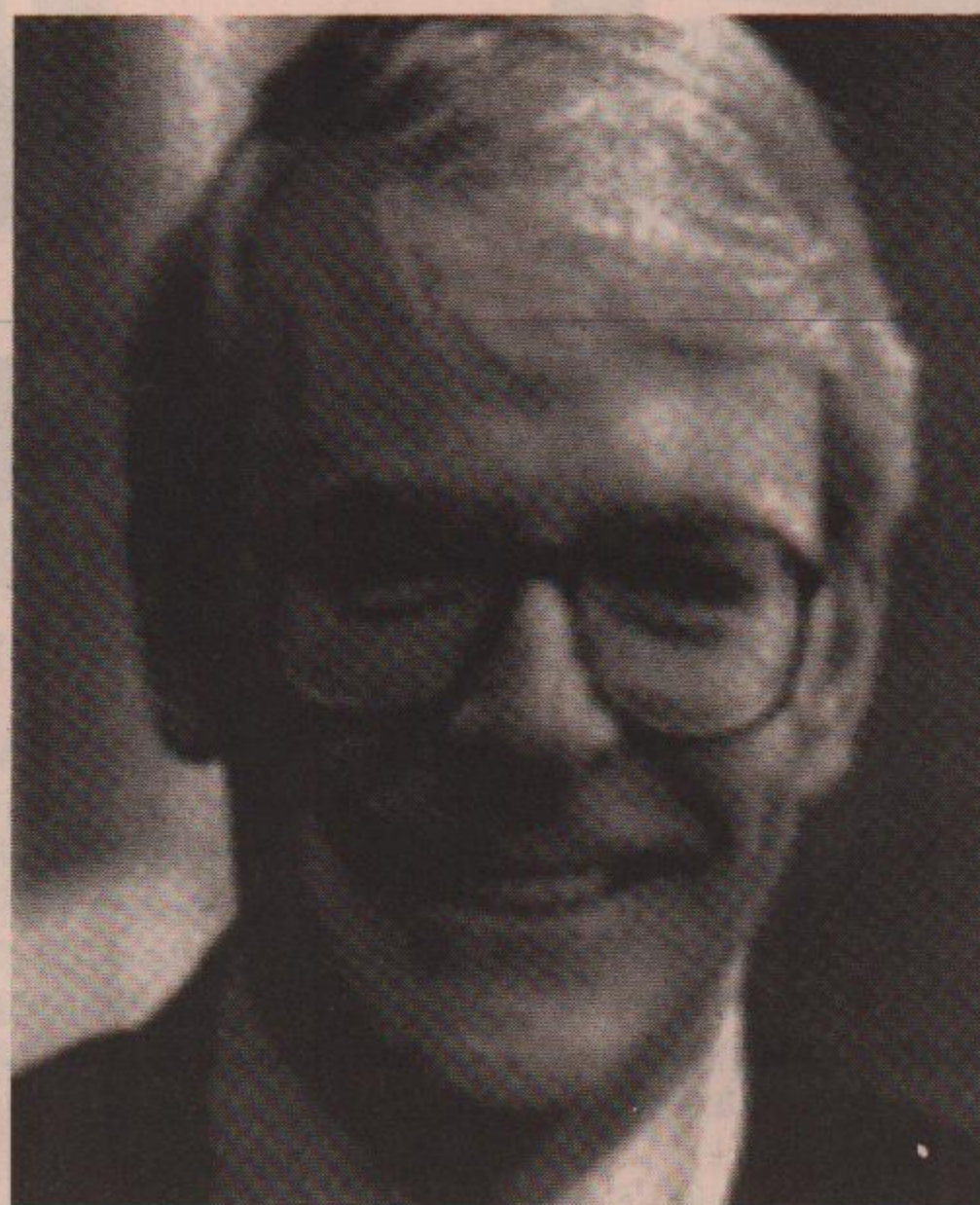
Blairwatch

Introducing a new monthly feature charting the ever rightward march of Blair's New Labour. Page 6

In next month's issue

N is for Nationalisation • Atlanta Olympics: the politics of sport • Unison conference • Labour and the unions • History of the FI: 1948: the Second World Congress.

Copy deadline 28 June



Major's beef war

From wimp to Wellington?

THEY'RE BILLING it as John Major's Falklands War: the decisive confrontation that will transform him from wimp to Wellington, head off a leadership challenge and deliver a Tory election landslide to rival Thatcher's. They must be madder than the cows they're trying to make us eat.

On 21 May Major announced Britain's policy of non-co-operation with the EU until the beef ban is relaxed. He was spurred on by the crazed chorus of little England racists in the cabinet and the Tory establishment who have now decided to make or break the Tory Party over Europe.

Three years ago America banned British beef; a move at least as economically vindictive as the EU beef-ban in Major's terms. But Britain did not implement a policy of non-co-operation with NATO. For years the entire Commonwealth has banned British beef exports, with no significant repercussions.

But when the European Commission voted to delay the partial lifting of the ban—not on beef itself but on beef tallow, gelatine and bull semen—Major declared diplomatic war on Brussels. If, as seems likely, EU farm ministers vote to lift this ban on 3 June, Major may even claim a victory.

But it will not be enough to save him. Only a collective act of madness by millions of voters will lead them back into the arms of a party which puts lard, jelly and bull semen before jobs, houses and education.

In their rush to cram British beef down European throats the Tories have shown not an ounce of concern for the lives and health of consumers. They denied the dangers of BSE for years. But millions of ordinary people decided to trust their own judgement. A mass consumer boycott forced the Tories into retreat, and

led the panic-stricken agribusinesses of Europe to demand a beef ban.

In the ensuing weeks most ordinary working class people, many of whose low wages make beef a high-priced luxury, forgot about the beef ban and turned their attention towards the more pressing things in life. But not the rabid Europhobes in the Tory party and the right wing press.

The Telegraph, the Sun and the Express raged furiously about Major's indecisiveness over beef. Behind the scenes at Westminster support was growing for the proposition—once derided as off the wall—for a British pull-out from the EU altogether.

Is all this the ranting of a gin-soaked section of the upper middle class, too old to care about the potential effects of BSE in ten years time, too bigoted to appreciate foreign food, too vain to realise that Britain's days as a superpower are over?

No. The hostility to Europe within the British ruling class goes deeper than prejudice. It is based on a profound crisis of economic direction.

As Workers Power has long argued, there is a material division of interest amongst the British bosses. It does not follow the lines of "City versus Industry", or manufacturing versus services. It is drawn between those capitalists who are forced to compete and trade in Europe, and those whose multinational interests lie primarily beyond Europe. This is the material underpinning of the Tory split on Europe.

What position should the workers' movement take on all of this? As long as EU experts think that British beef is potentially unsafe we should fight for a ban on its sale here, with full compensation for small farmers and traders affected by the loss of trade, and no loss of

pay for those thousands of workers in farming and the food industry who have been laid off as a result.

There should be no support for Major's economic and diplomatic war with Europe's bosses. Like all clashes between the big imperialist countries, it is a battle in which the working class should take no side.

Most of all we need our own, working class vision of Europe's future.

The Tory right has its vision of Europe: a single market and no more. It wants an exclusive club devoted to ripping off the working class, with no rules and regulations for businesses other than those that prevent "unfair competition".

The Europhile Tory left, the Liberals and the Brussels bureaucrats have their own, different, vision of Europe. They want a protected capitalist market, a new economic superpower to rival America and Japan. To achieve that goal, and the important stepping stone of a single currency, they are prepared to impose years of austerity on the workers of the EU. Both Europhobes and Europhiles want a "Fortress Europe" with racist immigration controls and internal race checks.

The Labour Party leaders have no clear vision of Europe other than general support for the more pro-European bosses. But when these bosses are divided Blair, Brown and Prescott can only freeze like rabbits in the headlights of an approaching car.

As for the Labour left, their vision of Europe rests on the useless supposition that a "sovereign British parliament" would be able to legislate socialism from above. In pursuit of this vision the Labour left leaders regularly troop along with right wing Tory misfits to bedraggled rallies in defence of British "independence".

The working class must reject all this. Its own vision of Europe must be based on class solidarity and internationalism.

At present 80,000 British building workers are labouring, in appalling danger, on the construction sites of Germany. They were brought in to undercut the wages of their German counterparts. Treated like dirt by their bosses, with no rights, they are herded into squalid barracks by tax-dodging sub contractors.

If the European working class was organised internationally it could immediately impose common wage levels, working conditions and safety standards.

We need a workers' Europe: a socialist united states of the entire continent, built not on a single market but on a common economic plan. It would be ruled not by an unelected commission or council of ministers, but by a pan-European workers' council. It would throw open its doors to all the victims of repression and starvation instead of criminalising them.

A socialist united states of Europe could eradicate the 20 million EU dole queue. It could eradicate poverty throughout the continent. It could ensure that Europe would never again see genocide and war, diverting Europe's multi-billion pound defence budget into spending to meet human need. It would reach outward to support the struggles of the masses across the globe, cancelling the debts of the semi-colonies, providing solidarity and working for world revolution.

That is a vision worth fighting for. As for the battle for British lard, British gelatine and British sperm—let's leave it to Major and the stuffed shirts of the Tory shires. ■

• Turn to page 10 - Viewpoint, Clare Heath

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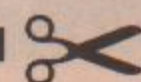
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After the conferences

Where next for the civil service unions?

Both Civil Service unions held their conferences last month. A delegate to the PTC conference reports on signs of a growing willingness to fight after years of cutbacks.

FOLLOWING THE Civil and Public Sector Association (CPSA) pay strike in the Employment Service earlier this year, there are now strikes, ballots for action or lock-outs in several sectors, including the Benefits Agency, the courts, the Immigration Service, Customs, the Welsh Office, and the Lord Chancellor's Department. Activists must build on this action and seek to escalate it.

There are problems, of course. Many disputes are localised or over secondary issues, and both the CPSA and the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) continue to be controlled by the right wing.

Advances

Whilst the best motions on pay, jobs and privatisation were either shelved or defeated at conference, there were some advances in both unions, including the call for a more co-ordinated fightback across the Departments, Agencies and unions. Now we must make this happen.

The left also made gains in the Department and Agency-based Group and Section conferences and elections. Members tend to vote for Group and Section leaderships that look prepared to fight, especially in those areas which have recently seen industrial action.

Many on the left, however, draw the wrong conclusions from this. Militant Labour, which enjoys leading positions in CPSA's Left Unity (LU) and the PTC Broad Left (BL), believe that electoral success is the key to transforming the civil service unions. They are wrong on two counts.

First, the concentration on elections has been an excuse for a dilution of policy. In search for electoral pacts with the Stalinists, the left has not only modified its own historic positions, it has also failed to warn rank and file members of the dangers of the fake lefts.

The PTC BL's journal, *Broadside*, failed to even mention the atrocious record of the Stalinists. Yet at conference, the Stalinists in the Benefits Agency crowned their electoral success by voting to recommend a pay deal that would introduce regional bargaining. This goes against national union policy, not to mention their own election manifesto!

Second, elections remain essentially passive exercises, which is why the right-wing do so well. At the LU rally, for example, over 500 delegates turned up. Yet, the LU slate only captured fewer than 7,000 votes.

The workplace, not the electoral arena, is where the civil service unions will be transformed. The task facing activists who want to take on the Tories and oust the right-wingers is to build a rank and file movement embedded in each and every office. Electoral tactics, like standing for the NEC, must be measured against the benchmark of whether they advance this key goal.

Realignment

Unfortunately, the realignment of the left in PTC and CPSA is going in exactly the opposite direction. The Stalinists and the left in the CPSA are now in the same organisation, Left Unity.

The PTC BL is likewise heading for a

merger with the Stalinist-dominated Unity faction. Whilst this has the advantage of producing large left groupings, it also makes the building of rank and file opposition within these blocs more urgent.

Built

The Socialist Caucus (SC) built on its work in leading the fightback in the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency and elsewhere. Within the CPSA, the SC are now a vibrant, independent group. In the PTC, SC established itself as a national group for the first time (thanks to the work of Workers Power supporters).

The SWP remains marginalised within

both unions. Despite good positions against the merger, for Labour Party affiliation and in favour of all-out, indefinite strikes, their sectarian abstention from the fight for a rank and file opposition within both the LU and the PTC BL leaves them on the sidelines.

We call on all activists in the civil service, including the SWP, to unite in Socialist Caucus and fight for a real rank and file movement. And the fight starts now by building on the existing disputes in the workplaces!■

Buy Rank & File, journal of the Socialist Caucus, price £1. Send cheques payable to Rank and File, PO Box 3140, London E17.

PTC

A POIGNANT moment during the recent PTC conference came as Lola Onibiyo thanked two immigration officers who openly defied orders and drove her brother Ade round to the front of Heathrow so that he could spend five minutes with his family before his deportation.

Unfortunately, a motion calling for the repeal of all immigration controls and a boycott of work related to the Asylum Bill had been defeated, though a third of the delegates supported it.

The other highlight of the conference was the fiery speech made by Doreen McNally, chairperson of Women of the Waterfront, the sup-

port committee established by the wives and partners of striking Liverpool dockers.

She launched a hard-hitting salvo against the trade union bureaucracy in general to the evident embarrassment of the suits on the platform. The top table would not even take an emergency motion from Companies House in Cardiff about a national protest strike in support of the dockers' fight.

Key motions at the conference were on affiliation to the Labour Party and Northern Ireland. Conference rejected affiliation, with only supporters of Workers Power and the SWP in favour.■

CPSA

A KEY vote at the CPSA conference in Brighton concerned merger with the PTC. Conference voted narrowly in favour of merging with the union that includes managerial grades. A card vote showed 55,281 in favour, 45,085 against. Arguments that the merger would lead to possible management domination within the new union locally and nationally clearly found some resonance. The narrow margin is striking since both the right wing and the Left Unity group were in favour. CPSA members will now have a chance to stop the merger in a ballot.

Despite election victories, the right appeared rattled at the conference. They reverted to the most blatant bureaucratic measures, closing the conference early one day to stop a debate on Rule 10.3.

This rule is totally anti-democratic since it effectively allows the president to rule any motion out of order, without having to justify the decision to the conference. Some left motions were carried, including support for the Liverpool dockers, for a campaign on pay and cuts, and a fight against the JSA. The debate on the JSA even pushed the leadership into criticising the Labour Party. Arch right-wing bureaucrat Barry Reamsbottom told the conference that it will be necessary to fight against a future Labour government!■

Unison

Organising to fight the Asylum Bill

THE TORIES are hoping to railroad their racist Asylum Bill through parliament by early July. They are playing the race card in the run-up to the next election.

Members of Unison, the country's biggest union, will have primary responsibility for implementing this legislation and associated attacks on refugees applying for a wide range of benefits. The Bill has sparked more resolutions than any other issue on the agenda of Unison's annual conference in mid-June.

Activists in the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU), the main left group within Unison, are preparing for war against the Asylum Bill.

Seventy five Unison members attended a CFDU-organised conference against the Bill on 11 May. Only four days later up to 230 delegates attended a second conference on the Asylum Bill, called by the Unison bureaucracy. Why two conferences? Because the bureaucracy had repeatedly failed to carry out union policy to hold such an event. Only when publicity for the CFDU conference had gone out, did the Unison leaders call an official conference in a petty manoeuvre that should have been condemned by any serious anti-racist activist.

Boycott

Unfortunately, matters were compounded by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) who also told its Unison activists to boycott the CFDU conference.

The delegates at the CFDU conference committed themselves to fighting for non-compliance with the Bill and sought

to map out an action plan that would help workers combat it.

If the Bill becomes law, thousands of public sector workers, especially those on the frontline of service provision, will be used as *de facto* immigration officials. The government expects these workers to deny refugees benefits, access to housing and to report service users without "proper" documentation to the Home Office.

Workshops at the CFDU conference tackled the mechanics of non-compliance, gathering delegates from each service area, so that they could formulate specific action proposals. One workshop consisted of Unison national conference delegates, responsible for composing amendments to motions on non-compliance, combined with strike action so that no worker in the forefront of resistance fights alone.

The CFDU event was concrete and absolutely committed to ensuring that Unison launches a real fight against the legislation. The official conference was far less productive. The organisers refused to take votes on proposals or to discuss strategy seriously.

General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe was having no truck with calls for non-compliance. When pressed by delegates asking what the union would do

to protect members from victimisation, the bureaucrats cracked jokes about well-known activists.

