

Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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NHS: Dying for profit

THE NHS IS facing the "worst financial crisis for ten years" and is close to collapse, according to Sandy Macara, chair of the British Medical Association. It needs £6 billion to avoid total breakdown this winter.

Why is the NHS in crisis once again? As always the Tories deny that they are to blame. According to John Major the health service is "part of the fabric of Britain... it must continue to be there when we need it". But millions of people know—it is **not** there when we need it. The only people who can rely on adequate

health care are those who can pay for it.

The facts speak for themselves.

■ In last year's budget the NHS got only a 1.1% spending increase—one third of what it needed just to stand still.

■ 60 out of the 98 health authorities in England are in the red to the tune of £140 million, with four months of their budgets still to run.

■ The Hillingdon Hospital Trust has refused to take emergency admissions from patients over 75.

■ The Tories have lined up a

whole list of hospitals to be rebuilt and operated under the Private Finance Initiative. Taxpayers will fork out millions over the next 25 years to conglomerates whose only interest is making profits—not making people better.

In the short term this crisis is because the Tories took money off the health budget and gave it away in tax cuts to their supporters last year.

But the rot goes deeper than one year's shortfall. Britain spends less than any other industrialised country on health care—7% of GDP compared to more

than 10% for other OECD countries.

Experts tell us that the economy "can't afford" the NHS. The ageing population, the costs of new treatment, and "rising expectations" are confronting us with the need for health rationing across the board, they say.

This is rubbish. Annual spending on health is £42 billion. Defence Secretary Michael Portillo is proposing to spend £20 billion on the purchase of 150 fighter aircraft.

The wealth is there to fund a health service that meets the

needs of everyone. A steep tax on the property and profits of the rich could easily provide the necessary funds.

That is why we need mass protests this winter to force health authorities to give us our rights: the right to free health care at the point of need. Health workers, patients and local trade unionists took to the streets last month to protest at the discrimination against the over 75s. Across the country we have to mobilise now to make our voices heard in every area and demand:

● An immediate cash injection

to reopen all closed beds and wards and an emergency programme to reduce waiting lists. For full government funding of care in the community.

● Abolish the NHS trusts. Take all hospitals under control of democratically elected health authorities. Abolish private health care.

● End private contracting in the NHS—renationalise all privatised NHS services.

● Meet the wage demands of NHS workers in full. Restore national pay and conditions. ■

Crime bill hypocrisy

Fight Howard's crack down!

BY ALEX NEWMAN

CRIME RATES have doubled under the Tories. Now, after 17 years in office, the Tories have announced a crackdown on crime. Their new Crime Bill brings in:

- minimum sentences for "repeat offenders" in burglary (three years) and drug dealing cases (seven years)
- mandatory life sentences for those convicted of rape or serious violence for a second time
- the abolition of parole, and its replacement by "time off for good behaviour" of up to 15%
- a Criminal Records Agency providing details of criminal offences to prospective employers
- curfews and electronic tagging for fine defaulters and possibly for "delinquent youth".

There will also be separate bills against stalking, for the creation of a paedophile register, for the fast removal of club licences where drugs are sold, and for the banning of most handguns.

To back up this draconian legislation Home Secretary Michael Howard has ordered the building of 12 new private "super prisons", to extend prison capacity by 11,000. The Tories have doubled prison capacity since 1979.

The prison population of Britain now stands at 57,633, the first time this century that it has gone above 50,000. Howard doesn't plan to cut crime, it will simply boost the prison population even more. Even prison governors have called his plans a "human warehouse" building boom.

The Bill is a cold, calculating measure designed not to combat crime but to win back voters. The feelgood factor has failed to materialise from economic recovery so the Tories are trying to conjure it up with a few stiff sen-

tences and a moral crusade.

The crackdown is also designed to challenge Labour. Jack Straw has refused to say whether Labour will oppose the Bill, claiming it is "softer" as a result of Labour front bench pressure. And Blair managed to embarrass the Tories over anti-stalking measures and the paedophile register.

Opposition to the Bill, so far, has been led by the top judges - including many Tories - who claim that it is a dangerous infringement of the judiciary by the executive.

Where should workers stand on all of this?

Our opposition to the Crime Bill has nothing in common with that of the capitalist judges. While we share their disquiet over the content of the Bill, the argument that it "disrupts the balance" between judiciary and parliament should be rejected. The judges are not elected. They should have no rights to veto parliament.

They are as guilty as the Tories when it comes to maintaining class based justice that systematically discriminates against workers and the oppressed. Look at the meagre fines and sentences that the current "balance" allows them to hand out to City fraudsters and compare that to their readiness to lock up strikers, black youth and anyone who fights back against the police.

Socialist opposition to Howard's US-style justice starts with a straightforward fact - it does not prevent crime. Stephen Shaw of the Prison Reform Trust said, "Howard's plans have been imported from the United States. A tripling of the prison population in California has not made safe the streets of Los Angeles. A similar policy will be equally ineffective on the streets of Liverpool and London". He is right.

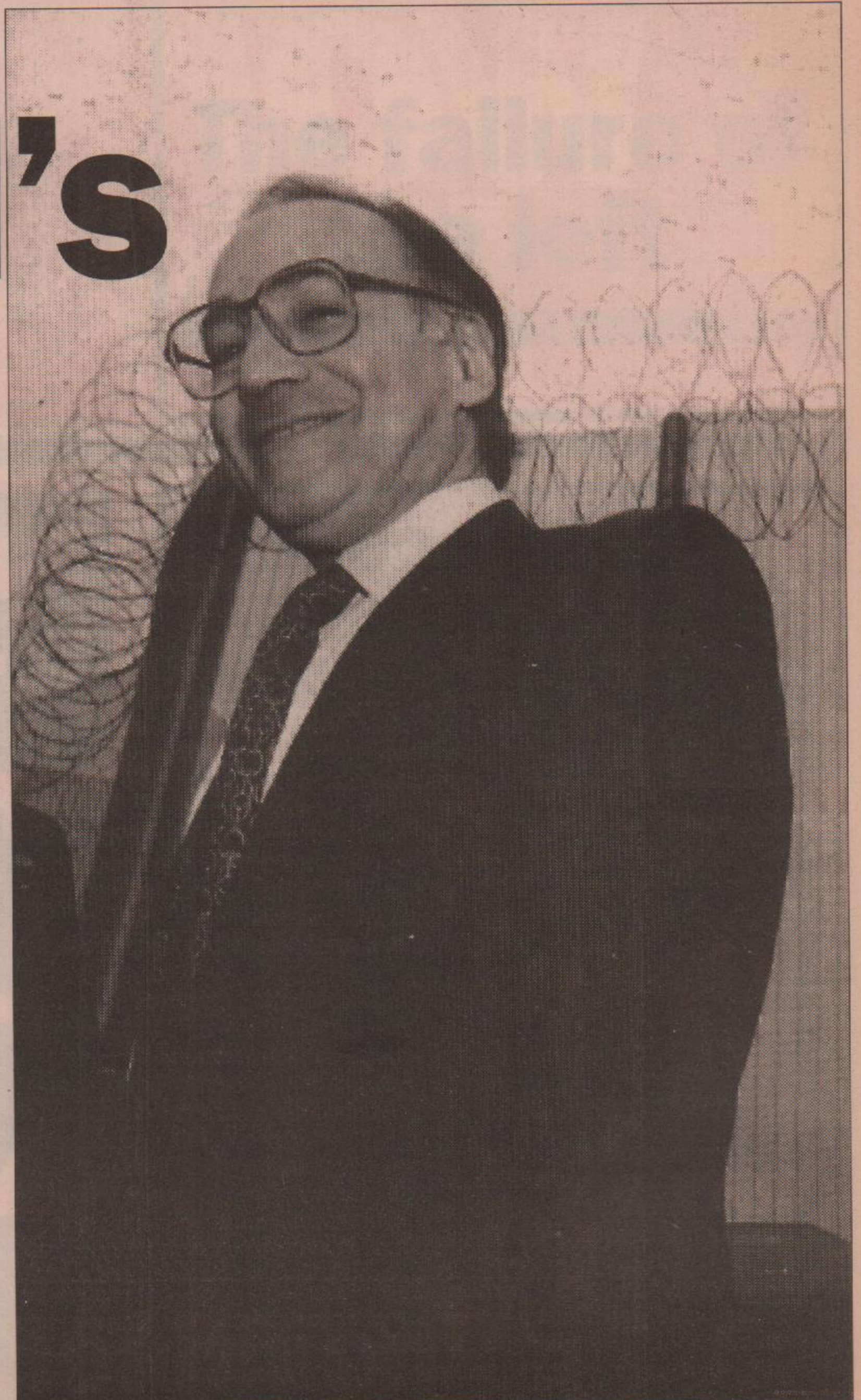
You do not need to be a woolly-minded liberal to see that prison does not work. You only need to look at prison culture - with its drugs, bullying and respect for the hierarchy of organised crime. You only need to look at the rate of re-offending amongst ex-prisoners. Howard's Bill will increase the numbers of prison inmates and remove what little rehabilitation takes place, as prisons are farmed out to the private sector and retribution becomes the watchword for sentencing policy.

Howard's laws will further criminalise the oppressed sections of society. Youth who drink in public will be branded criminals. Youth who have "underage sex" will potentially fall victim to the "anti-paedophile" laws which are supposedly there to protect them. Those who buy, grow or sell cannabis will face years in jail. The tens of thousands who frequent the club scene every weekend will see their clubs closed down.

Howard's laws will do nothing to address the causes of crime. Socialists do not defend stealing, vandalism, rape, robbery and random violence. But we do recognise that the alienated and decaying society that gives rise to crime is the real problem. And we know full well that it is the Tories' policies that have deepened the decay and intensified the alienation.

While these policies continue - the destruction of the welfare state, the destruction of workers' jobs and living standards, the destruction of any sense of economic security for the working class - so crime will continue. All the sentences, knife bans and tough gun laws in the world won't change that one bit.

Much of the moral anguish that has accompanied the crime crackdown focuses on the genuine concerns and fears of ordinary working people. The



The Tories have already built 22 more prisons. Howard plans to spend £3 billion building another 12 more to cope with the results of his Crime Bill.

organised workers' movement was founded by workers who were sick of seeing their fellow human beings criminalised: dragged down and degraded by the system.

Those who went on to found the reformist - pro-capitalist - wing of the workers' movement could only see a morality imposed from above as the answer. Better education, a pledge to abstain from alcohol and the rehabilitation of offenders.

Welcome though many of these mea-

asures were, they did not and could not eradicate crime. Only a fundamental change in the power structure of society could do that: a change which abolished the poverty and alienation that breed crime.

This was the goal of the revolutionary socialists. And in the struggle for that change they also found something else. Mass struggle and solidarity is what changes people for the better, not preaching morality and harsher prison sentences. ■

Dunblane massacre

Gun control not the answer

BY ARTHUR MERTON

THE BRITISH gun lobby is a repulsive coalition of upper and middle class reactionaries. The Dunblane parents, and the Snowdrop campaign that backs their call for a total ban on legally held firearms, are dignified people united by the experience of an appalling tragedy.

Unfortunately the issue of the right to own firearms cannot and should not be settled by our sympathy for the bereaved parents. Their grief is real. Their anger and desire to see all guns banned is understandable. But it does not mean that they are right.

Socialists defend the right of all citizens to own a gun. We believe this is a democratic right. It does not mean that we want to see an increase in everyday violence, nor does it mean we are blind to the danger of guns falling into the hands of lunatics like Thomas Hamilton.

But there is no proof that the general availability of guns to the population - as opposed to the current restricted availability - will increase the murder rate, nor will a total ban prevent repeats of Dunblane.

Criminal violence continues regardless of gun laws. Criminals can get guns

while the majority of people can't. There are an estimated one million illegally held guns in Britain today as opposed to 57,510 people who are licensed to own hand guns.

More importantly, there is no evidence that the existence of these guns has led to more murders. It is no comfort to the parents of Dunblane, but it nevertheless remains true that the murder rate in Britain has remained relatively unchanged over the past 100 years. The increase in the circulation of guns, both legal and illegal, during this century has not led to an equivalent increase in the murder rate.

Prohibition

On the other hand, legitimate self defence from the threat of violence is denied to people by the existing gun laws. It will be further denied by the bans being discussed in parliament.

As for incidents like Dunblane and Hungerford, the tragedies were perpetrated by seriously deranged people. The guns were instruments of their disturbed minds. But a ban on legally held guns will not prevent similar tragedies in the future. The disturbed mind will find illegal guns or other instruments to carry out such actions.

So is there any way to prevent such

mindless tragedies? In the case of Dunblane, many local people who came across Hamilton had recognised that he was a potential danger, especially to children. They lodged complaints but the police did nothing.

These events in Dunblane pose the need for an entirely different system of policing and justice. An organised and armed population could have taken it upon themselves to have disarmed Hamilton. They could have judged as to his fitness to be at large, let alone be in possession of a gun license. A people's court would not have been indifferent to the evidence against him, as the Deputy Chief Constable was, because they would have been face to face with the immediate threat to their community.

At the moment such a system of people's justice is a remote goal. It is not only a democratic demand, but would challenge the class nature of the present justice system which systematically defends the interests of those in power. A people's court would not send tens of thousands of women to jail for being so poor that they can't pay fines or afford TV licences. A people's court would not let the police killers of Brian Douglas walk free. A people's court would find the heads of the privatised

utilities guilty of theft of millions of pounds through their pay packets and share options. This would be part of a revolution in the way society operates.

Democratic right

But recognition that true justice requires a fundamental change in society should not tempt us to reach for an immediate "fix" through calling for a total ban on guns, nor to defend the existing gun laws, as the gun lobby is doing.

The existing laws are a denial of the democratic right of all citizens to own arms. They serve a political purpose. They mean that in a society divided by class, the majority, the working class, are unarmed while the agencies of the ruling class - the police and the armed forces - are armed to the teeth, with a lot more than just hand guns. And the ruling class themselves are fully paid up members of gun clubs. How many working class youth, black people or single mothers are welcome members of these clubs?

The importance that the ruling class attaches to possessing guns underscores the importance of the working class winning the right to own guns. We have to train ourselves in their use in our own

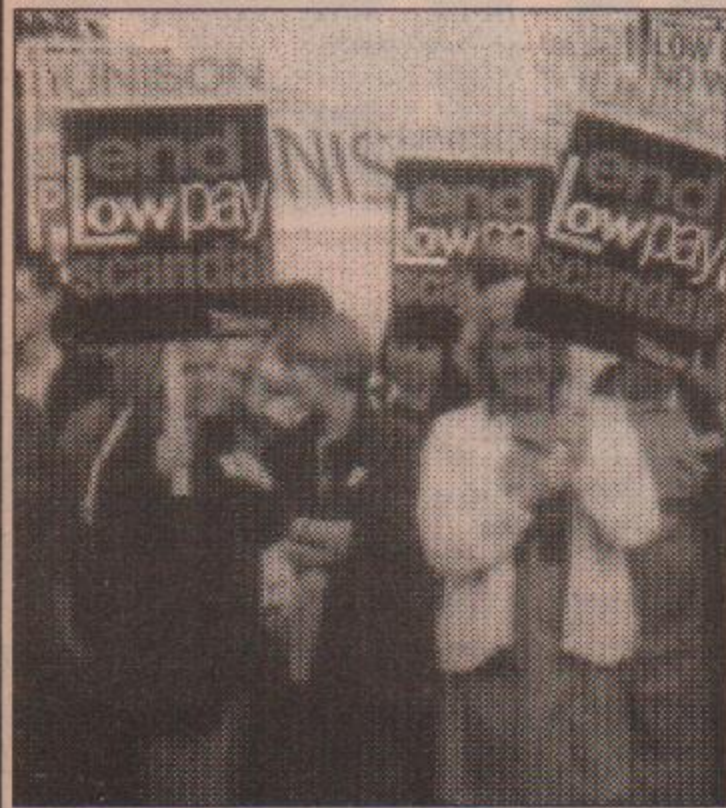
organisations, in the workplaces, the unions and the community organisations.

Socialists recognise that the class struggle is not peaceful. It is not peaceful because the bosses use the state machine to beat us down with violence. They attack our picket lines and demonstrations. They besiege our communities and estates. They harass us on the streets. And while we can and should organise ourselves for the purposes of effective self defence, that organisation will require arms when the bosses choose to use arms against us.

Earlier this century, strikes led to army machine guns on the streets of Tonypandy and gunboats on the river Mersey. More recently, in 1972, the Tories discussed using armed troops against striking miners and did use them in the same year against protesters on the streets of Derry, Northern Ireland, murdering 13 unarmed civilians.

The truth is a society that can effectively police itself and ensure that people's justice works can only come about if workers destroy the existing society of class rule, exploitation and casual brutality. And the refusal by the state to allow workers to own guns is one way of stopping us getting to that goal. ■

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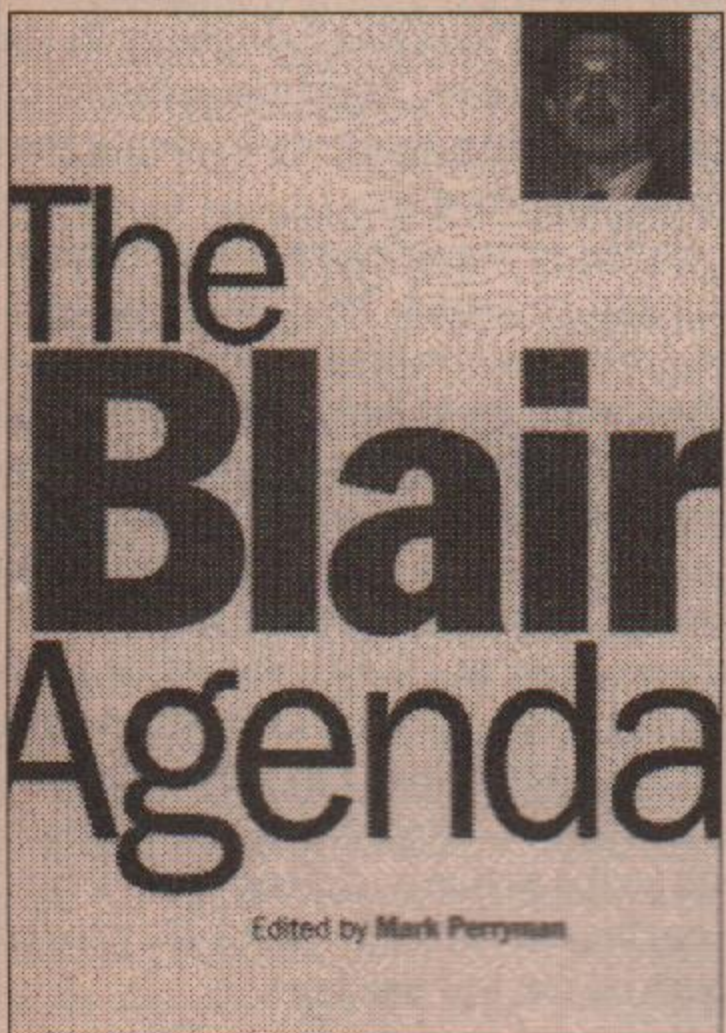
Job seekers' allowance
New government legislation will force the unemployed to take low paid jobs. Jan Lewis looks at how to fight back - page 5



Unions must Converge!
As the European capitalists try to make the workers pay for the convergence of their economies, Workers Power looks at the resistance so far and what is needed to throwback the bosses offensive - pages 8 and 9



Down with the Bosses' dictatorship!
The Argentine government's attacks on the working class have been met with demonstrations and general strikes. Keith Harvey reports on the situation and outlines the possibilities of defeating Menem - page 12



From Bernstein to Blair
Two recent books have set out to examine the rise of Tony Blair, and what this means for the Labour party and socialism in Britain today. Mark Harrison looks at both and puts forward the Marxist alternative - page 7

EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 205 NOVEMBER 1996



Their morals and ours

MORALITY HAS become the big issue in British politics. Labour and the Tories will vie with each other between now and the election as to who is the better guardian of our morals.

It is a sickening spectacle yet one that serves a very clear political purpose.

This latest bout of moral fever has two objectives. The first is to boost popularity in the run up to the general election. The second is to disguise the appalling lack of answers that Labour and the Tories have for the real problems of society.

Youth are blamed for the growth in crime which is actually the direct product of Tory policies: the bleak and run-down estates they are consigned to live on, the systematic destruction of leisure facilities that cash-starved councils have been forced to close and, above all, the prospect of a lifetime of unemployment.

Working class parents are blamed for not imposing enough discipline on their children, for not encouraging family values. But poverty and the ever present threat of redundancy are breaking families up at record rates.

The murder of school headmaster Philip Lawrence by a fifteen year old gang leader, and the massacre of children at Dunblane by a psychopath, have provided the immediate pretext for the crusade for a new morality. The widow of Philip Lawrence, Frances Lawrence, issued a manifesto on "how the moral climate can be changed for the better".