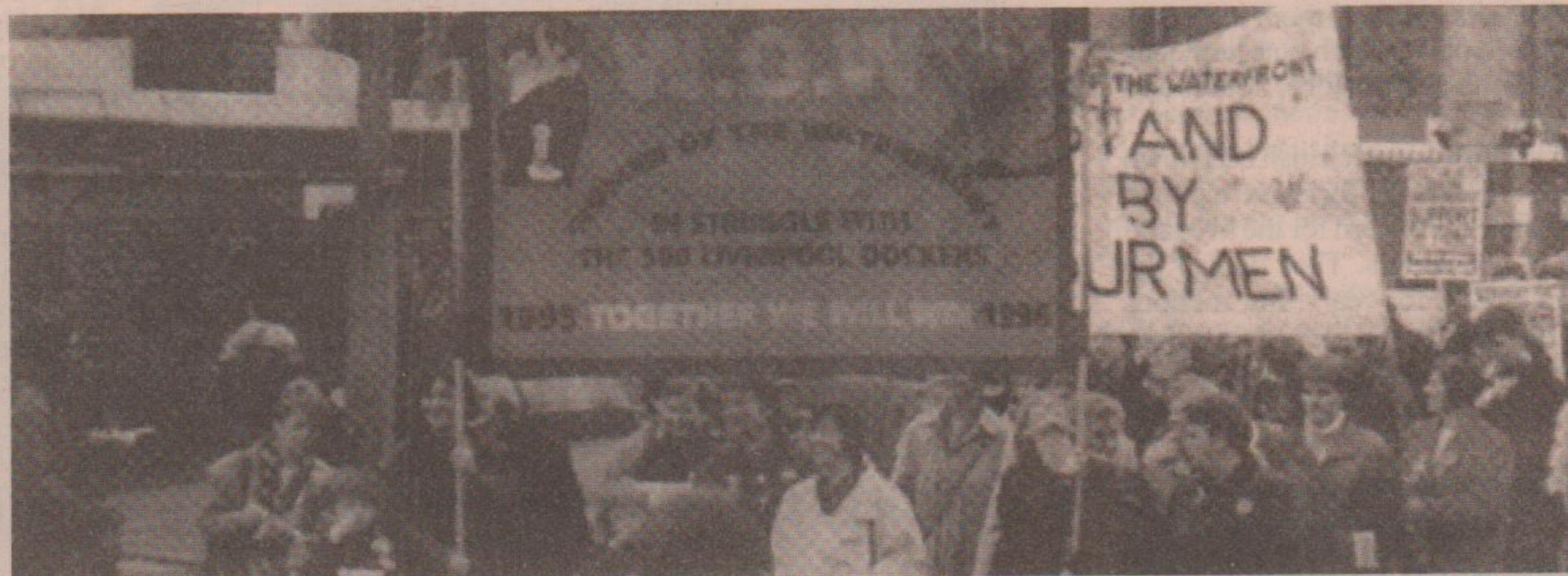
Violate

The leadership's proposal calls on employers to take out liability insurance to cover Unison members who violate the 1976 Race Relations Act by carrying out duties under the Asylum Bill.

The bureaucrats refused to commit Unison to a fight to repeal the racist laws, after Labour's spokesperson on immigration, Doug Henderson, made it plain that New Labour would only scrap the Bill's "offensive sections". This was a slap in the face to the conference as a whole, but especially to those Unison members currently fighting deportation threats such as Prakash Chavrimootoo, Florence Okolo, Bayo Omoyiola, Wale Croft and Joyce Onyibiyo.

A lunch-time caucus, dominated by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), was the only opportunity to discuss action. Their spokesperson, Yunus Bakhsh, called for unity around non-compliance in the run-up to the June conference. Ironically, the CFDU were able to provide a composite resolution along with an action plan for non co-operation, making the SWP's boycott of the 11 May conference look all the more ridiculous.

A victory for non-compliance at the conference is vital, but it is not the whole picture. We need to be able to build local activity against the specific measures contained in the legislation. The only guarantee of future success is a mass campaign of non co-operation.■



STRIKING LIVERPOOL dockers have entered the ninth month of their bitter fight in defence of jobs and trade union rights. The energy and determination of their partners in Women of the Waterfront (pictured above on their own 10 April march) has strengthened the strikers' resolve, but donations are desperately needed to sustain their struggle which has still received no official backing from the TGWU. Crucial as it has been, international solidarity is not enough. We urge all trade unionists to rush cheques/postal orders to: Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee, c/o Jimmy Davies, Secretary, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS.

The next national demonstration in support of the dockers' fight is scheduled for Saturday 29 June, Assemble Myrtle Parade, near the Philharmonic Hall at 11.30 am. Ring 0151 207 3388 for further details and to invite speakers to your branch meeting.

Postal workers' ballot For an all out strike

POSTAL WORKERS are poised to give backing to a call for strike action in opposition to Royal Mail's "Employee Agenda" (EA). Even the joint General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), Alan Johnson, has been campaigning for a "yes" vote.

Johnson, one of Tony Blair's enthusiastic supporters in the trade union bureaucracy, has not undergone a sudden conversion to militancy. But he has felt the pressure from CWU members, incensed at the EA and other management demands which would mean the axing of thousands of full-time jobs and the virtual elimination of second deliveries. The result of the ballot is due on 2 June.

Royal Mail management have refused to budge an inch in negotiations over the EA, leaving Johnson without a deal that he can sell to his executive, let alone the membership!

Circular

A management circular to the CWU shows their determination:

"We will have change with or without you. Whether it is today, tomorrow, next month or later, we will continue to pur-

sue the EA."

The bosses are determined to scrap demarcation through "teamworking". In practice "teamwork" means all absences being covered by team members, a management veto over attendance arrangements and break times, and no rotation of duties.

And all this for the princely sum of an extra £24 a week.

Johnson sees a pro-strike ballot result as just another bargaining chip to extract minor concessions from Royal Mail.

CWU militants need to seize on a victory in the ballot as a mandate for real action not for even more talks with the bosses. The national executive are unlikely to call any strikes immediately and will probably only authorise one-day walk outs. Given the scale of the management attacks, backed to the hilt by the Tories and unopposed by Blair's New Labour, the only effective answer for postal workers is an all-out, indefinite strike. A key lesson of the signalworkers' action against Railtrack in 1994 was endless one-day strikes sap members' savings and needlessly prolong disputes.

Indefinite action could bring a swift and decisive victory. The bosses would face the prospect of permanently losing

their market share to private sector outfits, while Major's government is in no shape for a battle with a strategic section of the working class.

To make an all-out strike bite, rank and file CWU members must take the running of the dispute away from Johnson and the present national leadership. Postal workers need a national strike committee, made up of accountable and recallable delegates from as many as branches as possible.

Control

Local strike committees should exercise day-to-day control over the dispute and any negotiations with Royal Mail bosses. They must organise and defend the picket lines and have full access to all talks between national officials and Royal Mail, with a veto on any deal, until it has been ratified by mass meetings of strikers.

CWU militants should also seize this opportunity to bring the huge number of unorganised casuals into the union. The CWU's demands should include a cut in the working week to 35 hours, with no loss of pay, and permanent contracts for casuals on the basis of union-negotiated terms and conditions. ■

Cardiff housing workers Solidarity action now!

"We must strive to provide a high quality service to tenants by reducing overheads, such as administration".

This is how Cardiff Council housing chairperson Linda Thorne defended the Labour council's axing of 109 jobs and downgrading a further 60 posts. In response, over 200 Unison Housing Office members have been on all-out strike since 9 May.

The proposed job losses would mean a massive reduction in the Housing Office service. Eight out of the twelve Area Offices would become a mere message-taking service, with only four core offices providing a full service (repairs, housing benefit, allocations, letting, rents etc.).

The remaining staff would face a huge increase in workload. The cuts are being "justified" by management because they only involve temporary contract workers!

Angry Unison members have lobbied Labour group meetings, but the council refuses even to negotiate. Labour councillors recently voted 46 to four to go ahead with the cuts, hoping to save £1.6 million on the housing budget.

Meanwhile, Council leader Russell Goodway, an arch-Blairite, receives £23,800 a year "expenses"—including a rise of £8,000 since the merger of the City and County Councils in April. The hand-outs given to the chairs of committees (£750,000) total half of the proposed saving in the housing budget! On top of this, Goodway plans to spend £500,000 on changing the colour of the city's buses!

Defeat

The real reason for the cuts in housing office jobs is to take on and defeat one of the strongest sections of council workers before further attacks on other sections.

The Labour council's election manifesto promise of no compulsory redundancies is already exposed as a lie. This is why the dispute is so vital to win—for all council workers. But the 200 Unison council strikers are unlikely to win a full victory on their own. Although the dispute is official, the members are not on full strike pay and are losing up to £500 a month. The current handful of scabs could increase, due to financial hardship and if no victory is in sight.

While the housing office workers provide front-line services, the effects of the strike are mainly long-term. The central housing office—Marland House—is not on strike and the Labour council can ride out the strike at present. It is vital, therefore, that the strike spreads.

SWP members have been effective in the leadership of the strike, ensuring that it has been run democratically, with regular mass meetings taking all the decisions. The strikers are solid and now need to turn to building for solidarity action across the whole council workforce.

This means demanding Unison nationally give full strike pay. They must immediately ballot Marland House members to join the strike. All sections of the 4,500 strong branch should be balloted to strike with the housing office workers.

Other workers can, and must, be won to joining the strike, bringing forward their own grievances and demands to fight for alongside the housing workers. ■

Messages of support, donations and requests for speakers to: Unison Office, County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff.



Strikers demonstrating outside the main housing office in Cardiff, where workers have not yet been called out. The strike needs to be spread quickly to other council workers in order to win.



Late nights, long days

A Unison steward from Derbyshire describes the problems faced by voluntary sector workers and the union activists who try to organise them.

"WE'VE ALL got over sixty hours owing to us, I suggest we forget it. The project can't afford to let us take the time off."

This is the attitude to which voluntary sector workers are meant to aspire. I've lost count of how many times I've heard fellow workers say "you have to live this job", or "of course you always end up putting in loads more hours than you claim for". I've sometimes felt very isolated when I've turned round and said: "No, I've got a right to a life outside work and I am going to take the time off I'm owed". We're told that to provide a good service to users, a devoted, self sacrificing attitude is vital. As a steward, it's an attitude I fight against—but it's not easy.

When I first started my current job, in a women's refuge, providing a good service meant taking home a mobile phone one week in three, and being prepared to drop everything and drive back to work if there was an emergency. This meant no drinking for that week, no travelling out of the area and no extra pay! When I and other workers questioned this system we were denounced as uncaring, uncommitted and selfish—and that was by co-workers!

One night I spent hours at the refuge because a young woman was threatening other residents with a broken glass. We didn't rely on the emergency services to deal with dangerous situations because that would mean men coming to the refuge. And I had to go back into work the next morning!

The issue came to a head when volunteers, who dealt with out of hours calls first and then contacted a worker if they couldn't handle the situation, decided they were going to have a break. They withdrew their unpaid labour with the result that the management committee expected workers to pick up the entire out of hours service on top of a 37 hour week.

As a steward, I got advice and support from my Unison branch, although I was accused of making matters worse by involving the "confrontational" union. Management, and some workers, preferred to try and solve the issue through consensus, i.e. giving volunteers an equal say on what workers should do! We finally refused to take phones home or to come back to work out of hours. However, this has left the out of hours service, which management decided was essential (despite alternative proposals put by workers), being run by volunteers, often unemployed single mothers paid meagre expenses.

It was a bitter and protracted dispute, in an organisation that recognises a union—many voluntary sector employers don't—and which sees itself as trying to be a good employer. It highlighted many of the problems faced by voluntary sector workers:

- volunteers often undermine paid workers by providing services free
- the service is always seen as more important than worker's rights or health and safety
- other workers, as well as management, promote the lie that a good service is best maintained not by fighting for adequate funding but through exploitation of good will and personal commitment
- union involvement is seen as unnecessary interference because "we all believe in equal opportunities here, so what are you worrying about?"

The voluntary sector is growing. Compulsory competitive tendering has meant local authorities are forced to transfer more and more services from the public sector to the voluntary sector—privatisation by any other name.

The unions have recognised the potential for recruitment. MSF, TGWU and Unison are all desperate for the subs of voluntary sector workers, but what are they going to deliver in return?

I attended Unison's first National Voluntary Sector Seminar in February. Voluntary sector projects are often small and isolated with only one or two active trade unionists if you're lucky, so this was a welcome opportunity to meet other activists facing similar problems. A lot of problems were raised—lack of recognition, lack of facility time, difficulties in taking strike action in small workplaces; voluntary sector issues not being taken seriously in the union as a whole, but there were no proposals for action, not even a commitment to hold further seminars because of the expense!

Voluntary sector workers don't need tokenistic gestures and glossy recruitment leaflets. We need our unions to fight for the legal right to recognition and to put pressure on local authorities, who fund or buy services from voluntary organisations, to require them, at the very least, to meet the local authorities standard of employment practice. We need unions that will fight for state underwriting of sick pay, maternity pay, redundancy pay and other conditions that aren't at the same level as the public sector.

We need unions prepared to take on the anti-trade union laws and call for solidarity action to support strikes in small workplaces. We need unions that will fight against services being provided on the cheap and unemployed workers being exploited as volunteers. And we need unions prepared to fight for these demands in the Labour Party.

This means organising our workplaces, getting active in our branches and fighting with public sector workers for better pay and conditions, and services that really meet people's needs. ■

Write to: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

What price the welfare state?

IT WAS Gordon Brown's month. Every time he appeared on the news you knew he was going to take some other benefit away from you. Would anyone stand up for the welfare state?

Some thought they had found a champion in Chris Smith, Labour's Shadow Social Security Minister. But Smith declared that the welfare state is only "a framework . . . not a mechanism for delivering security." He added: "Some argue that it is only the state that can possibly deliver . . . social security. I disagree."

The real cause of the divisions between Brown and Smith is the scale of what they think they can get away with and how quickly.

Blair, Brown and Smith all plan to dismantle the welfare state and leave the security of millions in the hands of rapacious private enterprise.

Job Seekers' Allowance

In the first week of May, Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown said he was against Labour plans to scrap the Tories' Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA).

Restoring unemployment benefits for 12 months would cost only £145 million, a mere fraction of the estimated £6.5 billion just given away to big business in the rail sell-off. At present 250,000 people stand to lose out under the JSA.

When an article by Labour MP Michael Meacher repeated Labour's pledge to scrap the JSA, Blair denounced it and forced Meacher to change his tune.

Now Brown is resisting a proposal from Chris Smith for £400 million to be spent reducing the cash penalties people suffer when returning to work after unemployment. Brown had already beaten Smith down from a figure of £1 billion, but it still wasn't low enough for him. For the bosses and for Brown every penny spent on the working class is an intolerable burden.

In a refreshingly honest comment on New Labour's shifting position, Chris Smith told reporters that if Brown's intention to maintain the Tory JSA gets through, "voters might have started to wonder if we were going to do anything at all." Exactly!

What do we want from Labour?

- No cuts in income support or unemployment benefit.
- Scrap the Job Seekers' Allowance.
- No means testing. For work or full pay.
- Benefits to be index linked to inflation.

Child Benefit

Brown proposed to scrap Child Benefit altogether for 16-18 year olds in education.

Chris Smith, Labour's Shadow Social Security Minister quickly pointed out that this would undermine the ability of families to help their children stay on at school and get qualifications.

Even arch Tory right-winger Peter Lilley described Brown's proposal as a "teenage tax" and a "pernicious tax on learning."

Over a million people would lose benefit, to save £700 million and enable Labour to keep taxes low for the rich.

Brown claimed that Child Benefit should be scrapped because it is unfair that better off parents receive it.

In fact this could be redressed by imposing a steeply progressive income tax, something no Labour politician will call for. Brown then claimed that it was unfair to leave Child Benefit as it is because one in four of its recipients are in private education. The obvious answer for anyone interested in fairness and equality of opportunity is: scrap private schools.

What should Labour be doing?

- No cuts in child benefit.
- Scrap private schools; no to selective education.

Another day, another policy shift by Blair's New Labour—and always to the right. Blair is determined to reassure big business that their profits will be safe under the Labour. As New Labour prepares for government **Workers Power** introduces **Blairwatch**—a regular feature keeping track of the sell-outs.

Blairwatch

Student grants

A week after the Child Benefit row came the news that Labour will definitely scrap student grants when it gets into office, thus making a quick saving of £1 billion a year. Students may not be quite so impressed by this thrifty approach from New Labour.

Students will be forced to take out extended loans which will be paid back over twenty years through the National Insurance system. The "graduate tax" is a direct attack on the principle of free education. Students will still get just £3,200 to £4,000 a year. The insurance and loan companies will make millions on the scheme.