These personal tragedies have been seized on by the politicians. Ann Pearston, of the Dunblane inspired Snowdrop anti-guns campaign, spoke at the Labour Party conference. She had been carefully groomed by spin doctors so as to maximise the effect of her speech.

Frances Lawrence's manifesto has been getting the same treatment. Major backed her call for a nationwide movement "dedicated to healing our fractured society and banishing violence". Blair met her to discuss the proposals and announced that the issues she

raised "should be at the centre of political debate".

With crime rates rising, with appalling incidents like Dunblane prominent in the news, with high profile cases of "unruly" pupils being blamed for wrecking the entire education system, Blair and Major both hope that playing the morality card is a good vote winner.

The cynicism of Blair and Major needs to be exposed. But their moral crusade is more than just cynical electioneering. It is a carefully erected facade behind which to hide their real agenda.

This agenda has very little to do with morality. It is about defending the very foundations of society - capitalism - with policies that will increase poverty and inequality. It is about developing ever more authoritarian and repressive measures to cope with the terrible results of capitalism's inherent poverty and inequality.

In short, both parties seized on Frances Lawrence's manifesto because it gives them a convenient pretext for more authoritarian measures.

Lawrence's manifesto is wrong and reactionary. It calls for a higher status in society for the police. Labour and Major agree. The police are the only section of the public sector workforce who have had their pay raised year on year since 1979, their budgets expanded and their numbers increased.

The reason for this is that the police have been a vital weapon for the Tories in the long war against the working class and the oppressed. They are the shock troops used against picket lines and demonstrations. They are the terrorists of black youth. They are the brutal murderers of black people in custody, like Brian Douglas and Ibrahim Sey. And they are the ones who have proved grossly ineffective in dealing with the ever increasing anti-social crimes suffered by working class people.

Enhancing their status, however, will happen under either a Major or a Blair government because both are committed to further attacks on the wel-

fare state, both are committed to forms of workfare to punish the unemployed, both are committed to defending the bosses' right to manage against striking workers. Both need the police to remain a well armed force to deal with the continuing fracturing of society that these policies will directly cause.

Frances Lawrence calls for a movement to banish violence, and at the same time wants to enhance the status of one of the biggest organised forces for violence in Britain today. It is couched in terms of morality. It will be enacted in terms of brutality against workers and the oppressed.

Frances Lawrence calls on the government to end its neutrality on the question of the family. Once again Blair and Major endorse her manifesto. What this means is simple. Frances Lawrence believes that the right and proper way to bring up kids is within the framework of a lifelong marriage between a man and a woman. She wants to back this up with the teaching of good citizenship in the schools.

Labour immediately claimed that David Blunkett had already formulated proposals along these lines, while Michael Howard announced the creation of a good citizenship award in memory of Philip Lawrence. The Tories have also said that a new course on morality will be introduced into the school curriculum.

This reassertion of "family values" and "good citizenship" is reactionary to the core. The family ideal sanctified by church and approved by the state is narrow, cramping and oppressive. It is based on the legal and social subordination of women and children to the husband.

It is an attack on single mothers, on lesbians and gay men, on people who choose not to marry. It asserts that such people are unfit to have children and are the real cause of mayhem in the schools, of violent gangs and of increasing crime rates.

It is an attack on all of those people whose families have been broken up by the relentless increase in poverty and economic insecurity that the

Tories have presided over during the last 17 years.

The good citizenship courses will teach the working class to obey without question the dictates of their rulers, work for miserable pay without protest and accept unemployment as though it were an act of nature not a result of capitalism.

This is the real moral agenda that Frances Lawrence is calling for and that is being supported by Labour and the Tories. It is an agenda of repression. It is an agenda that ignores the reality of who and what causes the fractures in our society - a vicious economic system based on exploitation and alienation that condemns millions to poverty and unemployment.

The Queen's speech has given us a real flavour of that new morality at work - more prisons, more police powers, more expulsions of children from schools instead of the provision of resources that could deal with the causes of unruly behaviour and help overcome it.

Blair has given us a further taste of what new morality will be in practice - curfews on children, punishment for parents who do not attend his "parenting classes", the replacement of jobs for under 25s with the millennium levy to get them doing voluntary work or face having their benefits cut.

Workers need to reject all of this. Not because we don't want a new morality. We do.

We want one founded on co-operation and solidarity, on justice free from class bias and discrimination, on an end to racism, sexism and the rabid prejudices that fuel violent attacks on people because of the colour of their skin or their sexuality.

But this new morality is not on offer from Labour or the Tories. It never will be. It is a morality that only the working class itself, through the revolutionary destruction of capitalist society, can forge. Until then it is vital that we don't get duped into falling for the latest "moral crusade" behind which lurk new attacks on our rights and our livelihoods. ■

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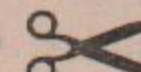
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MAGNET: Locked out strikers call for solidarity

Support mass picket!

Workers at the Magnet factory in Darlington were sacked by management in August after they took strike action over pay. Since then the strikers have regularly picketed the factory and are calling for a boycott of Magnet products. The company has refused to negotiate and is using scabs to keep the factory operating. *Workers Power* spoke to **Ian Crammond**, a member of the Magnet strike committee.

Workers Power (WP): What are the most recent developments in the dispute?

Ian: At the moment the latest developments are that Alan Milburn, the Labour MP for Darlington, has met with the managing director of Beresford (the parent company of Magnet-WP). They had a head to head meeting. Mr. Milburn questioned the method that the company had used to get us out. The company said they would sit out the 90 day period and then they would advertise certain jobs, if they need any. There is no guarantee that they will offer the jobs back.

At the moment there are approximately 147 scabs working. They are mainly unskilled because they have no one inside who is skilled enough to train anyone on the majority of machines that they need. The unskilled workers are only able to make the carcasses of the equipment.

The company are not talking to the unions. There was supposed to be a meeting with T&G General Secretary, Bill Morris but as far as I know that has not gone ahead.

WP: Are the pickets still being organised?

Ian: We have a 24 hour picket and then, generally on Monday mornings, we have a mass picket. We are planning a mass, mass, mass picket on 25 November at 6.30 am. We invite all our friends and supporters throughout the country to come and support us. We have got four gates. I would like 1,000 at each gate.

The other event planned is on Saturday 30 November. We don't have all the details yet but there is going to be a demonstration in Keighley. It is a demonstration organised by the Keighley Magnet plant shop stewards, to show Magnet that they fully support us.



WP: What has been the police response to the pickets?

Ian: The police are very intimidating at the moment, pulling individuals aside and having a word with them. There haven't been many arrests. We're not very militant. One picket was arrested for throwing a cold cup of tea at a van. Another one shouted at a copper for arresting the first one and he got arrested. I was arrested for taking photographs. There was an official photographer in the middle of the road and I was stood on the grass. I asked about him and was told he was an official photographer. So he was allowed to do that but you're not. I said I was a freelance photographer, but he wouldn't have it and they arrested me. They didn't charge me. It was just intimidation. It got me away from the picket site. I got a good photograph from the back of the van though. They didn't take

my camera away.

On the mass picket on 25 November, I would imagine that they will have the helicopters, riot police, horses and they will really try to intimidate us. We don't want any trouble, but if the police intimidate people it is bound to upset the apple cart a bit.

WP: You haven't asked workers at the other Magnet factories to come out in support of your strike. Why not?

Ian: The other Magnet factories do a completely different product to ours. I think it is to our benefit to actually keep them in work. They can do other things while they're in work which we can't do. For instance they can support us financially, which is a very big help to us.

It would be more of a problem for Magnet financially if they were out, there is that way to look at it. But these other places are very small. It is not a

big economical advantage to Magnet really. The only one would be Keighley, but they had a pay dispute the same as ours. They paid them what we asked for—3% across the board for everybody. The day we went out they offered them those terms and they accepted. Quite rightly, that is what we would have done.

We have been trying to get in touch with workers at Well Built in the US but we haven't got the information to contact shop stewards yet. Beresfords are an American company. They bought that company after they bought Magnet.

We have had messages of support from Moscow and Paris. They have retail outlets in those two cities.

WP: What about the boycott of Magnet you have called for?

Ian: The women's support group have been doing some work around the

Magnet retail outlets around Darlington and they have had some success. The women have been leafleting and stopping people going in. It has upset the managers very much in all three outlets which they've targeted. They've come out screaming blue murder; the police have been called. They are not selling anything at all. I was told that they sold three kitchens a fortnight ago and the director came up with a bottle of wine for them to celebrate!

WP: Have you had much support from the officials of your unions?

Ian: UCATT say they have no money. GMB are threatening to pull the plug after 13 weeks. They are hoping their members will find jobs and walk away from the strike. The local T&G and UCATT officials have done a lot of work for the strike, but nationally not much has been done. We sent letters to the national officers of all four unions begging them to get the information out to their members.

Obviously we have had support from ordinary union members on the picket lines. Unison members have been tremendous supporters of the Magnet strike from day one. ISTC, the steel workers, have been a tremendous boost to our morale at times. The CWU has been fantastic. The FBU have come on the picket line quite a few times, they've supported us both financially and physically.

WP: What should other trade unionists do to support you?

Obviously come to the mass picket in November. Send us messages of support and donations. If you want a striker to come to speak to you, we'll gladly do so, we'll go anywhere in this country—or abroad.■

Send messages of support and cheques made payable to Magnet Families' Hardship Fund
c/o Ian Crammond
109 Jedburgh Drive
Darlington
DL3 9UP ● For a speaker, contact Ian on 01325 282389

Defend the right to strike

LAST MONTH, Chancellor Clarke announced that public sector workers would face a pay freeze for the fourth year running. At the Tory Party conference, Trade and Industry Minister Ian Lang told us that unions in "essential public services" should be subjected to new restrictions on the right to strike.

Workers in the public sector are being hit on two fronts. Their pay is being cut in real terms and they are being told that they cannot have the right to take effective action against this. In particular, workers in the post and

on the railways are being targeted because their summer action caused so much "disruption" to consumers.

TUC leader, John Monks was firm - in words at least - in his response to the latest Tory threats to the right to strike. He denounced them as a "pre-election gimmick" and warned that they would be "impracticable and unworkable."

Will he be equally firm in his opposition to the party that is likely to be the next government and is highly likely to try to impose new restrictions on the right to strike in the public sector -

the Labour Party?

At the TUC, David Blunkett, Labour's education and employment spokesperson, said he wanted to oblige unions to re-ballot their members if management made them a "significant new offer" and hinted that binding arbitration would be imposed in disputes involving workers in the public sector engaged in essential services.

This actually goes further than Lang's proposal to remove immunities from public sector unions and is a real threat to the right to strike. Bind-

ing arbitration means that you cannot strike once ACAS, the arbitration service, has decided on a settlement.

Trade unions exist to defend their members' interests. When management try to ride roughshod over those interests the principal weapon that unions have to stop them is strike action. Of course such action effects "consumers". It would not be very effective if it didn't. And this is as true for public as for private sector workers.

But if workers are deprived of this right it can only mean one thing - the bosses will always be able to get their

way and workers won't be able to do a thing to stop them. The idea that ACAS will be a neutral arbiter is laughable. It is an appointed state agency that consistently "resolves" disputes in the bosses' interests. Binding arbitration means binding workers to deals that benefit their bosses.

Public sector workers need to defend the right to strike. Without this right, the London Underground workers would never have been able to force the bosses to honour a previous promise to cut the working week and postal workers would have had teamworking imposed on them. Workers in the NHS, such as those at UCLH, would be powerless in the face of management's attempt to cut their pay once again.

In each of these cases, the workers took strike action to defend themselves. In each case the right to strike proved essential for the workers.

It is vital to put paid to Blunkett's threat. The best way to do that is not by reliance on the rhetoric of John Monks but by fighting now in the public sector unions.

We must organise around the demand that Labour pledges not to remove the right to strike in the public sector and, further, that it repeals all the Tory anti-union laws - laws which have already severely restricted the right of all workers to take effective strike action.■

Students fight against racism

THE STUDENT Assembly Against Racism meets in London this month. The Assembly will provide an important forum for students to explore the issues of racism in Britain and internationally.

The Student Assembly, set up by the National Assembly Against Racism, aims to ensure that students play their full role in the anti-racist movement. The basis of this involvement is the ten point anti-racist charter of the parent body, the National

Assembly. Students and youth will have to wait until late next year before they can democratically discuss the Charter itself.

The Charter, while correctly identifying the key issues of racism - the Asylum and Immigration Act, the rise of the far right, police attacks, discrimination in employment and education - fails to provide an adequate basis from which to fight racism. For example the Charter contains the idea that fascism can be defeated by "demo-

cratic means". The fascists' use of physical intimidation and street gangs have made a mockery of this assumption.

In dealing with immigration controls it "opposes the introduction of any new legislation", and seeks to "campaign against patently unjust aspects of asylum and immigration legislation and to overturn legislation that perpetrates injustice against black communities". The question is, are there any immigration controls that do not penalise and criminalise British

black communities?

We agree that students should play a full role in the fight against racism. Students should attend the weekend event. They should also demand that the Student Assembly call an open and democratic conference to debate these fundamental questions.■

The Student Assembly Against Racism 23-24 November
Queen Mary and Westfield
College Student Union
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JOB SEEKERS' ALLOWANCE

Stop the attack on benefits

THE JOB Seekers Allowance (JSA) is upon us. It is the most thoroughgoing change to the state benefit system for over forty years. It will cost over £320 million to introduce, and is intended to save the treasury £240 million a year. This is money that we have paid in our taxes over the years, and now the Tories are clawing it back to fund tax cuts for the rich.

The government intends a quarter of a million claimants to lose all or some of their benefits. A further quarter of a million people on invalidity benefit will be forced onto the JSA through stringent medical tests. They may then fall into the "incapacity gap" because they will fail the JSA's strict "availability for work" tests.

The JSA is not only an attack on the unemployed. It is a serious threat to all workers. It will be used to force people into low paid jobs, giving the green light to bosses to force down wages even further. Already, South Wales is attracting inward investment because the average wage is about £9,000, whereas in South Korea, for example, it is nearer £11,000.

It has been argued that because the "stricter benefit regime" is already in place, the JSA will make little difference. This is simply not true. The government is determined to see the numbers on unemployment benefit reduced in time for the election. The Labour Party are quite happy to let the Tories do this now so they won't have to do it themselves if they are returned to power. In fact it will provide them with a basis for further attacks!

Many Employment Service (ES) offices are not prepared for the massive workload that the introduction and implementation of the JSA is bringing. There are even job slips appearing for casual workers to implement the JSA! Some offices have no trained staff, have several weeks back-log of work and have not yet started to carry out the new procedures. But none of this means that the JSA will not bite.

The JSA is one of the biggest attacks on the working class since the Poll Tax. Yet it has not generated the same widespread anger. By the time the Poll Tax was introduced, there was already widespread organised resistance in working class communities. This has not happened with the JSA because of the lack of organisation among the unemployed. Any effective fight against the JSA must address this problem.

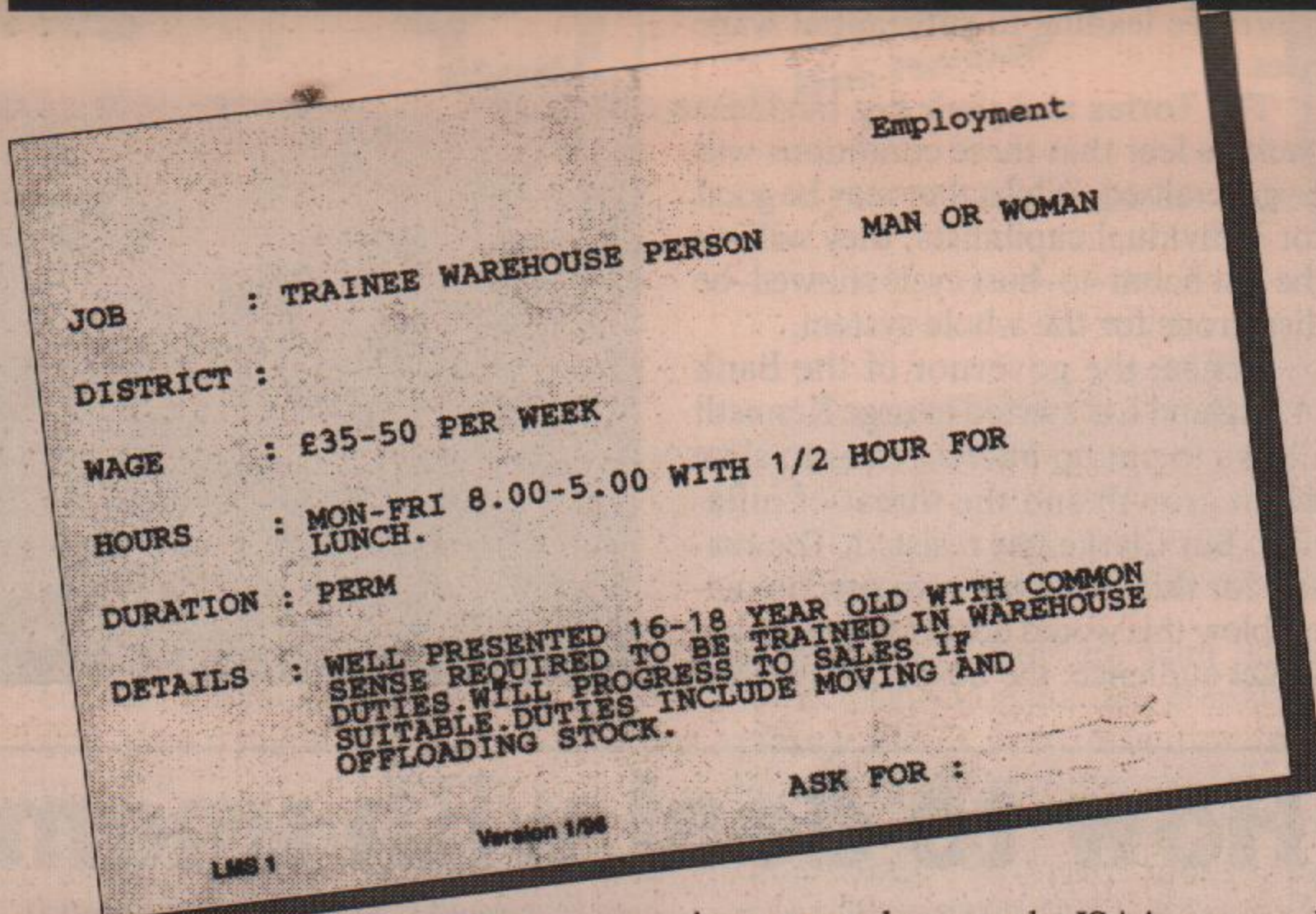
How can we organise against the JSA? Not by waiting for Blair and the Labour Party. They have no intention of restoring benefits despite suggestions that they may review the JSA. Nor by taking, and even winning, a few cases through the appeals procedure. Battles around legal niceties take years and are rarely generalised to benefit everyone.

The only people who can effectively demolish the JSA are the working class. What is necessary at a local level is an organisation which can bring together those on benefits, those in low paid jobs and those in unionised workplaces—particularly those in the CPSA in the Benefits Agency where they have already taken national strike action against the potential impact of the new measures.

Local groups need to organise activities which raise awareness and build the confidence of those who feel isolated and helpless. Trade unionists must support unemployed workers by denying their own bosses the chance to slash wages and conditions. They must recruit all workers to the appropriate union, regardless of whether they are casuals, part-time workers, shift work-



Low paid workers at Hillingdon Hospital were sacked when they refused to accept a pay cut. Unless we fight the JSA, employers will get away with offering poverty wages. This job was advertised last month—£35 for a forty two and a half hour week.



BY JAN LEWIS

ers or youth and they must stop employers from working with any Training For Work or "Workfare" scheme which does not pay the recognised trade union rate for the job.

In this way they will be protecting themselves and the unemployed. The interests of both employed and unemployed are fundamentally the same—we want real jobs, real job security, and real wages—nothing less than £6 per hour.

For those in work the alternative would be to see wages undercut and jobs lost. For the unemployed, the only other option is to become "criminals" by trying to survive on "fiddle jobs" with low pay, appalling health and safety conditions, no security and the permanent fear of prosecution. Unscrupulous employers would be the only ones to benefit.

The TUC should be supporting the unemployed by setting up and funding unemployed workers' unions and centres across the country. These must be autonomous bodies, not under threat of closure if their campaigning becomes too effective for the liking of the TUC bureaucrats.

Local unemployed groups and advice centres across the country have attempted to organise but in many instances these have had little

impact—not because the JSA is not a real threat, but because it is difficult to really tackle it until it bites. Now that it is in place, groups should set up hot-lines to give information to individuals who are affected, to draw them into activities and to mobilise against employers who cynically use the JSA to drive down wages and attack their workforce.

Stunts, such as occupations of Benefit Offices, are an excellent way of getting publicity and so drawing others into the campaign but should be carried out with the support of the trade unions involved.

The idea of the "three strikes" where unemployed people target individual Benefit Agency workers for attack is not the way forward, it divides the working class as a whole and identifies the cause of the problem as individual workers, not the government.