Students: What do we need from Labour?

- No cuts in student grants.
- A living grant for all students over 16 at the level of a national minimum wage of £8 an hour.
- Free education for all.



Labour must deliver!

No matter what Brown comes up with, the majority of workers and trade unionists are still set to vote Labour.

Geoff Martin, the London convenor of Unison, expressed this clearly:

"Whatever the Labour leaders say, the expectation from people in the public sector is that they will get a better deal under Labour."

The job of socialists is to turn these expectations into demands that address the real needs of the working class. Workers must fight for these demands, forcing the next Labour government to meet them, fighting against that government if it refuses.

What should Labour be doing?

- Defending the welfare state. No "stakeholder society" but full employment and state provision of benefits, education and healthcare for all.
- For a massive programme of public spending to build schools, hospitals and put the unemployed back to work.
- Nationalise the banks, insurance companies and major industries without compensation and under the control of the workers themselves.
- Tax the rich. For a wealth tax on profits and unearned wealth, and a steeply progressive income tax. ■

Briefing: Labour and immigration controls

Playing the racist game

Each month **Blairwatch** briefs activists on an area of Labour Party policy, past and present. This month we examine Labour's disgraceful record of collusion with racist immigration controls

OVER THE past few months the Tories have introduced one of their most spiteful pieces of racist legislation: the Immigration and Asylum Bill. New Labour has remained virtually silent. This shameful response to such a vicious attack will be no surprise to anyone familiar with the Labour Party's record on immigration. They have a long history of following the Tories' racist lead.

The last time around, when the Tories introduced the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act (1992), Labour allowed the Tories to rush the bill through parliament with only minor changes so as to "remove race as an issue in the 1992 election" [see WP 153].

The new bill and the changes to benefits law which accompany it will introduce savage restrictions aimed at stopping refugees from entering Britain. Amongst them is the introduction of a "white list" of countries which are considered safe. It will also criminalize employers who take on illegal immigrants and establish new fast-track procedures for hearing (and rejecting) asylum seekers' appeals. There will be widespread loss of benefits for those waiting for an appeal to be heard.

The Tories say they are helping "race relations" by blocking immigration. But who first used this excuse?

It was Labour's Roy Hattersley. In 1965 he said that "without integration, limitation is inexcusable: without limitation, integration is impossible". In other words "good race relations" is a cover for racist restrictions. The problem of white racism is supposedly caused by black immigration. This outright racist lie is covered up by a hypocritical liberal motive.

Although Labour MPs often oppose vicious cases of their implementation, Labour agrees with the fundamental thinking behind immigration controls. As Jack Straw has explained, "Britain needs, but has not got a just and robust system of immigration controls. Whatever its sympathy, this country cannot sustain a large influx of economic migrants" [Socialist Outlook 28.11.95].

Whilst Straw is more outspoken than Hattersley, they share a thirty year record of introducing, implementing or supporting these racist laws.

In 1962 the Tories introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the first ever restriction on the entry of British Commonwealth citizens. It made primary immigration dependent on possession of a work voucher.

During the 1964 election campaign the Labour Party in Wandsworth claimed that "large-scale immigration has occurred only under this Tory government. The Tory Immigration Act has failed to control it—immigrants of all colours and races continue to arrive here."

In August 1965 the Labour government of Harold Wilson renewed the Tories' Act. Three years later, in response to Tory right-winger Enoch Powell's attacks on Kenyan Asians, Labour rushed a new bill through parliament, preventing these displaced people from entering Britain.

In 1971 the Tories introduced a new Immigration Act which banned primary immigration altogether.

During their term in power between 1974-79 Labour failed to repeal this Act even though the party conference had voted to do so. Home Secretary Merlyn Rees went on to admit that these laws were actually designed to stop black people coming into Britain and that they would be strengthened.

Under Labour "virginity tests" for Asian women coming in to marry were introduced. And a Labour Green Paper paved the way for the Tories' 1981 Nationality Act. "Left-winger" Michael Foot declared that work permits for black people shouldn't be renewed if a white worker was available for the same job.

Once Powell's disciple, Margaret Thatcher, got into power in 1979 she piled on the racist legislation. The 1981 British Nationality Act removed the automatic right to British citizenship for

all those who had settled here before 1973. The 1988 Immigration Act removed the right of black people in Britain to bring their families in [see WP181]. Labour in opposition has scarcely lifted a finger to stop them.

This is the way the Labour Party reward the electoral support of black people, who have traditionally been Labour's staunchest supporters.

The Labour Party openly agrees with the Tories that Britain "cannot support" large waves of immigrants. They happily go along with policies that scapegoat immigrants as responsible for the poverty and misery the bosses' system has created.

Immigrants are not responsible for these problems. Far from it. They are most likely to be its first victims.

We must reject the arguments, accepted by Labour and Tories alike, that black people are themselves responsible for causing racism. We must expose the arguments that immigrants take all the jobs and all the available houses.

The whole racist system is designed to divide and rule, to prevent us fighting the real enemy—the bosses, the real creators of unemployment, the ones responsible for housing shortages

All immigration laws are inherently racist.

Whilst they work to keep black people out of Britain, the bosses' money is allowed to go anywhere in the world regardless of national borders in its search for profits. When workers try to do the same thing, they are told they are unwelcome.

We should not differentiate between those fleeing torture or even death in their own country and those simply looking for a better life.

All immigration laws should be scrapped. Workers should be free to live and work wherever they choose.

What Labour must do:

- Scrap the Asylum and Immigration Bill
- Close down Campsfield and all the immigration detention centres
- Stop all deportations
- Scrap all immigration controls.

Secrets and lies

Fractured families

A FILM ABOUT the lives of ordinary working class and lower middle class people in London and its suburbs that wins the Cannes Film Festival's *Palme d'Or* would usually make me suspicious. But in fact, *Secrets and Lies* is a remarkable piece of cinema. Without being overtly political it manages to explore class, gender and to a lesser degree racism against the background of contemporary Britain.

Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies* is as compelling as any of his work in the past 20 years, a painful yet often amusing look at a tortured family that can no longer carry on living with a series of lies.

Catalyst

The catalyst to a decisive showdown in the Purley family is the arrival on the scene of a 28-year-old black woman, Hortense, who begins a search for her biological mother after the death of her adoptive parents. Hortense, played by Marianne Jean-Baptiste, is a university-educated optometrist with a comfortable lifestyle, but who is feeling very much alone in the world.

Her efforts to locate the woman who gave birth to her lead eventually to 40-something white woman, Cynthia Purley, who works on the shopfloor of a cardboard box factory and teeters on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

Cynthia's daughter Roxanne is thoroughly rude and stropky. She makes too little from her council road sweeping job



Cynthia's divided family are brought together, but then their problems begin

GR McColl reviews *Secrets and Lies*, directed by Mike Leigh, on general release.

to think about escaping from a claustrophobic, slightly decrepit house.

The plot pivots on the relationship that

slowly but surely develops between Hortense and Cynthia. Brenda Blethyn's excellent performance as Cynthia is both hilarious and empathetic, making the curious friendship that develops between "mother and daughter" seem altogether convincing. Through this rela-

tionship the film shows Cynthia discovering hidden reserves of strength as she finds out what has become of the infant who was wrenched away after she gave birth at the age of 16, knowing neither the baby's sex nor skin colour. This personal tragedy stems from her father's

decision to exile his pregnant daughter to a home for "wayward girls" in the Home Counties.

Blethyn's portrayal of Cynthia conveys a palpable sense of pain at a life of "quiet desperation", spent working to put food on the table as a single mother to Roxanne, who is now completely alienated from her.

Racist

Hortense inadvertently falls deeper into Cynthia's dysfunctional family as she attends a 21st birthday party for Roxanne under the pretext of being Cynthia's friend from the factory. Things threaten to get really nasty as Roxanne turns abusively racist when she finally learns that she has a sister and that the sister is black.

I found this film especially powerful because of certain truths it brought home about my own family. But beyond that there is an effective use of London locations, complete with SWP posters carrying the message "Defend Hackney Downs School". The film is a vindication of Leigh's long-time method of collaborative improvisation, which endows the characters with an extraordinary authenticity.

Secrets and Lies affirms human potential in the face of everyday adversity. Its "message" may be a simple one—we need not be prisoners of our past. But it is a film that is well worth seeing nonetheless. ■

Kids

The lost generation?

WHEN ASKED to review this film I expected to champion it against the chorus of prudery and incomprehension that greeted its release. Then I saw it. And whilst Larry Clark's *Kids* must be defended against calls for bans and censorship—my overall response was quite different. *Kids* is one of the most loathsome, prurient, indeed anti-human, films I have ever seen.

At one level the film does strike a blow against bourgeois sexual hypocrisy. The official morality of church and state denies the sexuality of children and youth altogether, flying in the face of facts, science and, of course, experience. If art is

Richard Brenner reviews *Kids*, directed by Larry Clark, on general release

to "hold a mirror up to nature", there can be no reason whatsoever to object to a film showing adolescents engaging in penetrative sex.

If, on the other hand, the purpose of art is to conceal and distort social realities, then convincing images of sexually aware youth must be suppressed. This is what lies behind calls for censorship. That is why they must be resisted.

The script by 19-year old Harmony

Korine catches both the subject matter and language used in much teenage conversation with verve and authenticity. The acting, almost all by amateurs, is the best thing about the film.

So why did I find *Kids* so repellent? Because regardless of its script and inspired performances, this film shows real hatred for young people. It takes an unremittingly pessimistic view of the human condition.

Just because the youth are shown having sex and taking drugs does not mean that these realities are represented accurately. There is no joy and precious little pleasure depicted. Sex is a bleak

and destructive obsession, not only for the self-styled "virgin surgeon", Telly, but for almost all the characters. It carries manipulation, pain and disease in its wake.

Drug taking rarely seems to be a source of enjoyment, merely of oblivion, from the 12 year old boys smoking weed at a party through to the preposterous pill of indeterminate nature that Jennie is literally "forced" to take and which leaves her so numb that she is unaware she is being raped.

The only club we see is a fearsome den of iniquity, dark, uninviting and without a smiling face to be seen. How

many clubs have you been to where gyrating, expressionless teens press into the corners for joyless group sex?

Any common experiences of young people that run counter to this image of a lost, hopeless generation are simply suppressed. There are no satisfying sexual encounters between any of the young characters. None of the drugs make anyone smile or dance.

Perhaps this is Clark and Korine's own form of moralistic censorship. Whatever the reason, it is a gross slight on young people.

Kids' redeeming feature is supposed to be its safe sex "message". But even this is fatally compromised. Though one character is urged after an HIV test to "read this leaflet", the overall impression given is that no one bothers with safer sex and condoms are a waste of time. In this context the message that comes across is that promiscuity, not lack of protection, means death.

Overall, despite its grunge chic, this is a film with a message which will appeal precisely to the boring old farts it purports to offend: "young people are growing up too fast".

That is why it will never be a "youth cult" film—young people aren't going to want to see it. If you smoke dope at parties, have a sex life or go to clubs, why watch lifeless images of these things on the big screen?

Why bother to stay in your cinema seat as the camera pans painfully slowly across a couch of unconscious stoned school kids for what feels like half an hour? And that is why this film made me so angry.

For all its "brutal" naturalism, the people it is addressing are those most removed from the real lives of the young. And its message will confirm their prejudices, in the powerful language of young people themselves. ■



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THE FIRST round of the Russian presidential elections on 16 June looks likely to see a remarkable revival in Boris Yeltsin's political fortunes. Opinion polls have Yeltsin and Gennady Zyuganov, candidate of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), running neck and neck.

Yeltsin's recovery from the low point after the December elections to the Duma has been helped by recent military successes in the Chechen war. But it is mainly due to the orchestrated support of all the forces of capitalist restoration, both at home and abroad.

In January Yeltsin seemed a certain loser. The hunt was on for a new standard bearer for the "market reformers". The problem was that all of them had failed miserably in the elections. They were so divided by bitter rivalries that none was willing to stand down for another.

The bureaucratic centre party of prime minister Victor Chernomyrdin (Our Home is Russia) gained only around 10% of the vote in December. Chernomyrdin is not standing in the presidential elections, despite massive financial and media support. Another potential successor, the youngish former general Alexander Lebed (Russian Communities) also did poorly in the Duma elections.

The forces openly supporting the present course of capitalist restoration have failed to come up with a replacement for Yeltsin. So now, with considerable foreboding, they have to rally behind him.

Doubts

Yeltsin's friends abroad—Clinton, Major, Kohl and Chirac—despite their doubts as to his reliability, have pulled out all the stops to get him elected. They signalled the IMF to make a \$10bn contribution to Yeltsin's re-election. This and other loans have enabled him to pay off most of the wage arrears—one of the main factors making Yeltsin so unpopular over the winter.

The settling of the wage arrears—in part forced by strikes in February—has left the war in Chechnya as the most prominent cause of popular discontent. The "lucky" missile which killed Dzhokar Dudayev in April, and which has forced the new Chechen leader to the negotiating table, has temporarily boosted Yeltsin's claim that he can bring an end to the Chechen war.

Yeltsin has most of the big money in Russia behind him. There are reports that the KPRF campaign could run out of money before polling day. The President

Russia On the brink of c

As Russia prepares to choose a president, many in the upper echelons of the state are considering a coup if Yeltsin loses. **Dave Stockton** looks at the options for Russian workers and examines the "communist" credentials of Yeltsin's main rival Gennady Zyuganov.

also has a near total monopoly of the broadcast media. But his victory is still far from inevitable.

Whilst Yeltsin's rating in the dubious polls has gone up, he still only manages around 28% support. There remains a huge well of resentment against the man who has made so many false promises about the economic recovery.

Under Yeltsin Russia's industrial production has halved. The rouble has fallen to less than 1% of its previous value. Real income has fallen to 60% of its 1990

level. In 1995 GDP fell by 4% and real wages fell by a further 15%. Prices rose by "only" 104.5% although inflation fell to 4% per month by the beginning of 1996. Yeltsin's large scale electoral bribes will lead to another surge in the second half of the year. The economic hardships caused by the restoration process, and unexpected twist and turns in the bloody war raging in Chechnya, could still unseat Yeltsin.

No one should underestimate the rage and frustration that millions of Russian

workers feel at the wanton destruction of their already poor standard of living. Yeltsin promised them a rapid rise in living standards to the levels of "the West". In fact they have experienced a precipitate fall to the standards of the semi-colonial "South".

Rules

The June presidential elections will decide who rules in Russia. That is why the forces close to Yeltsin are unlikely to relinquish power even if they were de-

feated clearly and constitutionally.

Yeltsin's regime, since the storming of the "White House" in November 1993, followed by the imposition of a new constitution, has been a thoroughly dictatorial one: a presidential regime resting ultimately on the Army and the secret police.

Whilst the regime allowed a number of civil rights, such as freedom of organisation, assembly and the press (except in Chechnya), the role of the legislature is largely ornamental. Only the presiden-



Yeltsin and Clinton: imperialism has poured money into getting Yeltsin re-elected.

Russian workers fight back

THE MINERS' strike which erupted in January and February 1996, involving over a million miners in 170 pits, was the first real revival of workers' action since 1991. The strike led to mass demonstrations in Moscow, Vorkuta and the Kuzbass. The strikers demanded the several months back pay owed to them by the government.

Their anger was also aroused by a new ruthless management system, imposed by Rosugol, the state-owned mines trust, under the slogan "Vertical Power is good!". The miners were now being subjected to a capitalist-style management, aimed at maximising profits.

The strikes were strongest in the Kuzbass, the area which played a central role in the strikes of 1989 and 1991 which hastened the downfall of Gorbachev and the CPSU. In the aftermath of these earlier strikes the Kuzbass miners movement fell under a pro-market leadership that wanted to make the region into a special economic zone open to multinational capital.

Their illusions that American and Japanese companies were just waiting to invest billions in the Kuzbass

mines have now been shattered. The billions never came, but the economics of the IMF and the World Bank did. The result was discussions between the coal monopoly, Rosugol and the World Bank on a "restructuring programme". The new structure would mean a reduction in workforce from 763,000 miners to as few as 287,000.

Taste

This bitter taste of the market led miners to withdraw their support for Yeltsin. In the Duma elections in December the KPRF (Communist Party of the Russian Federation) won 53% of the votes in the region, well above the national average.

In the inhospitable Vorkuta coalfield, above the Arctic circle, pit after pit launched spontaneous strikes as early as the summer of last year. The slogans on the miners' placards read "Down with the Hunger Reforms!", "Money is there for War but not for our Wages!".