If it is possible to identify employers who are using the JSA to attack their workers, or to take on cheap labour, then we need to take a lesson from the 1930s. Then, unemployed workers leafleted and occupied the factories, recruited the workforce to the unions and organised effective strike action to repel the attacks.

Successful actions like these increase confidence and can snowball into a real fightback against the bosses. ■



Labour Council takes on the unions —a taste of things to come?

by Alison Higgins-Steward and
Convenor, Derbyshire Social Services
APT&C Branch

Derbyshire County Council's Labour leaders are busy preparing for a Blair government—by taking on the unions. They have launched a series of attacks—starting with cuts in the fire service this summer, and more recently with attempts to sack the branch secretary of one of the county's Unison branches.

He was targeted for his involvement in unofficial action. Martin Doughty, one of the Labour leaders of the council, reportedly said this was so that, "there would no problems with the unions when Labour gets in".

As well as the firefighters' dispute, the last few months have seen other long running struggles come to the surface in Derbyshire. Local government reorganisation prompted the County Council to attack the twenty year old protection of earnings agreement (which keeps workers' wages at the same level if they are redeployed). A four year struggle by Domiciliary Service Organisers (DSOs—who organise home helps) to reduce their workload resulted in a successful ballot for a work to rule in August.

In an attempt to break the DSO dispute, Derbyshire County Council announced they would dock their pay by 20%—despite the fact that the DSOs were still working a 37 hour week! On 9 October, the resulting anger led to a two hour walkout of 100 staff from Chesterfield Area Social Services Office in support of the DSOs. Pete Moore, the branch secretary of Derbyshire Social Services APT&C which represents many DSOs, went along to support his members, although he had not organised the walkout.

The Unison regional officer was handing out official repudiation letters, but workers rightly ignored them and left to hold a meeting at the nearby Labour Club where Pete Moore spoke in their support.

Two days later Pete was suspended by the Council for "gross misconduct". He was charged with involvement in unofficial action and with calling for similar action in other areas. This amounted to a "breakdown of trust and confidence" between him and the authority.

This was clearly an outrageous attack on the union and our right to fight the attacks. Pete has five days facility time off from his job as a residential social worker in order to carry out his branch secretary duties. So they were "suspending" him from a job he was not doing!

Other union activists, even some managers, also walked out at Chesterfield, but only Pete was targeted for disciplining—showing that he has been a thorn in the side of management since his election in January on a militant anti-cuts platform.

Management's aim was not only

to victimise Pete but also to divert attention from the DSO dispute and the simmering fight over protection of earnings. However, the anger they have provoked has made sure that they have failed to achieve any of these things.

A "mob of a hundred" activists (as one of the directors put it) descended on Matlock to support Pete Moore during three disciplinary hearings. After the first hearing, the County hired a private security firm to try to stop us getting near the hearing and disrupting the building—a pathetic attempt at a strong arm tactic since activists soon found their way up the back stairs.

Council sub-committee meetings were disrupted by angry militants and the whole issue was regularly reported in the local media. Unison branches throughout the East Midlands and around the country sent letters of support and protest letters and petitions to the County. Branches of the NUJ, NUT and FBU have also given support.

Immediately after the suspension, councillor Dave Allen, chair of the Social Services Committee, was openly talking in terms of "when we sack Pete". Workers Power and other activists successfully argued for a mass walkout if they did sack him and management had to back down. Instead they issued him with a final written warning.

Derbyshire County Council were out to sack Pete Moore but they couldn't. Their attempt to weaken and intimidate the union has backfired, the lobbies of County Offices have enabled us to start to pull together a network of activists that could be the basis for building a rank and file movement when the county's 16 Unison branches merge in January.

The council wanted to undermine the DSO dispute—but the DSOs were a strong force in supporting Pete and are now more likely to vote yes in their current ballot for strike action against the threatened 20% wage cut. The attack on Pete has also helped to pull branches together into a common position of calling for a ballot for strike action if the council goes ahead with attempts to force new contracts onto workers in order to get rid of permanent protection of earnings.

Derbyshire County Council are trying to prepare for Labour by intimidating the workforce into submission. They want to defeat us now so that when a Blair government attacks the public sector we will be less able to rock the boat and fightback against Labour.

Workers in Derbyshire are starting to realise that their problems won't disappear with the Tories. In fact, the big fights are still to come—under Labour. ■

Write to BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tory economic miracle? Dream on, Ken Clarke

UNEMPLOYMENT IS down, inflation is low, shares are soaring and so is the value of the pound. We are in the midst of an economic recovery that the Tories hope will win them the election. What does it tell us about the state of British capitalism?

Between 1983 and 1989 Britain boomed. But the boom was unhealthy; investment and industrial output did not grow that fast; by the end of the "boom" both were still below 1979 pre-recession levels. Credit and consumer demand expanded rapidly on the back of a housing recovery. As the Tories frantically struggled to contain inflation and, at the same time, remain inside the European Monetary System, they steered the economy into a four year recession.

Both the last boom, the recession and the recovery since 1993 reveal the underlying sickness of British capitalism. In the early 1980s Thatcher was determined to destroy union organisation and thereby hold down wages, increase productivity and boost profits. The result was the destruction of one fifth of manufacturing capacity and the loss of 45% of industrial jobs in the four years from 1979-83.

This left the British economy susceptible to inflation because Britain's "downsized" industries always operate at or near full capacity very early in a recovery phase. In this situation the bosses could only expand capacity through investment to meet demand. But the bosses have no confidence in the durability or strength of any economic upturn which would warrant committing themselves to huge investments. So they take the easy way out—they choose to profit from the extra demand through higher prices rather than expanding capacity. And higher prices boost inflation.

Deregulation and competition have reduced the scope for firms to sustain such surplus profits (except in the ex-public utilities) for any length of time, but if the recovery lasts prices will start to rise.

Since Britain was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in September 1992 the Tories have steered the UK along a course of slow, weak recovery. The overriding objective has not been to create jobs or cut taxes. It has been to keep inflation low, even at the cost of weakening the recovery.

Any strong recovery in domestic demand, as Workers Power predicted in 1994, would lead to inflation, followed by interest rate rises, and finally a relapse back towards recession. And that is what is looming on the horizon. At present Britain is "on target"

The Tories are hanging on for grim death, hoping that economic recovery will win them the election. They talk up the "dream conditions" of the British economy. **Colin Lloyd** says "dream on".



for 2.5% growth in 1996 provided there is a spurt towards Xmas. This may be above the near stagnant 1990-1995 average of less than 1.5% per annum for Europe as a whole but it is low by most post-war standards, and way below the level needed to absorb those leaving school and college into the labour force.

Yet despite the very meagre character of the current economic recovery all the signs are that it has given a boost to inflation. The underlying rate of inflation in Britain rose to 2.9% last month. Within a year it will breach the Tory target limit of 4%.

At the same time, despite the existence of over 2 million unemployed, a skills shortage has opened up in northern manufacturing industries. And wages in the manufacturing sector are reported to be rising at 4.5% on the back of bonus schemes and overtime which supplement the basic rate. These facts point not to the generosity of the employers but to another of British capitalism's strategic weaknesses: Britain is a low skill economy. Because Thatcher's strategy was to replace apprenticeships with slave labour YTS schemes, to "force the unemployed to price themselves into a job", the kind of work which has flourished is low skilled, low wage, part time manual work.

Consequently the Tories totally ignored the need to train skilled workers. Instead of soaking up mass unemployment, the capitalist system in its "recovery" phase only soaks up more and more overtime from a few skilled workers.

Measures such as the abolition of the Wages Council in 1993, the break up of national collective bargaining and a public sector pay policy of 0%, have all helped to decrease the value of real take home pay for most workers. But when demand increases for high skilled

labour, so do wages—even if only for a minority of the working class. And this adds to inflationary pressure as industry passes these costs on in recovery conditions.

The construction industry is a good example of the British business cycle. As late as this summer it was bumping along the bottom of a recession. Its profit margins are, on average, 1%. Over the last five years half a million construction jobs have been lost: skills and expertise destroyed for ever. But now experts are predicting that, if the recovery continues, its prices will rise by up to 6.5% next year—way ahead of inflation. Economic consultants EC Harris say:

"The warning signs are already there, with potential for massive skills shortages leading to substantial wage rises."

The Tories and their big business backers fear that these conditions will be generalised. Whilst they may be good for individual capitalists, they will—as the last boom-to-bust cycle showed—be disastrous for the whole system.

Hence, the governor of the Bank of England has started to urge Kenneth Clarke to put up interest rates to slow down growth and the threat of inflation. But Clarke has resisted. The reason for this is the massive psychological blow this would deliver to the Tories' target audience: the bosses, the skilled

workers and the middle classes. After a long five year hangover from the housing market crash of the late 1980s hundreds of thousands of families have come back into the housing market during the last six months tempted by rock bottom house prices and low mortgage rates.

They all know that the only way for mortgage repayments to go is up. An interest rate rise now will signal the start of that process, possibly knocking the momentum out of the recovery. Rate rises would almost definitely precipitate a stock market slide as investors rush to take advantage of higher interest rates for lending, dumping their over-priced shares in the process.

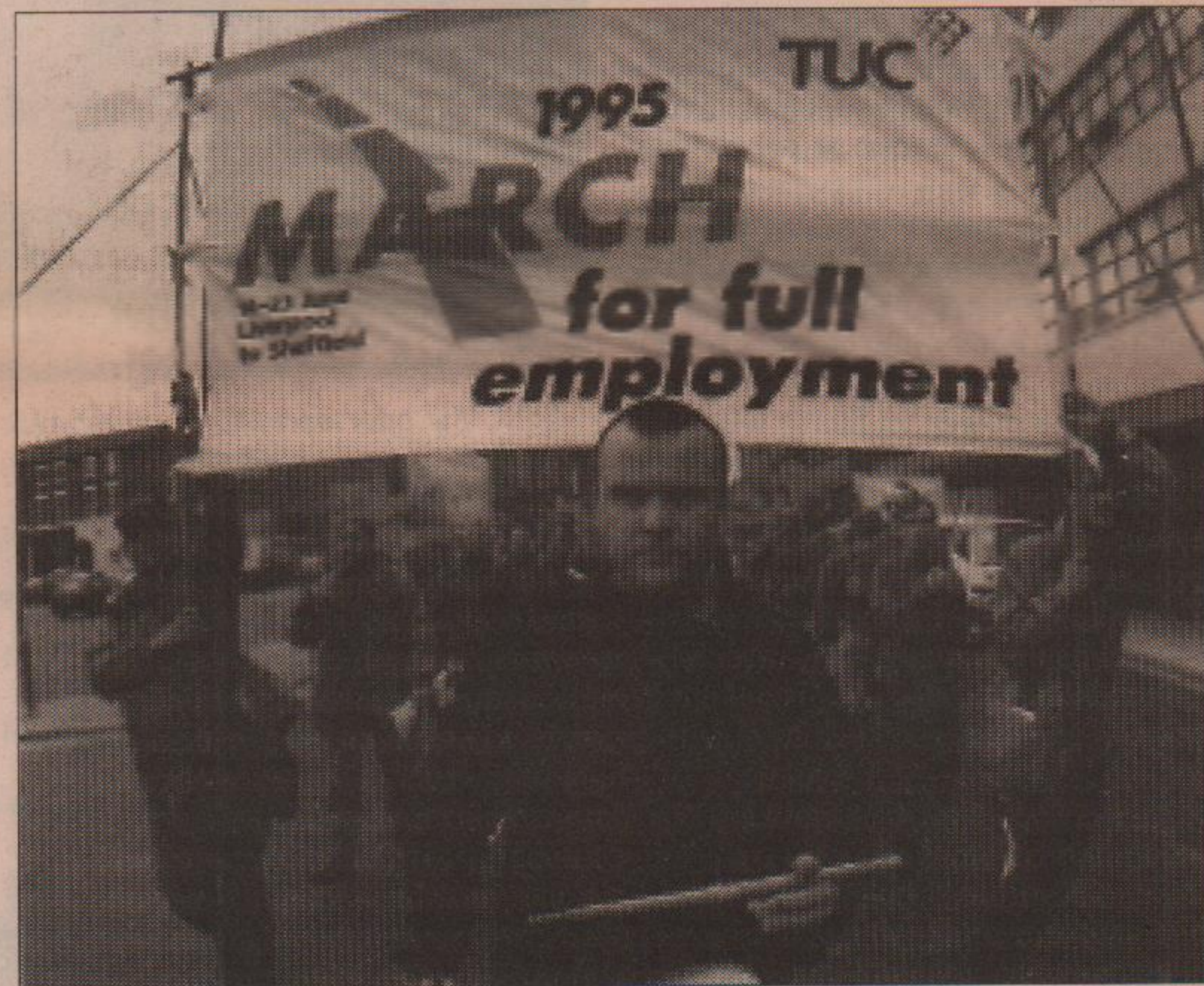
Clarke's strategy seems to be to avoid giving away too much in tax cuts in the November budget because these take time to work through and the Tories only have until 1 May 1997. Instead he will announce small tax cuts and a relatively "generous" spending round. This heads off public sector pay

disputes and reopens closed hospital beds. Next, fiddle the government debt projections and leave Gordon Brown to sort out the resulting mess. Alternatively, in the best case scenario for the Tories, scrape home to victory and then whack up taxes after the election to cover the shortfall.

The weak, inflationary character of Britain's recovery shows that, despite their constant pronouncements about "dream conditions", the Tories have done nothing to resolve the strategic problems facing British capitalism. If it were only a matter of economic management, Clarke and Eddie George would have already raised interest rates, signalling that the recovery was past its high point.

Millions of people's lives were blighted by the last recession. For those in work the temptation will be to breathe a sigh of relief as rising demand eases the fear of redundancy and offers the opportunity for a few more hours overtime. It is fool's gold.

The Tory strategy is to buy off those in work while destroying the very services we all rely on and condemning the under 24s and over 55s of all strata of the working class to unemployment and poverty. ■



How to deal with unemployment

That the capitalists need to slow down growth while 2 million are unemployed is testimony to the sickness of the system. This figure confirms the historic trend under capitalism towards ever higher levels of structural unemployment at the end of each recovery. Moreover, this hard core of unemployed sees its benefits savaged so that it snaps desperately at the heels of the low paid, unskilled workforce, helping depress their inadequate wages.

Faced with this miserable scenario we need a workers' answer to the economic misery capitalism inflicts on us. First and foremost we need an end to mass unemployment.

Impossible? Under capitalism, yes! Although 7-8% growth a year and proper training would absorb the unemployed in UK Plc, this is impossible. But we demand that capitalism be forced to pay for the crisis it creates. With one tenth of the population unemployed and one fifth working significant amounts of overtime the answer is simple. Cut the working week to 32 hours, with no loss of pay and place a statutory ban on non-essential overtime.

At the same time we need to solve the problem of poverty, starting with a statutory minimum wage of £6

an hour.

Wouldn't forcing capitalists to employ more workers and pay living wages tempt the bosses to take their businesses elsewhere? Yes. And that is why every factory closure or threat of redundancy has to be met with nationalisation.

Nationalisation has become a dirty word—in part because the reformist bureaucrats of the unions and the Labour Party refuse to defend it anymore. But nationalisation holds the key to many of the problems outlined above.

The public utilities are raking in profits which even some capitalists describe as obscene. Nationalise them and the wealth they produce could be distributed in the form of free or cheap access to gas, electricity, water and telecommunications. That would immediately alleviate the deepest poverty faced by many low paid and unemployed workers.

Nationalisation, under workers' democratic control, of the main business corporations, banks and pension funds would allow the main economic decisions to be taken in tandem, co-ordinated so that a proper plan could be drawn up to meet the needs of the mass of working people. Long term skills training, planned growth in incomes, regular and ongoing educa-

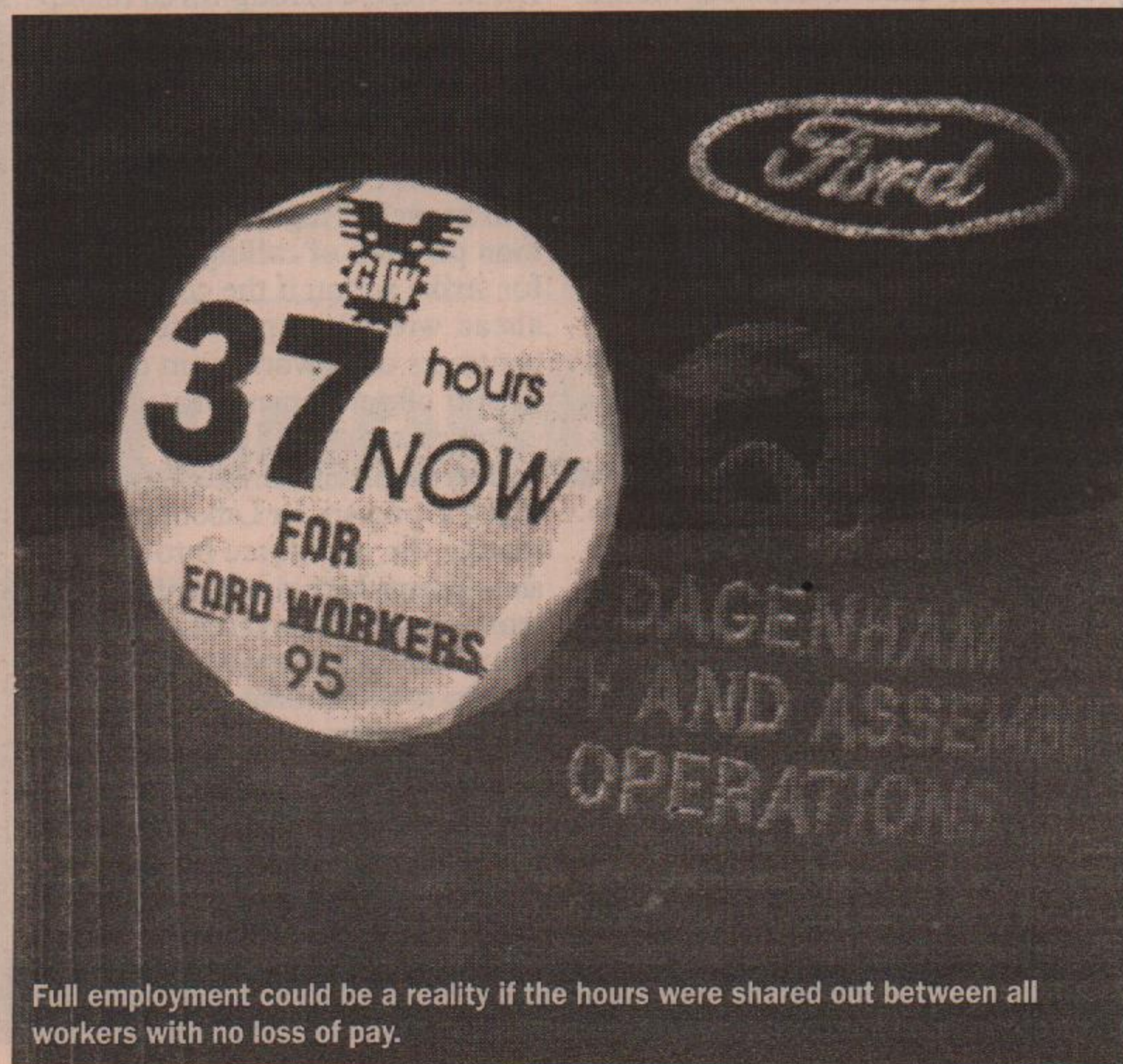
tion and time away from work—all these are possible only on one condition: that workplace democracy and direct economic co-operation between those who actually produce the goods and services replaces egotistical competition between vicious cost-cutting private firms as the main dynamo of economic life.

Such planning and workers' control is vigorously resisted by capitalists. But just look at what their system offers.

We need an integrated transport plan. But we have a fragmented and privatised transport system.

We need a revitalised health and education system. Yet the control over the future of these systems has essentially been handed over to Britain's cack-handed building contractors in the "Private Finance Initiative"—whereby schools and hospitals will be built and operated by the construction firms at massive future cost to tax-payers.

We could put an end to this stupidity by a government funded crash programme of renewal of the transport, health and education systems. To do that, we would have to take the whole lot out of the hands of the private capitalists and put them in the hands of the state and the working class.



Full employment could be a reality if the hours were shared out between all workers with no loss of pay.

BOOKS ON BLAIR: Post Marxist Pretensions

From Bernstein to Blair

NEW LABOUR, new books about Labour. *The Blair Agenda* is a collection of essays from the *Signs of the Times* group. This post modernist current is run by figures associated with the now defunct *Marxism Today* magazine. They are committed to a systematic attack on Marxism, replacing it with an undefined body of ideas aimed at "the remaking of the political".