Earlier this year 300,000 teachers went on strike at the same time as the miners—they too had not been paid for more than three months.

The miners learned about organising strikes back in 1989 and 1991. This time they once again elected strike committees and organised mass occupations of

the town squares. This encouraged striking teachers and other state and municipal workers to join the action.

Only after this show of rank and file initiative did the main union the NPRUP (Independent Union of Workers in the Coal Industry), formed in 1991 from the old state union, call for and organise a strike.

The fact that it organised action shows that this is still a trade union, and not simply a bureaucratic machine at the service of the management and the regional and central government. It is, however, an ultra-bureaucratic union. Officials are elected for five year terms, with salaries which are 80% that of the directors. Managers are also members of the union.

The alternative "independent" miners union, the NPG, which was built in the 1989 strike, has become so compromised by its slavish support for Yeltsin that it lost any real hold on the vast majority of miners.

There is still a huge crisis of leadership amongst the most militant sectors of the Russian workers. There is a spontaneous tendency to create strike committees and for various sectors in struggle to solidarise with one another, but the former "official" unions remain the

only bodies capable of organising nationwide strikes.

The NPRUP bureaucrats have no stomach for a fight against Yeltsin. In the absence of any militant alternative some workers are gravitating towards the KPRF. In the Kuzbass, for example, Aman Tuleev has put himself forward at strike rallies as the champion of the miners and other workers against Yeltsin's imposed governor of the region.

Popularity

Tuleev—though not formally a member of the KPRF—used his mass popularity to support the KPRF in the Duma elections. He has registered as an "independent" candidate for the presidential elections. He is tacitly supported by the Kuzbass KPRF for the first round, and he will undoubtedly advise his voters to vote for Zyuganov in the second round.

This does not yet constitute a strong organic link between the KPRF and the miners of the Kuzbass but it does show that the Stalinists are regaining support in the working class and that there is as yet no viable alternative for workers trying to "kick out Yeltsin". ■

Ret con

IN SEPTEMBER 1991 the CPSU was still a party of millions, yet it disappeared like a puff of smoke. Yeltsin forced Gorbachev to concede to its dissolution and the seizure of its vast property and it went to its grave with scarcely a twitch of resistance.

Yet today, its largest self-proclaimed successor, the KPRF, is a mass party with around 500,000 members, by far the largest party in Russia. It and its allies gained nearly 33% of the vote in December. All commentators admit it is the only party with an active mass base and a local organisation. It is headed by Gennady Zyuganov, who likes to present himself as a Scandinavian-style Social Democrat.

He is not. But neither is he a communist. If you need a measure of how far from real communism Zyuganov actually is, he has written a book in which he declares his affinity to nineteenth century Slavophile writers like Count Sergius Uvarov (author of the slogan; "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality"). As Trotsky pointed out sixty years ago such ideas were endemic in the Stalinist bureaucracy, along with anti-Semitism, thinly disguised as anti-Zionism.

Politically the KPRF is a thoroughgoing Stalinist party—the true descendant of the Stalin-to-Brezhnev's CPSU. It rejects only the Gorbachev years. In this respect it is very different to the Polish Left Alliance or to the Hungarian Socialist Party. It still proclaims itself to be "Leninist", uses old Soviet state symbols, and calls in its programme for the (eventual) return of Russia's major industries to state ownership.

Protectionist

It calls for protectionist measures for Russia's industries, for the right to work for all, for a restored welfare state, and for the "voluntary restoration of the USSR". It also calls for the replacement or amendment of the Yeltsin constitution to remove the "dictatorial powers" of the president and to increase the powers of the Duma and the federation Council. But its main ideological core is its repeatedly proclaimed patriotism and its defence of the historic Russian strong state and both Tsarist Russia and the USSR's role as a Great Power.

Despite its programme, however, the KPRF does not promise an immediate or even a short term return to the centrally planned economy of ten years ago. Whilst he criticised the IMF for acting as an imperialist power in Russia at the Davos "economic summit", Zyuganov went out of his way to proclaim his loyalty to the "mixed economy".

These overtures have led to serious criticism of Zyuganov within the party. His deputy, the head of the party appa-

ivil war?

tial elections decide where real power lies. Key figures in Yeltsin's entourage have made it very clear that they will not accept or tolerate a Zyuganov victory in June.

There has been some ominous grumbling emanating from the Kremlin. General Alexander Korskzhakov, the head of the Kremlin security guard and the lynchpin of the Bonapartist clique around Yeltsin, has openly called for the postponement of the election.

General Leontin, commander of the Moscow military district, has also called for postponement. After considerable hesitation Yeltsin apparently rejected this course in mid-March, though the majority of his advisers had made advanced preparations for introducing a state of

emergency, postponing the elections and getting the President to rule by decree.

Pretexts for this "preventative coup" were sought in the KPRF-initiated Duma vote on 15 March, declaring the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 illegal. Attempts were made to fake major terrorist acts in Moscow linked to the Chechen War.

Coup

Indeed it appears that a coup was only rejected following objections from Pavel Grachev (War Minister) and Anatoly Kulikov (Interior Minister) that such a coup could lead to civil disturbances which the army and the police might be unable to control.

The coup makers might rely on sup-

port from those benefiting from their economic reforms. The Group of 13, a collection of bankers and industrialists, criticised the calls for postponement, but put forward the idea of some kind of compromise between the Yeltsin and Zyuganov camps to ensure a strong and stable Russian state. One of their number, Boris Berezovsky, who is said to be close to Korskzhakov, declared that "Businessmen possess the necessary resources and will to influence politicians who are too unprincipled and too reluctant to compromise". So much for the democratic process! Those around Yeltsin have a great deal to lose if he were to be defeated. All key posts, particularly in the army, police and security services, are personal appointees of the president. Their jobs are under threat. And in some cases, because of their dubious activities in Chechnya and the storming of the White House, even their liberty may be lost along with the election.

A surprise defeat may see the Kremlin cliques unite to attempt yet another coup. But waiting for the day after a clear Yeltsin defeat could result in splits in the state apparatus. The temptation of a preemptive strike may yet be too much for Yeltsin's men to resist. ■

urn of the munist?

ratus Valentin Kuptsov, and indeed most of the rank and file members are opposed to any drift away from traditional Stalinist ideology. Thus Kuptsov can say at the party's fourth congress held on 17 February 1996:

"Yes we are loyal to the best that was in Lenin's party and in the CPSU. We are loyal to tradition. The Communists today are working for an idea, we are enduring deprivations and oppressions, and have nothing in common with Gorbachev's ideas and policies. They reject all forms of political and state extremism and do not accept ultraleft Trotskyist methods or jingoistic patriotism. The forces that drive us are socialist ideas and the interests of the working people and our fatherland." (The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press)

The KPRF is also under some pressure from its "left" allies. Viktor Anpilov and Viktor Tyulkin lead the hardline Stalinist Russian Communist Workers Party (RKPR) and its front Working Russia (TR). The RKPR wishes to preserve the presidential powers and use them to reintroduce "soviet power". The RKPR-TR got just under 5% in the Duma elections and stands to gain from

any crisis in the KPRF.

Anpilov received a stern rebuke from Zyuganov during the campaign after Anpilov called for the renationalisation of the banks and declared that any bankers who didn't like it could always be found a job operating a lathe.

No wonder Zyuganov was upset. Whenever he speaks of Lenin, Zyuganov speaks not of the proletarian revolutionary, but of the "Lenin who found Russia in disintegration (1917) and left it a great state (1924)", who initiated NEP, and advocated "State Capitalism". In addition he is fond of referring to Deng Xiaoping and "the economic dynamism of Communist China".

Restoration

The KPRF's real—but disguised—programme is for the restoration of capitalism but on a paternalist state capitalist basis.

The KPRF is a party which is still linked to sections of the managerial nomenclatura and to certain local and city governments. It even has links to a few banks (e.g. Kredobank). Its leadership contains figures who have close ties



KPRF leader Zyuganov

with major banks and industrial groups and even some who have links with Western capital e.g. Gennady Selezanov, now speaker of the Duma or "red banker" Vladimir Semago a casino owner and member of the board of directors of Mozbiznesbank. But it also has a mass basis on the housing estates. Commentators note the aged or middle-aged nature of this membership but also their high degree of political activism.

These people have suffered the most through devalued pensions or lost jobs. Many have and the privileges and prestige of membership of the ruling party. They represent in some sense the dispossessed labour aristocracy and lower bureaucracy who hate the "New Russians", the "democrats".

The KPRF has roots in, and certainly draws millions of votes from, the working class. It is not an active party of struggle of the working class—though it is an instrument of pressure for workers immediate needs and demands. ■

What we say

SHOULD WORKERS vote for the KPRF? Certainly not if it were a question of its programme. The vanguard of the Russian working class has no reason to place any political confidence whatsoever in the KPRF's Russian chauvinist leader Zyuganov.

The KPRF identifies historically with the working class and promises to bring a halt to the process of privatisation, if not to reverse it. Its programme proclaims defence of democratic rights and parliament against Yeltsin's dictatorship and promises to repeal the "presidential constitution". Whilst its credentials on all these questions are bogus, many workers will vote for it because of these promises.

The KPRF is a Stalinist party, a party with both historic and current links to the degenerated workers' state and the working class. But at the same time it is subordinated to a privileged bureaucracy that ultimately serves world capitalism. It is in short a variant of what Marxists term a *bourgeois workers party*.

At the moment a vote for the KPRF is the only way Russian workers can

express their rejection of Yeltsin and their hostility to the restoration process. It is also the party whose rise has stopped Zhirinovskiy from monopolising the discontent of millions. Therefore revolutionaries should call for a critical vote for Zyuganov on 16 June, at the same time as denouncing all the reactionary aspects of his programme and clearly predicting his betrayals. Such a tactical vote will expose Zyuganov and the KPRF as falsely anti-capitalist and open the millions of its supporters to a real communist—a Trotskyist—alternative.

Workers should demand Zyuganov pledges himself to:

- Act against the privatisers and plunderers of state property
- Fulfil his pledge to repeal the December 1993 constitution and hold immediate elections for a sovereign constituent assembly
- Guarantee work for all by instituting a massive programme of social and public works to meet the needs of the population
- Re-nationalise without compensation of all public assets, factories, houses etc. sold off to the imperialist multinationals or the "New Russians"
- Recognise workers' management

over all the industrial, agricultural, communication and distributive enterprises of the country, and convene a congress of their democratically elected representatives to draw up an emergency plan to solve the burning needs of the masses

- Nationalise the banks and re-impose a monopoly of foreign trade under the democratic control of the workers.
- End the war in Chechnya and withdraw all Russian troops and recognise its right to self-determination including complete independence if it so wishes.

Revolutionaries in Russia however should spread no illusions in Zyuganov or the KPRF. They must set about the building of a new revolutionary workers' party addressing themselves to the workers under immediate attack, the miners the teachers, above all to the youth. Trotskyists must provide a revolutionary programme which will rekindle the idealism of the young for a world without capitalist exploitation, imperialist domination, or bureaucratic dictatorship. ■

The A-Z of Marxism

m is for Materialism

by Paul Morris

IN EVERYDAY speech a materialist is somebody obsessed with money, shopping and furthering their own career. An idealist is somebody who pursues a higher goal, forsaking material wealth for a noble cause, or hopelessly optimistic about human nature.

But in philosophical language, idealism and materialism have completely different meanings.

Next time you sit down to watch the National Lottery you might, like millions of others, be willing your six numbers to come out.

This is a crude but nevertheless very clear example of an *idealist* way of thinking. Taken seriously, it rests on the assumption that thoughts—ideas—can directly influence material reality: mind over matter, consciousness over material "being".

Of course, most people don't seriously believe that "vibing" the lottery balls has any effect. They base their economic decisions on the recognition that whatever their wishes the result relies on chance and the laws of physics.

But at the level of competing world views idealism is taken seriously. Philosophical idealism sees the material world as only the reflection of a great idea: the mind of God, the world spirit or even some abstract number principle. The material world we experience is only an imperfect copy of this.

Such a world view underpins religion and superstition. It is a weapon of reaction because it encourages passivity in the face of events that are deemed to be unchangeable by human action since their truth or meaning stems from a God or fate (or some earthly representative of one or the other).

Marxists, by contrast, are passionate partisans of philosophical materialism. In its consistent form it is the enemy of reaction and prejudice; a champion of truth and enlightenment.

Marx was not the first materialist but he did deepen this philosophy and make it more consistent. What are its basic elements?

To be a materialist means first insisting on the *primacy* of matter. As Lenin once remarked:

"The one property of matter, the assertion of which defines philosophical materialism, is that of being an objective reality existing apart from our consciousness."

Planet

To put it another way, matter existed long before the human mind existed to try and comprehend it. The earth is some 4.5 billion years old, while the first organic matter appeared on the planet about two billion years ago. Human-like creatures evolved a mere 1.7 million years ago.

Materialism is hardly the view of a Marxist fringe. All great scientists took this outlook as the basis for their work. Albert Einstein noted that "all physics is realistic in so far as it starts from the hypothesis of a reality independent of perception and thought."

But modern materialism goes beyond the idea that matter is prior to mind. Some ancient Greeks accepted this as did philosophers of the Enlightenment. But they also viewed mind and matter as quite different to each other. Marxists do not. In fact,

the mind is but one form of matter, albeit highly developed.

As Trotsky remarked:

"The human mind is a product of the development of matter, and at the same time it is an instrument for the cognition of this matter . . . without, though, ever breaking away from this basis of all that exists."

Mind is made up of cells, matter combined in a particular form that enables humans to recognise, memorise and reflect. Almost daily, science reveals the mechanisms by which these functions take place, stripping away the "mystery" which made them prey to superstitious explanation.

Once the primacy and multiple forms of matter have been established then it is a small step to the proposition that ideas and consciousness are a reflection of reality, not the other way around as Hegel argued. Marx put it this way:

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness."

Forces

Our views of the world and other people are shaped by forces external to ourselves, by one's biological, historical, social, physical and psychological background.

Marx spent his life trying to grasp the essence of the human "being" that determined "consciousness".

He concluded that this essence was not some mysterious spiritual quality, but rather what sets us apart from previous non-human ancestors.

This lies in our capacity to labour purposefully, that is, with a goal in mind before we set to work.

Over the course of many centuries the social relations of co-operation and conflict that our species has formed, broken and reformed, have changed.

These social relations exist independent of us, and we can't simply escape them. Historically, each system of social relations corresponds to a particular stage of technological development.

These social relations of production form the foundations of all other social activity, in particular the legal system and politics, and also of the most prevalent ideas. Our "social being" determines our consciousness. Marx describes this as the relationship between the "base" and the "superstructure" of society.

The forces of production and technology develop. They come into conflict with the relations of production that were built up on the basis of the old relations of production. Instead of aiding progress the pre-existing system of social institutions starts to restrain it. We get famine, poverty, the return of preventable diseases, the re-emergence of old, reactionary ideologies.

This clash between the forces of production and the social relations is what makes revolutions both possible and a *lawful* part of human history.

It brings the progressive classes in society into conflict with the reactionary classes: representatives of a new social system into conflict with defenders of the old. And it is what makes socialism the logical and necessary outcome of the capitalist crisis. ■

viewpoint

CLARE HEATH

Salt beef sandwich?

EVERY TIME you walk into a supermarket now you're faced with a dilemma. Do I or don't I? Should I or shouldn't I? What if it's cheap? Is that good, or a bad sign?

Beef. It is becoming a crucial question. When you meet someone these days, you find out their name and then...whether they're still eating beef.

Last week, at my office canteen, there was a near riot when two of the three meals on offer ran out leaving, surprise surprise, only the beef. Hundreds of normally placid office workers suddenly started to look like the crowd in *Battleship Potemkin*.

But while we are all desperately calculating the risks, the food industry has moved rapidly on. After the initial flurry of scare stories about the risks of eating beef, the focus of the government and the press has shifted entirely to anti-European ranting in defence of "our" beef industry.

The possibility of transmitting the agent of BSE to humans has been known since the late 1980s, but pressure from the beef producers on government "experts" meant that these dangers were not broadcast.

There is considerable uncertainty about the risks of eating beef, and will be for many years. There is no reason to doubt that BSE could spread to humans, and no doubt that thousands of cattle in Britain were, and still are, infected with the agent that causes BSE.

But the Tories are not interested in the health implications. Neither are the Labour Party leaders, who just harp on about how badly John Major is handling the whole affair. They are battling it out with the Tories to see who can prove themselves the beef industry's best friend.