These ex-Stalinists apparently chew over their thoughts "amidst the splendid surroundings of *Anna's Place*, London's premier Swedish restaurant". It is clear that they have not explored them much beyond the dinner table; the product is a mass of confusion rather than any insight or clarity. No great intellectual insights here, no critical thought and analysis, no well researched facts; only speculative musings shaped by the powerful, but in historic terms, transient, influence of two personalities - Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

Awe

The contributors are, in most cases, in total awe of Thatcher, hoping that Blair will be a similar figure, but with a liberal rather than neo-liberal agenda. They are second rate intellectuals in search of a new vision. Blair has provided it. He is a product of Thatcher, but offers the chance of transcending her penchant for authoritarianism and her uncaring attitude towards "the less fortunate", in the words of one of the authors.

Talk of "the less fortunate" is a deliberate substitute for a class label for the overwhelming majority of the society - the working class. It is a pointer to the unifying theme of the book: class, class struggle, workers, bosses, Marxism and socialism are all things of the past, no longer applicable in understanding the complex reality of today's fractured post-modern world. The individual is everything. The collective is a museum piece.

Mark Perryman sets out this theme in his introduction. He writes about "the collapse of Marxism" and berates those "who remain locked into an ideological time-warp: they have their holy grail of class struggle and guiding light, party, and nothing is going to shift them".

Nina Fishman repeats this idea, asserting that "trade unions and socialism are as inextricably part of the past as Alec Douglas Home and grouse moors". Wendy Wheeler tells us that socialists are "now conservatives who seek to preserve a tradition of labour and class division which has more or less passed".

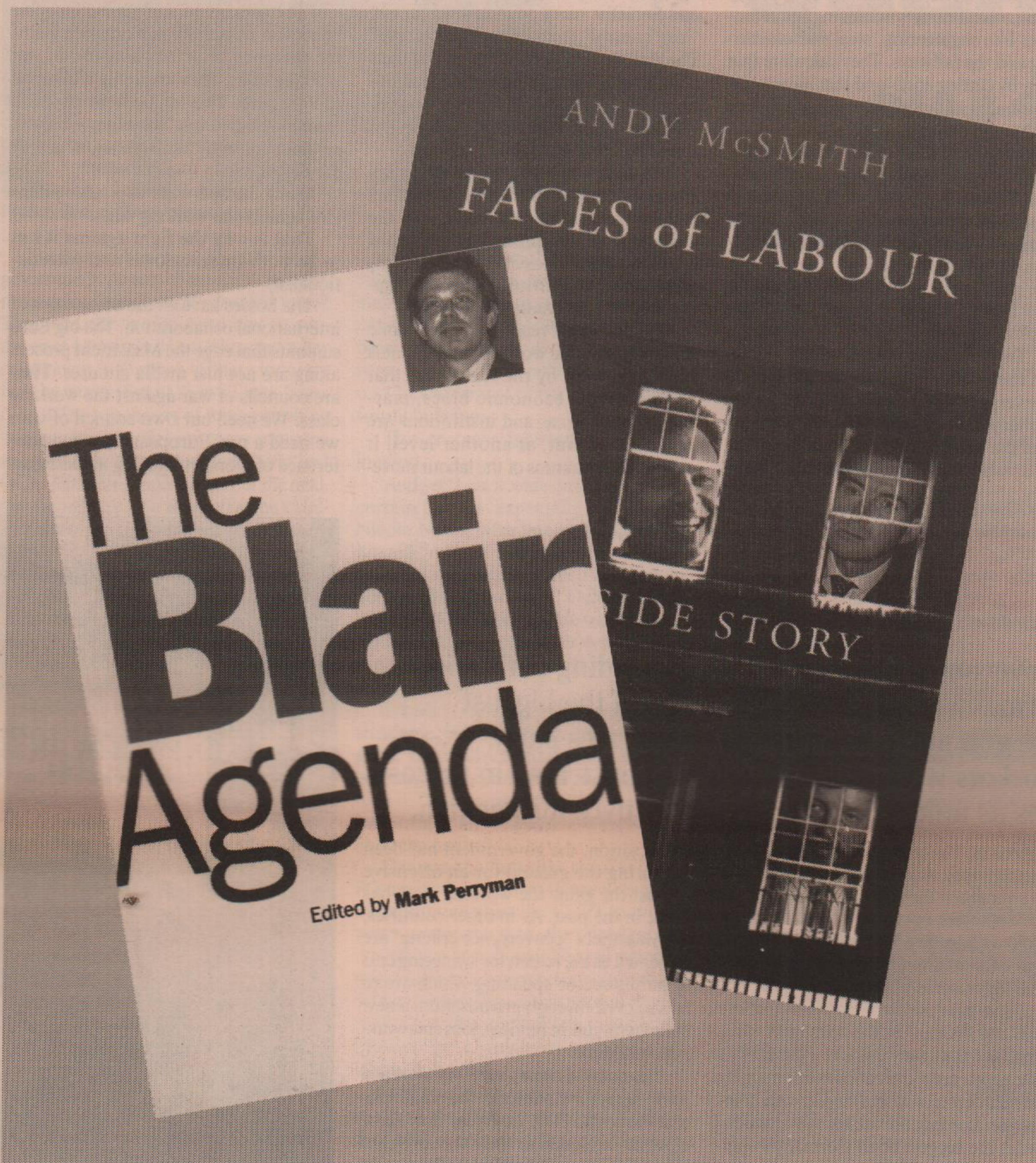
Class

This idea is widespread, informing much of contemporary British politics. Class is not primary for road protesters who see cars as mankind's greatest enemy, for Scottish nationalists who see England as the cause of their problems, for trade union leaders, who see the future in terms of profit sharing not wage bargaining. And so too for Tony Blair, who believes that Labour should cease to be any sort of class based party and should become one whose principal purpose is to promote and protect individualism against "vested interests".

The problem with the book is that it cannot prove the validity of any one of its ideas. It simply asserts that class struggle is a thing of the past and that Marxism has collapsed. When Nina Fishman tells us that trade unions and grouse moors belong to a bygone age she fails to add that both still exist. The former have almost seven million members, and over the summer used the no doubt "extinct" weapon of the strike to bring London to a standstill and paralyse postal communication across the country.

So has the class struggle died a death? If you believe that the two icons of

Mark Harrison reviews *The Blair Agenda*, edited by Mark Perryman, Lawrence and Wishart, £12.99 and *Faces of Labour*, by Andy McSmith, Verso, £16



this book, Thatcher and Blair, are products of a political immaculate conception, then it might appear so. But these political leaders are themselves products of the class struggle.

Andrew Gamble, so filled with admiration for Thatcher that he should have joined her party, argues:

"Thatcherism has had a big impact on the Labour Party. Indeed the transformation of the Labour Party is sometimes regarded as Thatcherism's greatest achievement... certainly the thoroughness with which the party has reformed both its thinking and its organisation is a tribute to the impact Thatcherism has had on it."

Battles

So what was Thatcherism? At heart it was nothing else but a policy of class struggle - the destruction of the power of organised workers, the unions. The execution of that policy was by the methods of class struggle - battles in the workplace and on the streets with steel workers, miners, printers, Labour councils and poll tax protesters. The triumph of Thatcher in those battles was a triumph for one side in the class struggle - the bosses. The impact of that triumph was felt inside the organised working class. It resulted in demoralisation as defeat followed defeat.

The consequence of this was that the struggle by the Bennites to transform the Labour Party into a more accountable and left wing reformist party was blocked and the left were thrown on the defensive. Successive attacks by the right created a mood of desperation that Blair has capitalised

on. Millions of workers want Labour to win an election and are prepared to tolerate Blair's transformation of the party in order to get this result.

In short, the transformation of Labour under Blair - a transformation that has so far stopped short of destroying the organised link with the unions - is a product of the class struggle.

Thatcher herself was a product of the same thing. She represented a section of the bosses and fought on their behalf. That her electoral base included some workers does not alter this fact. And her fall was a result of the class struggle - a mighty battle over the poll tax and a division in the British ruling class over the best way to pursue the class struggle in Europe.

Neither Blair nor Thatcher exist by virtue of their ideas alone. They exist and either prosper or falter according to how relevant their ideas are in the class struggle. Blair now promises to meet the needs of whole sections of the British ruling class while at the same time promising a change for the better, however limited, to millions of workers.

This means that he will win a general election. But it also means that a Labour government will rapidly be buffeted by class struggle as the expectations of workers and the needs of bosses clash and as Blair opts to side with the bosses.

Blair himself has made this abundantly clear in his statements on the economy, in his refusal to make commitments to the working class and in his manifesto draft.

Rejecting Marxism and the class struggle

has left these post-Marxists looking for new intellectual inspiration beyond the Sunday-school socialism of Blair. So who do they turn to? None other than that up-to-the-minute post-Marxist, Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932): not so much post- as pre-modernism?

Bernstein broke with Marxism in the 1890s and laid the basis for a coherent reformism, in many aspects akin to "old Labour". He rejected a perspective of revolution and argued for peaceful parliamentary reform as a means of ameliorating the worst aspects of capitalism and as an alternative to destroying it. Nina Fishman tells us that "reading his [Bernstein's] practical suggestions, it is striking how applicable they still are to our current perspectives".

After all the guff about rejecting the past, about the end of Marxism and the class struggle, the only thing that *The Blair Agenda* can come up with as advice to Blair is to return to the good old fashioned reformism of Bernstein.

Smorgasbord

Well, not quite. They also come up with a series of proposals on decentralisation and a call for Labour to be kind to animals and the environment. But after tempting us with a smorgasbord of new ideas, born between courses at a Swedish restaurant, we end up with the same old meatballs.

The one redeeming feature of this book is an essay by Kevin Davey, "The Impermanence of New Labour". It doesn't sit very well with the other articles, primarily because it is actually about the real Blair agenda.

It favours Blair's reforms and points to state funding as a way of breaking the union link. But, despite the politics of its author, it points to the real prospect of class struggle asserting itself early on in Blair's reign. It predicts strikes in the public sector, unrest amongst youth, battles over the constitution and warns that the "immediate fruits of victory will be meagre."

But one good essay out of ten is poor change from £12.99.

McSmith's *Faces of Labour* is better value for money. Not because of its political analysis, but because, by using the method of individual portraits, it gives us a revealing glimpse of the factional rivalries that Blair presides over.

Even Ted Grant, former leader of Militant, gets a thorough biographical treatment along with Blair, Mandelson, Blunkett and others. It is an acknowledgement that the Labour Party has been a forum within which socialists have fought battles, trade unionists have staked their claims and right wingers have deliberately betrayed the hope and trust that has been placed in Labour.

Defence

It recognises, in other words, the role of the class struggle inside the Labour Party in a way that *The Blair Agenda* will not. It recognises that the struggle has not been concluded under Blair, but warns that it might be in the near future.