The beef barons are not the only section of the food industry doing all they can to obscure the unhealthy nature of their products.

The Salt Institute—an international trade organisation of salt producers—has been working overtime to prevent the government issuing any guidelines on the bad effects of a high salt diet on health. They are currently challenging extensive research which clearly shows the dangers of too much salt.

For almost ten years there has been evidence that a high salt diet increases the risk of high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease. To alter this requires a change in the way foods are manufactured: three quarters of dietary salt comes from processed foods rather than the salt-cellar in the kitchen or on the table.

Most processed foods would be unpalatable and tasteless if they had less salt. To reduce their salt content but retain the taste would mean adding other flavours from fruits, herbs and vegetables.

Far too costly and healthy for the Salt Institute. Instead of investigating these healthy alternatives, they spend their money on lobbying governments and pursuing campaigns to rubbish the evidence of independent researchers. In this they are backed by the right wing press who scream about the "nanny state telling us what to eat", while at the same time parroting the contrary views of medical "experts" who just happen to work for the food industry.

In 1994 the government's own advisory committee on food policy recommended that people should reduce their salt intake by one third. The food industry then went on the offensive to prevent this policy being adopted. After the draft recommendation was circulated, four major manufacturers of sweets and snacks demanded a meeting with the Department of Health. The government chief medical officer dissociated the government from the policy recommendations on salt, but they were not removed from the document.

This, plus the fact that salt restriction had not been included in the Health of the Nation targets in 1992, still wasn't enough for the manufacturers. In 1994 United Biscuits stopped its contributions to the Tory party; Tate and Lyle diverted half of its donations to Labour and the Liberals. The Tories seem to have learnt their lesson.

Last year food industry representatives refused to take part in the government's "nutrition task force" discussion on how to reduce the salt content of their products. The Tories responded by disbanding the task force and saying its work had been completed!

The food business will stop at nothing to pursue profits. We are all dependent on mass produced food, processed or otherwise, and it is impossible for individual consumers to know what has been done to the food before it reaches the shop.

So what do we do in the supermarket? You can't stop eating everything. Of course if you're middle class, with plenty of time and money, you could try self-sufficiency with your own organic market garden. But for the vast majority that simply isn't an option.

It is possible, however, for the organised working class to do something about irresponsible food bosses. Workers' inspection and control of food production, in collaboration with consumers and independent experts, could ensure that established safety measures are stuck to—whatever the effect on profits—and that new safety checks are developed.

In Britain and many developed countries we have become used to a diet that is rich in meat, high in fat, sugar and salt, and extremely unhealthy. In many semi-colonial countries decent food may be unavailable to many, or may be basically healthy but takes a massive toll on the workers' and peasants in terms of production and preparation.

Sustaining a diet with mass commercially produced, rather than locally produced food, creates pressure for ever more efficient and intensive methods of production. Under capitalism this means major risks to health. Under socialism, workers' management should be used to revolutionise farming to combine efficient large-scale production with good nutritional value and fair distribution across the globe.

So the next time you're in the supermarket worrying about beef, think about some of the other food you are buying.

It's impossible to go back to a world without mass produced, supermarket distributed food. It is possible to go forward to a system, with safe, cheap food for all humanity. But only through socialism. ■



Strikers confront police in battle against oil privatisation

Bolivia

Fight against oil sell-off betrayed

by Keith Harvey

IN A symbolic act of spite, Bolivian president Goni Sánchez de Losada chose May Day to gain parliamentary approval for the legislation which privatised the state oil industry—YPPFB.

This was achieved only after two months of fierce working class struggle against the plans, and as a result of the treacherous capitulation of the leadership of the Bolivian trade union federation, the COB.

Since coming to power four years ago Sánchez de Losada has driven Bolivia further down the same neo-liberal economic path as the rest of the continent: privatising state industry, devolving national responsibility for health and education onto grossly under-resourced regional and city authorities.

Losada had some successes in the first years of his administration. He privatised the state airline (LAB) and the railways (ENFE) by means of a "capitalisation" plan. This involved selling off 50% of shares in the state industries to private capital. The revenues were then used to reduce the tax burden on business and help pay off foreign debt, as demanded and supervised by the IMF.

The remaining 50% of shares are distributed to the population. This is aimed at disguising from the people of Bolivia the real content of the privatisation plans. It recognises their mistrust and hostility to the state divesting itself of the country's key natural resources, many of which were the fruits of the 1952 revolution.

Development

ENFE was sold to a Chilean company; most of the power and natural resources of the country—key to the course of future economic development—are destined to end up in foreign and imperialist hands.

As with the mass privatisation schemes of Eastern Europe the bulk of shares distributed to the population will be sold on. People will need the money to replace the services lost through the slashing of state provision in the sphere of education, pensions and health. Soon these shares will be concentrated in the portfolios of North American or European multi-nationals.

Nevertheless, Losada's government has met strong resistance. Last year the government imposed a state of siege and arrested key trade union and peasant leaders in an attempt to break resistance led by teachers, students and coca producing peasants.

But the state of siege only delayed the inevitable confrontation over the oil industry. The battle over the YPPFB was crucial both for business and the labour movement. The oil industry is expected to be the engine of the country's economic growth into the next century. It is

profitable and expanding.

For the working class vanguard the fate of the future organisation and class consciousness of the oil workers was of critical importance. After the struggles of 1985-6 the Bolivian working class suffered a strategic defeat when its then political and industrial vanguard—the tin miners—was shattered by mass sackings and closures.

Over the rest of the decade the working class was on the retreat and the economy itself was restructured. Nevertheless over the last four years a series of defensive struggles together with parliamentary opposition by the bourgeois parties have delayed or modified government plans without forcing Losada to abandon them altogether. The rural and urban teachers have come to play a key role in igniting and cohering these struggles.

As the oil legislation was tabled in parliament the teachers went on strike from early March. In the month leading up to Easter weekend (7-9 April) there were many demonstrations and protest stoppages throughout the country, mainly led by students and teachers.

On 2 April transport workers went on strike. But during the Easter holiday the church, government and the bureaucracy of the COB, led by Oscar Sales, struck a draft agreement to end the struggles which effectively gave the government what it wanted over YPPFB in return for wage increases of between 9% and 13%.

But the mass delegate forum of the COB on 8 April threw this deal out, and Sales was forced to promise an intensification of the struggle. On the streets throughout major towns such as Oruro battles took place between students and police.

On the day the COB rank and file pledged themselves to renew the struggle Losada adopted a Citizen's Security Plan which included special powers to break up and prevent demonstrations and roadblocks. The threat of another state of siege hung over the COB.

But in the following week the strikes and protests intensified. The University of La Paz was closed down by a strike of administrative workers. By 13 April a substantial number of small factories in La Paz were shut down. Health workers and miners joined the strikes. On 15 April peasants decided to block supplies of agricultural products to the cities.

In mid-April the struggle reached a turning point. Either it had to be raised to a new level, with an indefinite General Strike embracing the industrial and productive core of the working class, or the bureaucracy and government would

divide the movement while the police stepped up its repression of the vanguard.

The key weakness of the movement was the refusal of the oil workers' leaders to paralyse the very industry that was under threat of privatisation. It was crucial to close the valves on the pipelines, to suspend deliveries of oil to transport and industry. Without oil the country could have been paralysed. Additionally, as long as the workers in electricity, telecommunications, railways, construction, banks and privately owned mines were allowed to stand aside from the battle, the mass movement was fatally weakened.

Leadership

In the event, the official leadership of the COB refused to make good its promises of 8 April and intensify the struggle. They refused to call on other sectors to join the battle, or extend the strikes. They refused to prepare or equip the strikers for police repression. They refused to respond to the army occupation of the oil refineries and installations with the call for the oil workers to strike.

Finding no way of overcoming this obstruction, in the second half of April, the movement abated. This allowed Sales to negotiate an agreement that accepted the core provisions of the legislation which was finally adopted by parliament on 1 May.

Once again the Bolivian labour movement has been faced with the fact that it cannot rest content with the existing structure of the COB if it is to win future battles. The mass democracy of the COB congresses and special conferences cannot hold the treacherous leaders to their word, once the mass mobilisations weaken through prolonged but inconclusive struggle.

Councils of delegates from all the organisations in struggle must take over the direction of a general strike and its extension to other sectors of workers. The national negotiations must be taken out of the hands of the COB bureaucrats.

But above all, each and every general strike in Bolivia poses the question of which class shall rule. To rule the Bolivian workers need their own political party. This must be a mass revolutionary workers' party, independent of all the bourgeois parties that the Bolivian workers have been tied to since the 1952 revolution.

Those parties have destroyed and undermined everything that was progressive about the gains of that revolution. A political break with them is long overdue. So long as the top leaders of the COB are members or supporters of these parties and their programmes, then future struggles will end up in similar betrayals. ■

France

Le Pen's fascist turn

ON MAY DAY, the streets of Paris resounded to marchers calling for a minimum wage for French workers, denouncing Israel's attack against Lebanon and praising the long struggle of the trade unions. Nothing unusual in that, you might think. But this was not the traditional workers' demonstration; it was organised by Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National. The FN is increasingly marching under "national socialist" colours.

Founded in 1972, as an alliance of various fascist organisations seeking a mass base by concealing themselves as "respectable" electoral racists, the FN has chalked up significant successes at the polls since 1983. It has drawn into its ranks far-right, neo-liberal forces from outside the fascist tradition.

Until recently, Le Pen performed a skilful balancing act between these two wings. Now he has come down in favour of the openly fascist groupings, and has turned the FN towards more traditional Nazi politics.

After Chirac's election victory last year, all wings of the FN had an agreed strategy:

- to concentrate the FN's fire on the parliamentary right, in particular during the by-elections, going so far as to favour (and elect) Communist Party candidates;
- use its control of three major towns won in last June's local elections to prove the "superiority" of its politics;
- deepen the FN's roots in French society and in the state machine (i.e. the police and the army) by setting up FN unions.

Realising that the FN could profit from the inevitable disillusion with Chirac, the fascist front set out to "be credible on the question of employment and, more generally, on social questions", as FN deputy Bruno Mégret put it.

But the FN's long term commitment to a "parliamentary road" to power has come to seem a dead-end. The FN failed to win in the by-elections, and there is no chance that Chirac will reintroduce proportional representation. As a result, tensions have grown inside the FN. Added to this, the struggle for Le Pen's succession has turned into open warfare between the two wings - the fascists led by Bruno Gollnisch and the "ultra-liberals" around Mégret.

Gollnisch and his Nazi cronies remain faithful to the initial project of the FN's fascist founders. The racism that has been the FN's calling card is to be increasingly accompanied by distinctly fascist positions, as part of a strategy that will not be based on electoral success.

Mégret and the ultra-liberals dream of a massive shake-up on the French right, with the creation of a racist, ultra-liberal but non-fascist party involving many leading figures of today's right.

From 1992, the FN began to distance itself from the economic neo-liberalism it had embraced in the mid-1980s, opting instead for a return to more corporatist and interventionist policies.

Then, last year, Le Pen chose Gollnisch as the new Secretary General of the FN. At the beginning of 1996 Le Pen imposed the slogan "Neither right nor left, but French" on the FN, much to the disgust of the Mégret wing. Mégret warned that this would provide their enemies with "an additional way of identifying the FN with fascism."

The reality of this turn was shown by a series of increasingly violent speeches by Le Pen: signalling the dangers of a "civil war", calling on the government to resign before it is chased out by "the people" and warning Chirac and Juppé that the masses might have to resort to insurrection.

At the end of April, at a ceremony to commemorate the 1,500th anniversary of the baptism of Clovis, King of the Franks, Le Pen and Gollnisch presided over a nightmare assortment of Aryan racists, Pétainists and apologists for the SS. Mégret was conspicuous by his ab-



Le Pen (inset) spouts social rhetoric while the FN's thugs (top) turn to the unions.

For 13 years, France's Front National (FN) has relied on popular racism to grow. Now its leaders have made an important turn towards openly fascist politics. Serge Godard of Pouvoir Ouvrier exposes the FN's new strategy

sence from this celebration of the Dark Ages.

The final confirmation of Le Pen's new strategy came with May Day. Each year since 1988, thanks to the shameful passivity of the labour movement, Le Pen has been able to march thousands of fascists through the streets of Paris. His "Joan of Arc" march, has hitherto been exclusively nationalist and racist in its themes, with the open fascists generally required to disguise themselves because of the glare of the TV cameras. Last year the lumpen thugs went so far as to murder a young Arab, whom they threw into the Seine during the march.

This year social themes were to the fore. Marchers carried banners calling for a £700 minimum wage for French

workers, anti-semites condemned Israel's attack on Lebanon and praised the *intifada*, while Le Pen himself spoke warmly of "the long struggle of the workers and the unions for more justice, more security and more liberty".

This highlights the desire of the fascists within the FN to emphasise the social element in their "national socialism". It shows a demagogic turn to working class people.

The FN has even started to set up its own "unions" and to organise work in existing ones. Unsurprisingly it was to the police that the FN turned first. In March the FN list captured 7.4% of the vote in police union elections, with one cop in six voting for the FN in Paris.

As elsewhere in Europe, the French police are at the sharp end of implementing the state's racist anti-immigrant policies. They include an audience ripe for the FN's propaganda. The cops carry out racist round-ups licensed by the "Vigipirate" programme, smash up protests in Parisian churches by West African workers without official documents and mete out daily repression in the *banlieues* (working class estates with high proportions of immigrant workers and youth).

In April, however, the FN went a step further, announcing the creation of public transport unions in Paris, Lyons and Marseilles. Transport workers were at the centre of the November-December strike wave that shook Europe last year. They are unlikely to prove such fertile ground for the FN. But there is still the

danger that the fascists' message will get through, especially among drivers on the buses, where clashes with unemployed youth occur regularly.

The state's refusal to provide free public transport for the jobless, coupled with the transport companies' drive to boost revenues through drastically increasing the number of inspectors has meant that youth see bus drivers as being hand-in-glove with the cops. In the absence of a socialist answer to the crisis affecting unemployed youth, some sections of the bus workforce could fall prey to the FN's racist "security"-based policies.

The FN is beginning to abandon its pretence of not being a fascist organisation, and is increasingly adopting policies and stances that reflect the true nature of its founders and a large part of its leadership.

Why now? The answer lies in the unfolding crisis in French society that was not resolved by the peace formula that ended the autumn 1995 strike wave. The dominant wing of the FN's leader-

ship sees in the sharp polarisation of French politics an opportunity to grow among layers of angry and confused white workers.

In an atmosphere of insecurity and crisis, the FN offer radical answers to what has become its most important electoral base: the unorganised working class. At the same time it hopes to demonstrate to sections of the French bourgeoisie that theirs is the only party to turn to smash the resistance of the unions and the Left if the crisis deepens.

Having been silenced and sidelined by the massive strike wave, the FN is now seeking to grow on the basis of denouncing the attacks of the Chirac government as the labour movement leadership returns to its old divisive policies.

For the moment, the FN's evolution from fascist front into an open and outright fascist party is not yet complete. Despite Le Pen's talk of civil war, the FN still has the 1998 parliamentary elections in its sights. Were it to fail again, this development is highly probable with the neo-liberals defecting to their co-thinkers in the "traditional" right-wing parties.

However, as a mass force able to take to the streets to threaten immigrants or striking workers, the FN still has a long way to go. Its organisation remains relatively small and fragile. Le Pen's boasting is in inverse proportion to his real strength.

As November-December 1995 showed, every mass action by the working class in defence of its own interests alters the terrain of battle and dramatically weakens the FN. Rekindling the spirit of last year must be combined with a determined programme of anti-racist and anti-fascist action, designed to stop the FN peddling its vicious propaganda and uproot it from the working class areas where it has grown in recent years.

To achieve this requires a real offensive against the racism of the French state itself and the racist ideology that has too long been tolerated in the ranks of the French labour movement. This means building working class opposition to the deportations of immigrants and the whole battery of overtly racist laws framed by right-wing ministers like Pasqua and Toubon. ■

Fighting racism and austerity



IN ORANGE, one of the major towns captured by the FN in the June 1995 local elections, some 3,000 workers and youth staged an anti-FN march.

Since the divided May Day marches in Paris, the unions have managed to stage an impressive day of action on 23 May in opposition to mass unemployment and the government's latest threat to 25,000 public sector jobs.

But the union leaders remain fearful of reviving the autumn 1995 move-

ment that could finally sweep away the government's austerity programme since such a fightback would also threaten their own privileges.

In Paris rank and file rail and postal workers also set a magnificent example when they opened their union building to several hundred Cameroon immigrants who the police were trying to forcibly deport and guarded them against police attack.



Part 4

The tide of revolution ebbs

Our series on the history of the Fourth International looks at how disorientation over perspectives contributed to the FI's political degeneration.

THE FOURTH International (FI) was founded in 1938 by the only revolutionary organisations on the planet to survive the collapse of the communist movement into Stalinism. Led by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky until his assassination in 1940, the FI was, by its own admission, small in numbers but "strong in doctrine, programme, tradition, in the incomparable temperament of its cadres".

In the first three parts of this series we described how the FI survived World War Two. Despite the pressure of war hysteria and in the face of repression from Allied and Axis governments, the FI's leaders were able to regroup by 1944 and prepare themselves for the revolutionary events which Trotsky had predicted.

The 1944 European Conference of the FI oriented its sections towards the developing revolutionary situations in Italy and Greece. It prepared the Trotskyists to intervene in the mass movements which were to explode as fascism collapsed.

Two years later, in March 1946, the FI was able to hold its first real international conference since 1940. Meeting in Paris, the FI's leaders surveyed the results of a period which had seen revolutionary opportunities arrive, only to be squandered by the reformist and Stalinist leaders of the workers' movement.

Trotsky's 1938 perspective—that the war would bring about revolutionary struggles—had been in part borne out. But in other ways events fell short of the FI's pre-war predictions. Stalinism did not collapse. Neither did the "democratic" imperialist countries (USA, Britain and France). Workers' illusions in bourgeois democracy, and in Stalinism, were strengthened during the war, fatally weakening the mass uprisings of 1943-45 and diverting them into a dead-end alliance with their US/British "liberators". Thus another of the FI's pre-war perspectives—mass growth and the assumption of leadership of the mass movement—also failed to materialise, except in Vietnam, where the Trotskyists nevertheless were eventually smashed by the Stalinists.

The key task therefore was to re-examine two key aspects of the FI's politics: its perspective and its programme. Only by realising that conditions had changed, that opportunities had been lost, could the FI hope to address the tasks of the post-war period. Likewise, the question of the bourgeois democratic illusions of the mass of workers—a key debilitating factor in the revolutionary years of 1943-45—had to be addressed.

Conference

The 1946 Conference assembled 30 delegates from the FI's sections in Germany, the USA, Britain, Belgium, Spain, France, Ireland, Switzerland and Palestine.

Although the "war for democracy" had been over for nearly a year the Allies did not rush to restore full democratic rights in Europe. In France, where Stalinists like Maurice Thorez sat alongside bourgeois ministers in the government, both the FI and its French section, the *Parti Communiste Internationaliste* (PCI) remained illegal. Their publications—the journal *Quatrieme International* and the paper *La Verité* (Truth)—were still published clandestinely. In fact the international conference was itself cut short by the police who raided the conference, dragging the delegates off to jail.

The provisional European Secretariat (ES) had prepared an agenda which included a report of its work, the adoption of a Manifesto and an extensive resolution outlining the perspectives and key programmatic positions of the FI in the immediate post-war period. In this resolution, *The New Imperialist Peace and the Building of the Parties of the Fourth International* expressed very clearly the main strengths and weaknesses of Trotskyism in the period 1944-48.

The Conference also elected a new International Executive Committee (IEC) and International Secretariat (IS) to hold office until a full world congress of the FI could be summoned. This leadership, including Michel Raptis (Pablo), Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank, was later to play a disastrous role in the FI's degeneration into centrism.

In the immediate post-war years, however, they played a vacillating role, disorienting the International at the level of perspectives, showing tendencies to adventurism and impatience in their handling of the splits, fusions and internal debates, yet defending the orthodoxy of the programme inherited from Trotsky.

In 1946 they decided that the failure of all the expected outcomes of World War Two did not herald a new period and the necessity to reorientate. Instead they saw it as simply a matter of time until the predictions came true.

In the cause of staying faithful to Trotsky's perspectives they abandoned Trotsky's method which did not stop short at self-criticism. In 1937 he had written:

"Revolutionary thought has nothing in common with idolatry. Programmes and predictions have to be corrected in the light of experience, the highest authority of human thought." (*Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto*, Leon Trotsky 1937)

The manifesto issued by the conference was a genuinely revolutionary docu-

ment, reasserting that the war had been a predatory imperialist one. Despite the survival and expansion of Stalinism into Eastern Europe, the International resisted those within its ranks which claimed that the Stalinist bureaucracy had become either a new reactionary class or a progressive force.

Democratic

The programmatic documents of the conference addressed the democratic tasks facing workers in post-war Europe and the colonies.

It linked demands for democracy and national self-determination inextricably with transitional demands aimed at solving the hunger, homelessness, low wages and inflation facing the population of Europe.

It defended the perspective of political revolution for the USSR. There was no hint of an adaptation to the victorious bureaucracy.

The FI declared its unequivocal support for all those fighting to end colonialism and reaffirmed the validity of the programme of permanent revolution: there could be no progressive solution to imperialist domination, national oppression, military dictatorship and the agrarian question without workers' revolution.

But the conference did commit major errors of perspective. For the FI in 1946 it remained sufficient to continue to predict crisis, war and revolution. To dare to think otherwise seemed like a whole-

sale rejection of Trotsky's programme and to undermine the historic mission of the FI itself.

The New Imperialist Peace stated:

"Despite certain existing weaknesses of the revolutionary workers' movement, there is no reason whatever to assume that we are facing a new epoch of capitalist stabilisation and development. On the contrary, the war has acted only to aggravate the disproportion between the increased productivity of capitalist economy and the capacity of the world market to absorb it. The war has aggravated the disorganisation of capitalist economy and has destroyed the last possibilities of a relatively stable equilibrium." (*Fourth International* June 1946)

This pushes aside the unresolved crisis of leadership of the proletariat in favour of economic crisis as the sole determinant of perspective. And even here there is a fundamental flaw—the "underconsumptionist" view of crisis built into its political economy. The FI expected that a short-term boom would occur as the US satisfied the pent-up demand caused by the shortages and destruction of the war:

"However this increased production will in a short while run up against the limited capacities of the domestic and world markets. The United States will then head for a new economic crisis which will be more deep-going and widespread than that of 1929-33, with far more devastating repercussions on the world economy."



May Day 1946: British RCP made valid criticisms of FI's perspective.

Voices of dissent

The false perspectives were not accepted by everybody. The majority leadership in the British RCP in particular did understand that the events which had taken place since 1944 had postponed for the time being the perspective of a continent-wide revolutionary upsurge. In an amendment, rejected by the Conference, the RCP reminded the International of one of the most basic tenets of revolutionary politics, namely that there are no "impossible situations" for the bourgeoisie.

Applying this method to the post-war situation the RCP observed:

"Where the proletariat was paralysed by its parties and did not know how to exploit the crisis in order to overthrow capitalism and take the power into its own hands, a new economic upturn began."

The RCP tried to anchor its analysis in the Marxist theory of crisis:

"the laws of capitalism themselves guarantee the upturn of the economic and make a new boom inevitable."

The gap between programme and perspectives was widening but the International was still in a position to learn from, and tolerate, critics within its own ranks. On some questions, such as the

withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, it proved ready to change its line.

Unfortunately, a combination of political disorientation and bureaucratic manoeuvre were soon to prevent this. When the Tito-Stalin split occurred against the background of the onset of Cold War, all the elements were in place for the FI leaders' decisive turn towards the alien class forces of Stalinism, reformism and petit-bourgeois nationalism. And this time round, bureaucratism and demoralisation would ensure that the voices of dissent were stifled. ■

The 1946 conference confused the assertion that there could be an economic recovery of capitalism, and even a boom, with the reactionary idea that capitalism had achieved permanent stability.

With the FI's leaders insisting that greater destabilisation was just around the corner it was logical to expect "a rising revolutionary curve, despite temporary declines and fluctuations". Thus there was no need to undertake a fundamental review of perspectives:

"All self-criticism which we can and should make today on the perspectives which we developed during the war... limits itself essentially to the tempo and not to the fundamental character of the period."

As with imperialism, so too with Stalinism:

"Behind the appearance of power never before attained, there lurks the reality that the USSR and the Soviet bureaucracy have entered the critical phase of their existence."

This analysis was false. It was impossible in 1946 to simply assert that the outcome of the Second World War was identical to that of the First. The re-division of the world—one of the central "functions" of imperialist war—was not thwarted in 1945 but rather carried forward at lightning speed.

Rash

The FI's prediction of imminent economic crisis was rash and subjective, prediction aimed at shoring up tottering confidence:

"What confronts us now is a world-wide crisis transcending anything known in the past and a world-wide revolutionary upsurge developing, to be sure, at unequal tempos in different parts of the world, but unceasingly exercising reciprocal influences from one centre to the other, and thus determining a long revolutionary perspective."

In summary the FI's perspectives in 1946 were wrong. They were to lead to two years of disorientation and then the beginning of a phase of serious political errors.

The perspective mapped out in 1946 was a harbinger of the increasing reliance on the "objective process" to overcome all subjective obstacles. It was this "spontaneism" or "processism" which lay at the root of the FI's centrist degeneration.

Soon Pablo and Mandel were to abandon the intransigence to Stalinism displayed in 1946 in favour of a perspective which saw Stalinism as the key progressive force in the world, locked in a coming "war-revolution" in which Stalinist parties would be forced to play a progressive role. ■

Next Month: 1948, the Second World Congress and the Tito-Stalin split.

TIMELINE

1944: May Greek CP, at the head of ELAS resistance movement, agrees to government of national unity with Greek bourgeoisie.

June Italian CP leader Togliatti enters government with "liberal" capitalists.

August French CP leads Paris uprising as Allied armies approach.

October Tito's partisans take Belgrade. By end of 1945 80% of industry and banks nationalised.

December Fighting between British Army and ELAS in Athens. British Army imposes right wing government on Greece.

1945 August Vietnam (Communist-led) takes over from collapsing Japanese occupation. Welcomes French colonial troops. World War Two ends.

1946 March Vietnamese Stalinists slaughter Trotskyists after they oppose agreement with French colonists.

April International Conference of FI
October French troops attack Vietnamese Stalinists. War breaks out.

Northern Ireland

Stormont revisited

"THE MAY 30 elections will be a sectarian headcount, with the result as predictable as the colour of an Orangeman's sash."

This was how Kevin Toolis, a reporter and author of a book on the IRA, described the elections to the Ulster Forum. Any objective consideration will reveal the absurdity of the Loyalist and British government claims that the Forum, and the all-party talks due to follow on 10 June, are about democracy.

The elections were designed to guarantee that the Loyalist/Unionist minority in Ireland preserves its majority in the artificial Northern statelet that Britain created. This manufactured "majority", the guarantee of Protestant privilege, is reproduced in the Forum. It ensures that nearly eight decades of brutal oppression against the Northern nationalist population will continue. The Unionists will use the Forum to demand that Britain continues to back them with troops, weapons, money for the RUC and money to maintain Protestant advantages in the shrinking job market.

Decisive

John Major and the Unionists have a common aim. Their aim is not peace, but to inflict a decisive defeat on the nationalists in the Six Counties, and to force the IRA to surrender. This has been the aim of Major and David Trimble's Ulster Unionists throughout the peace process.

Britain aims to use the talks to exclude Sinn Fein unless and until the IRA declares a new ceasefire and hands over its weapons and signs up to the "Mitchell Principles". This would be tantamount to an IRA surrender. US Senator Mitchell's six principles require all parties and groups to renounce for ever the use of arms for political goals. That is all groups and parties except the British state and its heavily armed garrison and the 93% Protestant RUC.

In the run up to 10 June, Major and his Northern Ireland Secretary, Patrick Mayhew, have tried to coax Sinn Fein and the IRA into playing their game. Mayhew said that the talks would address all issues, with "nothing pre-ordained, nothing ruled out, nothing ruled in".

Signed

In a signed article in the *Irish Times*, Major said the talks would be aimed at "a genuine and serious effort to reach a comprehensive settlement, covering all the issues of concern and acceptable to all concerned."

Every nationalist should treat these sonorous pledges with contempt. These are the men who, during 18 months of the IRA ceasefire, betrayed every promise they had made to the IRA. Major and Mayhew resorted to every manoeuvre their malicious and scheming brains could conceive of to block progress towards all-party talks. They used the ceasefire as a means of trying to isolate and weaken the IRA, without making a single serious concession to the nationalists.

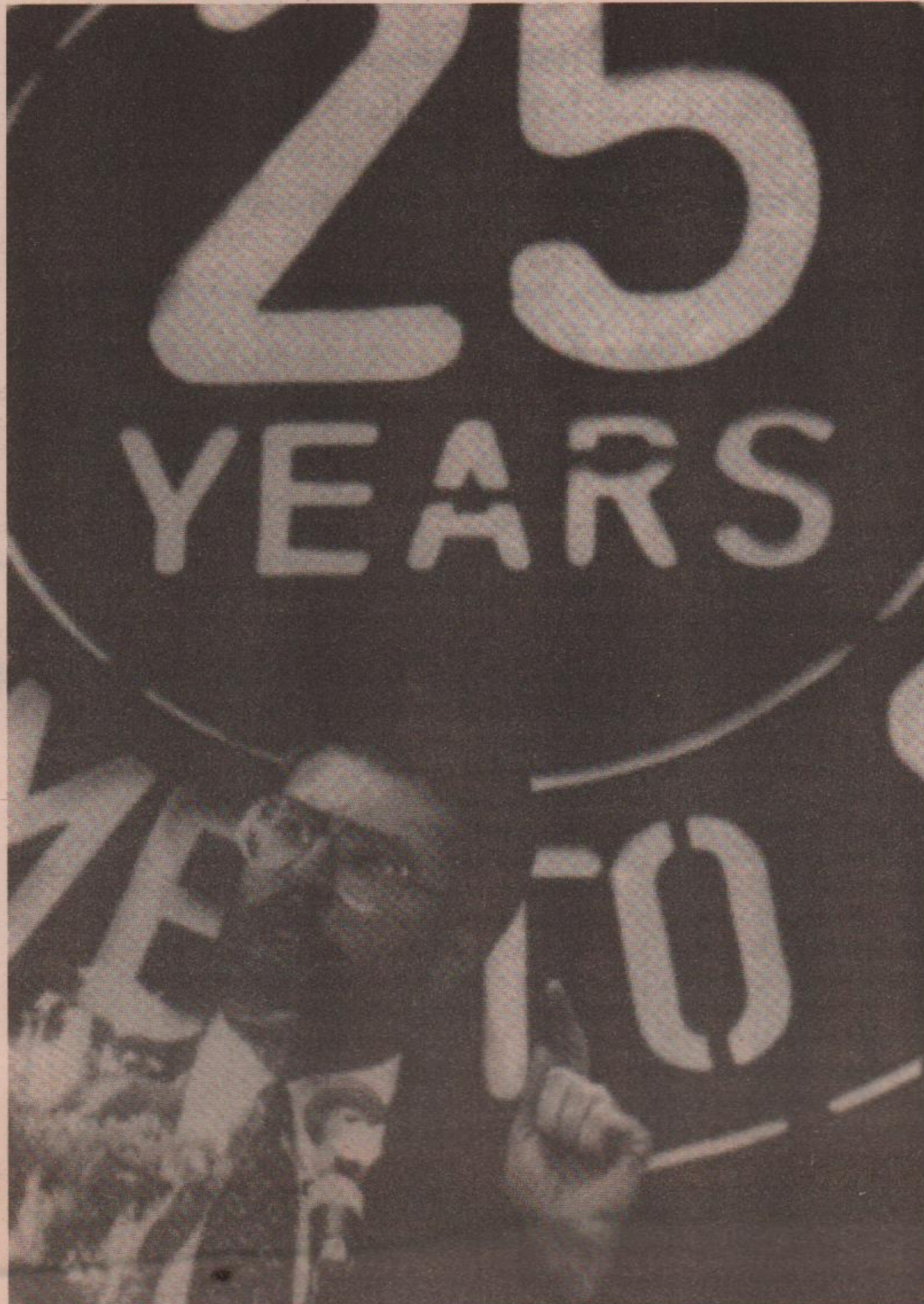
Now, they are manoeuvring again. They want the Forum to be seen as a great democratic gain, the talks perceived as proof of their sincerity in trying to bring about peace.

Obligated

To do this they need to persuade nationalists to take part. John Hume's SDLP, representing the Catholic middle class in the North, have obliged. They will give the whole process some credence. Even Sinn Fein have lent weight to the process by refusing to boycott the elections.

Major's determination to see the IRA surrender means he is demanding more than a new ceasefire. He wants the IRA to hand over their weapons now. That is why, despite his deliberately ambiguous article in the *Irish Times*, five hours of

by Mark Harrison



GERRY ADAMS: Sinn Fein's participation legitimises elections whose results are as "predictable as the colour of an Orangeman's sash".

talks between Britain and Dublin in late May broke down. He has renewed his insistence on decommissioning as a precondition for Sinn Fein's entry into the 10 June talks.

Labour to defending the Unionists' undemocratic veto over the future of Northern Ireland. They are not prepared to abandon this commitment, at least not while the revolutionary nationalist struggle

The IRA's struggle has substituted an increasingly fruitless guerilla struggle by a tiny number of volunteers for the best means of achieving self determination: the mobilisation of the mass of the working class North and South, against British occupation.

David Trimble revealed one reason why Major is still intransigent on this issue. He warned:

"I would remind the governments and parties that any progress beyond this point requires our agreement. In the wake of Adams' purported acceptance of the Mitchell report, we are alert to the danger of further pressure on John Major to again dilute the government's position. I want to make it clear that any backsliding by the prime minister on the twin issues of the ceasefire and decommissioning would be regarded as a fundamental breach of faith... In such circumstances I would have no hesitation in recommending to my parliamentary colleagues to oppose the government."

Potent

With a Tory majority of one in parliament this is a potent threat. The Unionists could easily bring Major's government down if they wanted to. Major knows this and will do nothing to risk losing their support. That is why he is standing firm on decommissioning and the ceasefire before allowing Sinn Fein into the talks.

Britain's determination to inflict a total defeat on the nationalists arises from the commitment of both the Tories and

the IRA remains a potential threat to British imperialism's political interests.

This is the starting point for the struggle against imperialism: Britain must be defeated and its troops driven out of Ireland now. National self-determination for Ireland as a whole has to be won against British imperialism and through the smashing of the Six County state.

Sinn Fein and the IRA, despite their revolutionary struggle against imperialism, are not capable of achieving these goals.

Struggle

The IRA's struggle has substituted an increasingly fruitless guerilla struggle by a tiny number of volunteers for the best means of achieving self determination: the mobilisation of the mass of the working class North and South, against British occupation. Despite the dramatic impact of some of its attacks, this armed struggle strategy is incapable of forcing British withdrawal. Only a mass working class fight could do this.

Sinn Fein, on the other hand, have attempted to present themselves as the peace party, preferring diplomacy (courting the Dublin and Washington governments for backing) and passive electioneering to mass struggle. Gerry Adams has said that Sinn Fein will accept the

Mitchell principles: this would mean accepting that there can be no revolutionary struggle against Britain and the Loyalist defenders of the sectarian statelet.

Instead of boycotting the undemocratic elections Sinn Fein agreed to take part in them. Their stated purpose was to mobilise enough support to embarrass Britain into allowing them into the all-party talks, ceasefire or no. Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, Martin McGuinness argued:

"The people who have led this struggle are asking you to vote Sinn Fein and we will go forward demanding the right of the Irish people to rule themselves. Then on 10 June we will present ourselves at the door of the negotiating room telling both the British and Irish governments they have no right to prevent Sinn Fein negotiating on behalf of a struggling people."

Credence

Certainly, if Sinn Fein are excluded on 10 June, it will highlight the farcical character of Britain's claim to be overseeing a democratic peace process. But Sinn Fein's participation in the elections has itself lent credence to Britain's bogus claims.

By restricting its central demand to admission to negotiations that are not going to tackle the fundamental issue—the right of Ireland to be united and free from British rule—Sinn Fein is giving credence to the notion that the talks can lead to any sort of just peace. They can't. The job of revolutionaries is to say that and mobilise the masses to win such a peace.

Sinn Fein do not want to take the revolutionary road. This is obvious from McGuinness' language. Things are to be done "on behalf" of the people. The small number of "people who have led this struggle" are making an appeal to the masses to support them.

Language

It is the language of petit-bourgeois nationalist elitism. And it should sound a warning to every working class nationalist who supports Sinn Fein. Your leaders are misdirecting the struggle. It is time to re-direct it.

The start of the talks should be used as a focus for a mass demonstration against British rule and the Loyalist veto. Sinn Fein should issue the call now for a protest march on Stormont on 10 June. Workers, North and South, should strike on that day to demonstrate their opposition to the British attempt to impose an unjust peace.

Mobilisation against the new Assembly should become the springboard for a new phase of anti-imperialist struggle: one that places the working class centre stage.

The answer is not to step up the guerilla struggle, but to mobilise the masses, in marches, demonstrations, strikes; to ensure that the masses have the means and are sufficiently organised to strike back against any military or loyalist paramilitary attacks on them; to build a working class anti-imperialist movement in which the tables are turned and in which the peace process is turned into negotiations on the terms of Britain's surrender.

That is a goal that generations of Irish nationalists have fought for. It is the only basis for a just peace in Ireland. ■

Troops out now! Self determination for the whole Irish people!

A World to Win

MAY DAY, the workers' holiday, set the scene for the rest of the month. In countries across the world demonstrations, strikes and rallies gave the lie to the idea that the working class is dead and the class struggle is over.

Even the *International Herald Tribune*, a solid mouthpiece of US imperialism, was forced to record that "millions used May Day to highlight grievances and rally for a better economic future".

In South Africa a million workers took up Cosatu's call to protest against the draft constitution that gives employers the right to lock out workers.

In Japan, sunk in deep recession, two million workers joined marches demanding a "war against unemployment".

Three hundred thousand Italian workers marched in Rome.

Belgium saw militant rallies against the austerity package of the Conservative-Socialist coalition government, driving the SP leaders from the platform with jeers and catcalls.

Russia

In Russia, three and a half million people, no longer herded by the state authorities but answering the call of the unions, protested against the terrible social and economic effects of Yeltsin's policies.

Turkey

But in Turkey, once more celebration of May Day was no holiday but a deadly earnest part of the class struggle. One hundred thousand marched in Istanbul, 50,000 in Ankara and 30,000 in Izmir. The Turkish military as usual took the opportunity to brutally attack the marchers, driving armoured cars into the columns of marchers and opening fire on them in Istanbul, killing three workers and injuring scores.

Venezuela

In Venezuela there were mass protests and rioting in Caracas and other cities against the government's austerity package.

Germany

In Germany, tens of thousands of workers have taken strike action against government austerity plans which include a pay freeze for 3.2 million public sector workers. In late May several cities were hit by strikes in public transport, education and local services.

Norway

In Norway, the Labour government faced a strike wave which grew stronger with 37,000 ship-building and engineering workers joining oil workers and hotel workers on strike.

France

In France there are signs of a revival of the movement against the government's cuts and privatisation programme. The public sector union, UNSA, has called for a day of action on 29 May; *France Telecom* unions have called for a one day strike against partial privatisation on 4 June; 6 June will see civil servants and railworkers on the streets in demonstrations called by the CGT. The settlement which defused last November-December's strike wave is coming apart.

A world to win!

These and many other growing struggles of the workers and oppressed are an inspiration to all revolutionaries: we have a world to win! ■

SLP Conference

The party begins

THE FOUNDING conference of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) took place in London on 4 May. Over 600 members assembled to debate out the policies and programme of the new party.

Conference delegates were told that 1,252 people have joined the SLP, among them a handful of Labour councillors. Arthur Scargill announced, to massive applause, that in addition the party can claim the adherence of 4,373 trade unionists whose branches have applied for affiliation to the party.

However, if the conference is a guide to the membership, the new party has a few problems representing the working class as a whole: whilst a high proportion of the delegates were blue collar workers, few delegates were under 25 and less than two percent were black.

Democratic

The conference proceedings were far more democratic than might have been expected – given the fact that the SLP was launched with a highly restrictive and undemocratic party constitution. Designed to minimise any possible challenge to the politics of the leadership, the constitution effectively bars openly organised opposition and declares supporters of alternative programmes ineligible for membership.

At the conference itself, however, the leadership were on their best behaviour—maybe for the benefit of the massed ranks of the media. Revolutionary, reformist and half-way house amendments all appeared on the order paper and many were discussed out on the conference floor, largely without harassment or suppression from the platform.

Nevertheless, there were some signs of bureaucratism. The party constitution was not even discussed at the conference: it has simply been imposed by Scargill. Certain delegates—including Mary Ward of the Scottish SLP Committee—were refused credentials, mainly because of their alleged membership of the tiny “Communist Party of Great Britain” group. And some highly contentious issues—notably the party’s attitude to the European Union—did not figure on the agenda. They will be referred to the incoming National Executive Committee, where supporters of Arthur Scargill’s policies have an absolute majority.

And the political complexion of the new party? Unsurprisingly, there was a clear majority for Arthur Scargill’s reformist road to socialism. A small but significant clique of older members—sitting on the right hand side of the hall, appropriately enough—appeared to be strongly influenced by the unreconstructed Stalinism of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB).

On the platform, rail union (RMT) assistant general secretary Bob Crow (ex-CPB) remained curiously silent, whilst the main work of running the conference and responding on the steering committee’s behalf was carried out by three people sympathetic to the right-wing of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International—Carolyn Sikorski, Pat Sikorski and Brian Heron.

Openness

There was, however, a substantial minority—50 to 70 delegates—prepared to vote for and support various revolutionary, internationalist and anti-Stalinist arguments. A degree of openness was revealed outside the conference as well. Around 50 copies of *Workers Power* were sold to SLP members and observers.

The most important debate of the day took place around the policy paper on the economy. Scargill himself motivated

Arthur Scargill is probably feeling optimistic about his new party. The majority of delegates supported his political line and gave him a rapturous reception. But his brand of left reformism did not go completely unchallenged. **Richard Brenner** was an observer at the founding conference of the SLP.



Sitting comfortably: King Arthur and loyal supporters won all the debates, including adopting a disgraceful position on immigration controls

this. Immediately, deep divisions were revealed within the conference. Chris Boylan of Leicester SLP spoke to an amendment that rejected Scargill’s reformist draft, and sought to commit the party to a series of revolutionary demands, culminating in a call for the working class “to smash the bureaucratic and military apparatus of the state

On immigration controls

“Scrapping all immigration controls is libertarian nonsense”

Paul Hepburn,
Manchester

“Make no mistake. All immigration controls are racist”

Shani Desainu,
Birmingham

through revolutionary struggle and replace it with a new state power drawing its authority from democratic workers’ councils and armed workers’ defence organisations.”

This plain talking drew considerable applause, but clearly worried and offended others, notably Scargill himself, who declared that to speak of armed struggle would play into the hands of the press. Nevertheless, he was unable to answer the argument that in Chile in 1973, the parliamentary road to socialism had proved to be a disaster leading to the military suppression of the workers’ movement. “We have learned the lessons of Chile,” Scargill assured the conference, though many must have noticed that he refrained from stating what those lessons actually are.

The Leicester amendment received around 30 votes, 10% of the voting delegates. A further amendment, sub-

mitted by five members, including Chris Ford, an activist in the Employment Services dispute, was less comprehensive and, if passed, would have left the reformist essence of Arthur Scargill’s policy paper intact. Nevertheless, it called for workers’ control and the smashing of the capitalist state, and received around 20% of the votes.

The SLP adopted a *left reformist* programme at the conference. Whatever Scargill’s demagoguery about the lessons of Chile, any attempt to implement a fundamental shift in property ownership and the overthrow of capitalism without breaking up the armed might of the state would lead to the same disastrous conclusions as befell the Chilean workers: defeat, military coup and massacre.

Yet there is a significant minority of the party who see the need to go beyond left reformism and commit the party to the goal of revolution. They need to get organised and continue the campaign for revolutionary policies. They are the great hope for the future of the SLP and of all those who see the need for a mass revolutionary party in Britain.

The debate that provoked the most discord and anger on the day was without doubt around the question of immigration controls.

Trevor Wongsam of Manchester SLP made a flippant and badly reasoned speech supporting the maintenance of some “non-racist” immigration controls, and revealed his opportunism by accusing his opponents of living in the world of “fringe politics”, by which he obviously meant that a consistent policy would not be acceptable to the prejudices of many workers. To the fury of many delegates Paul Hepburn, also from Manchester, declared opposition to immigration controls to be “a bit of libertarian nonsense”.

Several speakers pointed out the dangerous logic of these arguments, one accusing the official document of accommodating to the racism of white workers. From the platform Brian Heron gave a disgraceful response, maintaining that

when the ANC in South Africa dispossess the whites (which they will not), many of them will want to come to Britain (which they certainly will not if the SLP are in power) and, therefore, the party could not call for the abolition of the immigration controls maintained by the capitalists. This cynical nonsense was jeered by many delegates.

Two speakers pointed out how all immigration controls are used in a racist way by the establishment and that since capital can roam the world, workers should also be allowed to migrate. But the biggest cheer came for Shani Desainu from Birmingham when she stated clearly: “Make no mistake. All immigration controls are racist,” and went on to warn that she had left the

On reform or revolution

“The SLP must be a revolutionary party”
Chris Boylan,
Leicester

“To speak of armed struggle would be to play into the hands of the capitalist press”
Arthur Scargill

Labour Party because of its cowardice on this question. If the SLP did the same it would never be able to recruit militant and angry black youth.

The platform were clearly rattled but Scargill’s prestige proved decisive. The platform won by 182 to 114 in the narrowest vote of the day—but not without alienating many comrades, including the party’s youth section, whose Charter raises the call for the scrapping of all immigration controls. The demand for the SLP to adopt the slogan of “no platform” for fascists was also rejected on

the spurious grounds that this was only one of many useful tactics. If so, why reject it?

The most encouraging debate of the day took place on the crucial question of Ireland. As one young Asian delegate pointed out, for too long British socialists have supported national liberation movements in South Africa, Latin America and other distant places, but have shied away from taking the same stance closer to home.

Yet in a significant turn around, which could be read as a concession by Scargill to his pro-USFI lieutenants, the platform accepted amendments from Ellen George of Swindon and Eamon Graal of Manchester calling for Troops out of Ireland Now, repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the release of all Irish political prisoners and an end to the Unionist veto over Irish unity. Even better, Pat Sikorski declared that the SLP will not be in the business of condemning IRA bombings, but recognised the right of Irish revolutionaries to pursue their struggle against British imperialism “however they see fit”.

Economism

Certain delegates objected to this, including several who appeared to be influenced by the positions of Militant Labour and the SWP. Yet the majority gave no truck to their economistic arguments about class unity in the abstract. Several speakers explained how workers’ unity and a just settlement could not be achieved without taking a firm stand against the oppression of the nationalist population in the six counties. The conference did not raise any criticism of the failed strategy of the republican movement, or to recognise the possibility that—as in Palestine—peace treaties and arms decommissioning may lead to an inglorious surrender of the national liberation movement.

The conference heard many verbal commitments to internationalism. But a platform of foreign speakers indicated that the SLP’s choice of “sister parties” (there was no vote on this!) were all of a distinctly reformist and Stalinist complexion: the Communist *Refondazione* of Italy, the United Left of Spain and the Political Consul of the Cuban Embassy. This loose Three-and-a-Half International may have warmed the hearts of the delegates, but it will never provide a revolutionary lead for the workers of the world. For that a new international is needed, with common discipline and a clear revolutionary communist programme.

Violation

The anti-European rhetoric of Scargill’s closing speech was a violation of internationalist principles. It was reminiscent of the CPB and its paper the *Morning Star*. At a time when the Tory right and Major are waving the jingoistic anti-European flag, the SLP should refuse to side with either the Little Englanders or the Brussels bureaucrats, and fight instead for a Socialist United States of Europe.

The founding conference indicated that the SLP is a party that remains in the process of formation. In its majority, it supports the policies of the man it regards as its greatest single asset—Arthur Scargill. The members are in high morale, and roared their approval when Scargill called for “a recruitment campaign the likes of which this country has never seen before”.

Whether this really happens we shall see. But with a small but significant minority clearly seeking revolutionary policies and answers, one thing is certain: the struggle for the political soul of the Socialist Labour Party has only just begun. ■

LETTERS

WORKERS POWER 201 JUNE 1996

Indian politics in turmoil

Dear Comrades

The recent elections to the Lok Sabha, India's parliament, marked a turning point in the history of the world's most populous capitalist country, with serious implications for the masses of South Asia. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), an extreme Hindu chauvinist party, captured the largest number of seats thus breaking the Congress Party's 50-year long virtual monopoly.

Congress found itself mired in corruption scandals, while its attempts to implement IMF and World Bank "structural adjustment" programmes provoked anger among wide layers, from the very poorest to bosses dependent on state subsidies. Successive Congress administrations have fuelled regional and communal divisions, helping to pave the way for the BJP's poll success.

At the same time, an array of lower

caste and regionally-based parties have emerged, usually led by demagogic powerbrokers. Such parties gained 40% of the popular vote, though holding only 70 or so of the 545 seats in Lok Sabha.

The BJP installed a new leader, poet Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in the run-up to the election. He replaced the hardliner Lal Advani, who had led campaigns to torch mosques and replace them with Hindu temples. Western capitalists were confident that a BJP-led government would not overturn the neo-liberal policies of the outgoing Congress finance minister, Manmohan Singh, but they are worried about the prospect of instability and mounting ethnic and regional conflict.

The "left" did relatively well in the poll in a cross-class alliance of the National Front-Left Front. This loose collection of secular, regional and Stalinist-domi-

nated parties won nearly 100 seats, but has no coherent programme to present as an alternative to Congress' attacks on the working class and mass of the peasantry.

As I write this letter, reports from Delhi suggest that Vajpayee would soon step down as prime minister, marking the collapse of the BJP-led coalition.

Such a development, however, would only mark the start of a deeper political crisis in the sub-continent. It highlights the need for an altogether different kind of workers' party that wages a relentless fight against communal chauvinism and the national and imperialist exploiters who maintain their rule over a proletariat and poor peasantry divided against itself.

Yours in comradeship
Laura Watkins
Birmingham

OECD: from bad to worse

Dear Comrades

As I queued along with 15 others for the privatised bus that never seems to come, I thumbed through my copy of the *Guardian's* 21 May edition. I felt momentarily heartened by a photo of bus drivers in Cologne mounting a picket as part of a protest strike against the Kohl government's attacks on public sector jobs and pay.

But my attention soon focused on an article reporting the latest economic forecasts from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), imperialism's leading think-tank.

OECD reports make grim reading at the best of times with endless reams of statistics and the jargon of bourgeois economics, but the picture its researchers painted in late May should cause a few sleepless nights to bosses and politicians in the imperialist heartlands.

Unfortunately, the data from the OECD also suggests that the capitalists are again imposing the cost of their un-

resolved crisis on the backs of workers.

The feeble recovery in the fortunes of the west European economies has ground to a halt, with the OECD revising its projections downward for average growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 2.1% - a sharp dip from their December 1995 forecast. Their expectations for GDP growth in 1997 have also fallen from 2.8% to 2.5%.

In Germany in particular, the supposed powerhouse of the European Union economies, growth is almost too anaemic to register.

The OECD analysis suggests that the German economy currently meets the capitalist criteria for a recession, with GDP actually shrinking in the first half of 1996. This forecast has serious implications for the ability of Germany, not to mention France, to meet the Maastricht criteria for a single European currency.

The OECD report also highlights that the ranks of the jobless are starting to grow once again across most of the 27-

member states.

The total number of those officially unemployed is expected to stay around 35 million over the next two years. As an advisory committee of trade union bureaucrats noted in a submission to the OECD that "mass unemployment and chronic worker insecurity have created a ticking social time bomb".

We can be sure, however, that the remedy prescribed for the bosses' problems by the OECD's economists will be more fiscal austerity and so-called structural reform, a euphemism for savage attacks on public sector jobs and welfare state provision.

In short, the stage is set for major class battles across much of Europe in the not too distant future. It all seems a very far cry from less than five years ago when our capitalist masters and their academic apologists were telling us that we lived in "the best of all possible worlds".

Yours in comradeship
George Baxter
London N16.

AWL plays with Loyalist fire

Dear Comrades

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, formerly known as Socialist Organiser, has invited Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the "political" wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), to speak at their "Ideas for Freedom" event in London in late June. Apparently, the PUP/UVF has discovered socialism very late in the day!

The UVF is an organisation which has had no other purpose or ideology than to terrorise the anti-imperialist population of the six counties in the north of Ireland through random sectarian murder. Now it is on the verge of becoming an ally in the class struggle - or so thinks the leadership of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL).

From a situation where for many years the PUP/UVF has had no sympathetic political contacts in Britain beyond the ranks of organised fascism in

the BNP and C-18, these murderous gangsters are now courted by a group that judges itself to be "revolutionary Marxist". Perhaps the AWL now takes its lead from Militant Labour's sister organisation in the six counties which has already given Hutchinson a platform.

Billy Hutchinson and two other Loyalist paramilitaries spent many years in jail for the brutal murders of Sinn Fein councillors in the 1970s. To the best of my knowledge, and that of friends and family, he and his organisation have never distanced themselves from such crimes.

Loyalism is an ideology which exists only to lend legitimacy to the maintenance of Protestant privilege in the six counties, which is entirely bound up with support for British imperialism and the sectarian discrimination the British presence has helped to prop up. There

is no evidence to suggest that this reactionary monster has changed in character.

Those who consider themselves Trotskyists of whatever tendency have a particular responsibility to dissociate themselves from this latest example of the degeneration of the AWL. There must be comrades who generally support the politics of the AWL who are disgusted at the prospect of playing host to a representative of sectarian murderers on their platform.

I would call on all those who are committed to a truly just peace in Ireland and, in particular, those leaderships who claim to stand in the anti-imperialist tradition of Trotskyism to issue a joint denunciation of the AWL's invitation to Billy Hutchinson.

Yours in comradeship
Liam Mac Uaid
East London.

SLP confusion?

Dear Comrades

Your position on the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) seems confused to say the least.

On the one hand, you discuss the tactics a potentially revolutionary SLP might adopt, yet state that "Workers Power will not advocate critical support for the SLP": hardly the way to win SLP members to a revolutionary cause.

I would have thought that SLP members are just the sort of people whom revolutionaries would have more of a

chance of winning over to Marxism.

Ironically, for an issue that brags about the first 200 editions and Workers Power's achievements, the article on the SLP does not include an inkling of what kind of orientation communists should take to SLP members.

Yours for the revolution
Steve Davis
Birmingham.

We reply:
Even as a fighting propaganda

group, our electoral tactics must relate to the mass of the working class, who by and large hold some faith in Blair's "New Labour", a party still funded primarily by the political levies of union members.

As the report of the SLP's founding conference on the opposite page shows, the SLP is not about to stand for parliament on a revolutionary programme and it has not yet attracted a mass base of support within the organised working class.

Where We Stand



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.



The Trade Unions

must be transformed by 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.



October 1917

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin 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 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. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' 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.



Social oppression

is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of 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.



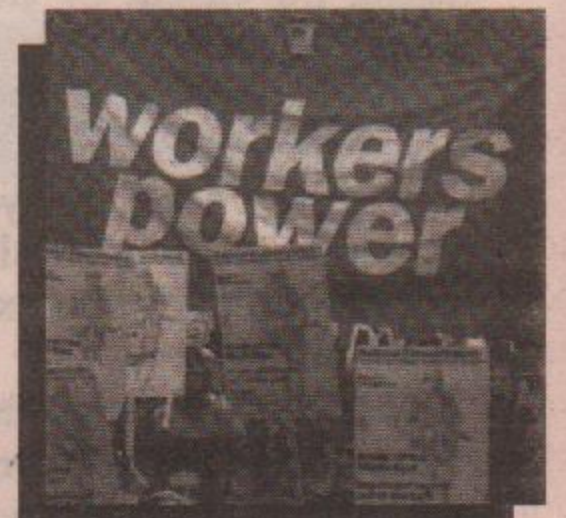
Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. 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. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism 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 a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. 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. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!★



Workers power

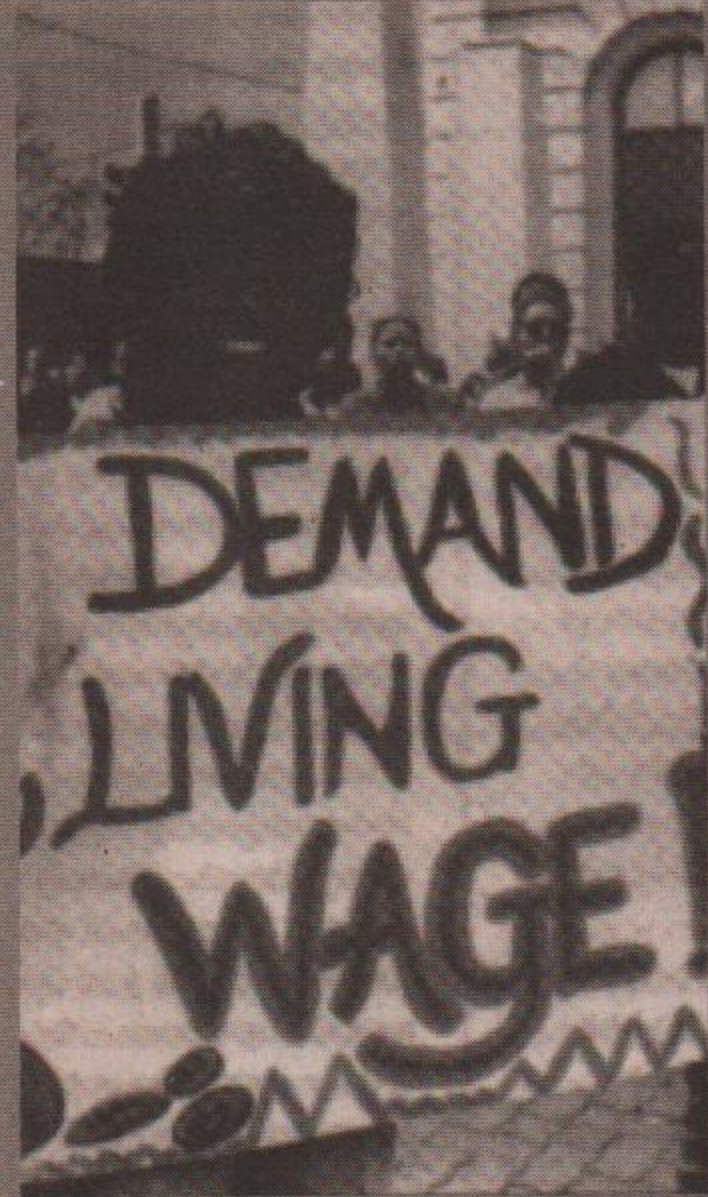
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on the
brink of
civil war?



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Details on page 7

Gay-bashing

Stop the bigots!

MORE THAN one third of gay men and nearly 25% of lesbians have experienced violence in the last five years just because of their sexuality. One in four of those attacked required medical attention.

These are the results of Stonewall's recently published survey of 4,200 lesbians, gays and bisexuals across Britain. The survey shows that many gay men and lesbians are too afraid to speak out and be open about their sexuality. This means millions of people facing the threat of vicious discrimination at work, at home, at school and on the streets.

It is even worse for young lesbians and gay men. Almost half of under-18s had experienced violence.

This level of threat means that lesbians and gay men often have to hide their sexuality.

Four out of ten reported always avoiding kissing or holding hands in public. Others said they avoided telling

people or looking "obviously gay".

As one young man in the West Midlands put it, "I was verbally abused by two policemen when leaving a gay club - they said "Watch your back you faggot, they're killing fairies like you" in a menacing fashion" (this was just after news of the serial killings of five gay men in London). Others told of having to move home, leave their jobs and of even waking up in hospital, all because of homophobic harassment and queerbashing.

This level of oppression is a disgrace. But the government, the bosses and even the unions are doing nothing.

Many companies have anti-discrimination policies printed up as smart guidelines. But the bosses then make a

mockery of this when it comes to same-sex couples. Rights extended to married and some heterosexual partners are frequently not available for partners of lesbians or gay men. Lisa Grant has recently taken her rail bosses to a tribunal because they have denied her partner a travel pass because she is also a woman (see page 2).

We can't rely on the government or bosses in the fight against discrimination and oppression. But within the lesbian and gay movement there are also problems in organising effective action.

In a recent interview defending the lesbian and gay community's drift away from political action Roger Goode, managing editor of *The Pink Paper* and *Boyz*, commented

that:

"For young gay people today, political action is centred around visibility - they do it by being out to their families, out at work and by being obviously gay in the streets. . . it's about individual action rather than group action".

This picture may reflect how things look in Goode's privileged looking glass.

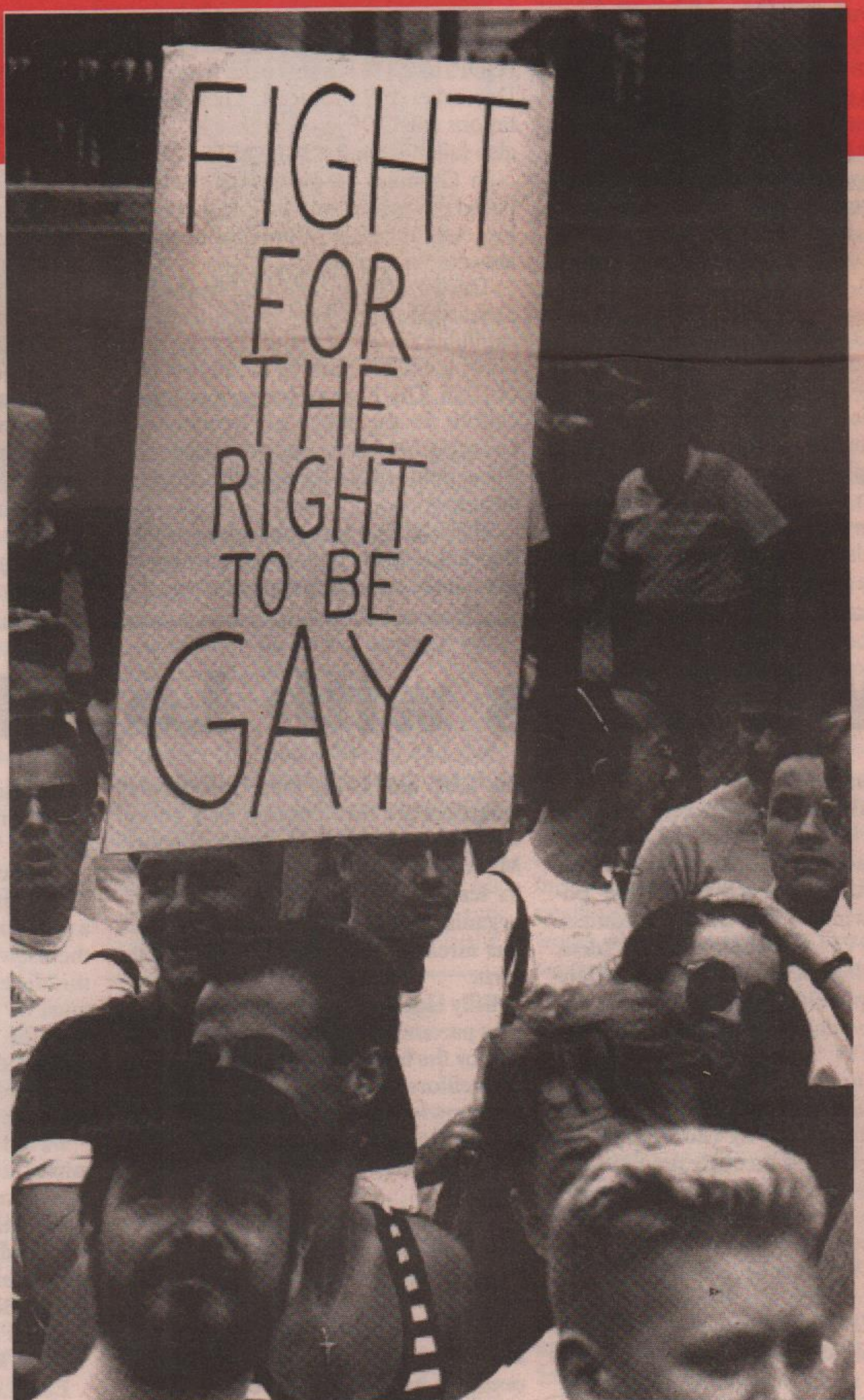
But for millions of lesbians and gay men the realities re-

vealed by the Stonewall report are very different. Adopting a liberated lifestyle simply isn't an option for the majority.

There is a real need for a renewed political fight by lesbians and gay men, with the aim of building self-defence groups and caucuses in the workplace and unions. But such a movement should not seek to fight in isolation, cut off from potential allies in "straight society".

A revitalised lesbian and gay movement needs to win workers, whatever their sexuality, to the active defence of the right of lesbians and gay men to express their sexuality. Only this can start to turn the tide against the kind of homophobic violence and workplace discrimination, highlighted by the Stonewall report and Lisa Grant case. ■

Turn to page 2



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