Insofar as it has a political analysis it is, essentially, a defence of "Old Labour" in its right wing form, John Smith and John Prescott, against the over-zealous modernisers.

The chapters on Blunkett, Mandelson and Blair bring this out most clearly. Blunkett's evolution from Bennite to mainstream right wing reformism is, tacitly, compared to Blair's evolution from young defender of the unions to outright moderniser. Mandelson is attacked not so much for his spin doctoring but for his contempt for Old Labour's welfarist principles and his belief that the unions were the major source of the party's problems.

McSmith bemoans the elevation of the professionals inside the party at the expense of the activists, not simply for sentimental reasons but because it threatens to destroy Labour as a reformist party. And, as McSmith says, such a reformist party, capable of enlisting the support and enthusiasm of ordinary workers, has been vital in enabling Britain to get through the twentieth century "free from revolution, social disintegration or political violence on any serious scale."

Warning

Under Blair, he fears, Labour may cease to be such a "channel [for] discontent":

"The cultural icons which hold the party together - the Red Flag, the Tolpuddle Martyrs, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, banners emblazoned with the names of defunct miners' lodges, composite resolutions to party conferences - these foolish things do not mean very much to Tony Blair."

He concludes with a warning that with Blair's domination:

"For good or ill, that must permanently change the nature of the Labour Party."

Naturally, McSmith ends there, which is fair enough for a reformist.

But Blair will not be able to carry through this change - which boils down to the destruction of the Labour Party as a party based on the working class - without a fight. That fight offers enormous opportunities for the building of an alternative party that will channel discontent towards revolution. ■

EU bosses' offensive

Europe's unions must converge!

THE BOSSES of Europe are engaged in a co-ordinated attack on workers' benefits and living standards. In order to meet the so-called "convergence criteria" set by the Treaty of Maastricht, all EU governments have to bring down public sector borrowing to 3% of GDP by the end of 1997.

Across the EU, this has resulted in a wave of public sector job cuts, pay freezes and fast-track privatisations. Instead of riding the tide of a modest economic recovery, the European ruling classes have been forced to rein in that recovery, imposing low growth, lower wages and lower public spending—all to satisfy the Maastricht criteria.

At the same time the European bosses are pursuing another vital goal in the creation of a Euro-economic bloc capable of competing with the USA, Japan and the rising economies of the third world:

they have launched an assault on the pay and conditions of workers in core industries like engineering, steel manufacturing and the railways. They calculate that only by cutting costs—and that means cutting wages and work-related benefits—can they compete on a world scale.

As a result, Germany is locked in a huge pay battle, Italy may soon follow, and France is on the brink of another round of strikes against public sector cuts. Belgium—which saw mass strikes last month against judicial corruption in the paedophile scandal—may also be on the brink of a new round of strikes against austerity.

Two things are notable about this latest round of resistance to the Maastricht convergence criteria: the absence of reactionary Europhobia amongst the rank and file workers and the absence of real cross-border co-ordination of the

protests. The first is to be welcomed. The second is not.

Twenty years ago most of the left of the workers' movement was united around opposition to the EU in all its forms and predecessors. The stated reason was that, by handing over sovereignty to a "supranational" body, Labour and Socialist party governments would "lose control" to multinational capital. The Stalinist Communist Parties and their allies on the Labour left advocated the introduction of import controls to protect home manufacturing from foreign competition.

It always was a futile and reactionary solution. Only revolutionary socialists had the nerve to say so. Today, with the advent of "globalisation" of the world economy, it is impossible. The struggle for socialism is international because capitalism is an international system.

The decline of reactionary economic nationalism in the workers' movement is caused, in part, by the realisation that supranational economic blocs, markets, trading areas and institutions are here to stay. But, at another level, it reflects the weakness of the labour move-

ment's leaders, the absence of an alternative vision when faced with the Maastricht process and globalisation. Having abandoned any idea of a socialist alternative to capitalism, most trade union and socialist party leaders can only see some form of socially benign Euro-imperialism as the solution.

But it will not be socially benign. The European bosses are not creating a single currency bloc for the good of the working class. They are doing it in order to compete. The Maastricht process means welfare cuts, pay cuts, job cuts, privatisation and "rationalisation" across the board.

It is a Europe-wide capitalist offensive against the working class.

That is why the fight against it has to be both international and internationalist.

The bosses have all the advantages of international collaboration. The big Euro summits that edge the Maastricht process along are not just media circuses. They are councils of war against the working class. We need our own council of war: we need a pan-European delegate conference of workers fighting against aus-

terity. We need to use every strike in Europe to raise the need for solidarity and active collaboration.

Our alternative to Maastricht has to be internationalist. Arthur Scargill calls for Britain to leave the EU and to trade instead with Cuba. That is Stalinist little-Englandism, not socialism. We have to offer a socialist alternative in Europe itself.

That means drawing up a workers' alternative to Maastricht: a workers' plan for full employment and prosperity for all in Europe.

Next year a number of trade union, left and Green organisations will be building support for a series of marches for jobs from April to June. The campaign will culminate in a massive demonstration in Amsterdam which is planned for 28 June to coincide with the EU Inter-Governmental Conference.

This initiative can provide a focus for unemployed groups, refugees and trade unionists to build the necessary links and co-operation that we need if the present and future waves of strikes are to be co-ordinated at a European Union wide level....

Germany

In September, the German government announced an impending cut in sick pay from 100% to 80% of normal wages. In October, many of the biggest engineering firms jumped the gun and introduced the new rates early. Hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike and demonstrated in protest. Peter Main looks at the issues as unions and bosses manoeuvre for position.

ON 24 OCTOBER the German workers gave a hint of their tremendous strength. 400,000 engineers downed tools and joined marches against the cut in sick pay. In the Rhineland, Germany's industrial heartland, 187,000 struck for a day, bringing 750 companies to a halt. In Baden-Württemberg 120,000 engineers walked out. Strikes hit the steel industry, car manufacturers like Mercedes-Benz and Audi and the shipyards of Hamburg. After years of relative class peace, the conflict between capital and labour is hotting up in Europe's most advanced industrial power.

The dispute over sick pay symbolises the indecision of Germany's bosses. Full pay from the very first day of absence was won by German workers after the country's longest ever national engineering strike in 1956, which lasted four months. It was that strike which created the framework for the "social partnership" between employers and unions which formed the pattern of German industrial relations for the next four decades.

Forty years of relative prosperity have entrenched and institutionalised the ideology of class collaboration. A recent Financial Times survey of Germany pointed out that many directors and executives were very suspicious of the "Anglo-Saxon" idea that firms should be run to maximise the value of dividends paid to shareholders. Instead, they insisted on the long term importance of "corporate value" which required the maintenance of good relations with their employees.

Nonetheless, facts are stubborn things. German wage levels are approximately US\$32 per hour whilst British workers are on about US\$14 and East Europeans on only a fraction of that. Faced with such competition, German bosses are united in the need to lower their wage costs. But they are divided over how to do it.

So far, a majority have continued to work within the framework of "social partnership", especially the biggest firms with most to lose from any prolonged closure of expensive plant. For them, the solution is to persuade their trade union "partners" that they have a shared interest in maintaining corporate value by lowering labour costs, especially non-wage costs such as sick pay, holiday pay and bonuses.

This is Chancellor Kohl's preferred

approach. The change in the law to lower the statutory sick pay rate was intended to strengthen the negotiating position of the employers, not to bring an end to negotiations altogether. The existing 100% rate was supposed to continue until the present agreements expired.

However, some firms jumped the gun and brought in the reduction early. The fact that they did not take Kohl's line says a great deal about the changing balance of forces within the German bourgeoisie. Leading the attack was Daimler-Benz, the biggest of all Germany's engineering firms. Their chairman, Jürgen Schrepp, earned his spurs running subsidiaries in South Africa and the United States. He is committed to a complete shake-up of the Daimler empire.

Following US practice he aims to divide the corporation into autonomous units which will be required to maximise profits on invested capital. Each unit will be in competition with the others and management will be judged by its ability to lower costs. The logic is simple. As long as all managements are faced by workers on the same contracts, their room to manoeuvre will be limited. Consequently, each will try to find ways of getting around existing contracts whether by local deals, or by "out-sourcing" to small, non-union firms.

Germany's industrial unions stand in the way of all such strategies. Daimler's attempt to override sick pay showed the bosses' determination to break down this obstacle. The money involved is not really significant; sick pay rates may be the highest in Europe, but German workers have the lowest rate of absenteeism so the potential savings are not great. What was really at stake was the union's ability to defend every clause of the existing contracts.

The strike on 7 October is reckoned to have cost Daimler some DM 200 million (£85 million). It was enough to force the engineering employers' federation, Gesamtmetall, to call off the offensive and advise members to honour existing agreements. Its president, Werner Stumpfe, complained bitterly of "government prevarication" on the issue of sick pay. But here too, the real issues lie deeper.

Since April, when elections in three major provinces strengthened Kohl's polit-

ical position, the government has been preparing the ground for an offensive against the gains the working class has made in the past. As in other countries, the Maastricht "convergence criteria" are presented as the reason for swingeing cuts in public sector spending which are to be achieved through privatisation, a new tax system, cuts in services, jobs and working conditions.

The political champion of this new and more aggressive stance is the small Liberal Party, the FDP. Last year they came close to extinction as their vote dropped below the 5% required for parliamentary representation. Since then, the FDP, which admits that it represents "the better off", has adopted a more neo-liberal, tax-cutting, service-cutting, deregulating and privatising programme. The party's general secretary, Guido Westerwelle, summed up their approach:

"We don't need to appeal to the 75% of the people who will never support us, we have to convince the 25% who ought to."

As the junior partner in the Bonn coalition, the FDP acts as the representative of the more aggressive wing of German capital. It was the government's adoption of much of the FDP's approach that seemed to signal its support for the engineering bosses' assault on sick pay.

On 23 October the leaders of IG Metall and Gesamtmetall met for a summit meeting in advance of the annual wage round. The aim was to see if agreement could be reached on several key issues in advance of the actual negotiations which take place at a regional level. The employers put in question not only the continued 100% sick pay scheme, the system of additional holiday pay and the Christmas bonus but also the viability of an annual wage increase and the legal enforceability of contracts on companies claiming financial difficulties.

Given the strength of feeling within the union it was no surprise that the talks rapidly broke down. On the following day, IG Metall mobilised some 400,000 members on a Day of Action which ranged from strikes to extended factory floor meetings and walk outs.

The stage is set in the months to come for a bigger confrontation than Germany has seen for many years, perhaps since 1956.



German IG Metall strikers oppose plans to cut sick pay

IG Metall: Wi

THE ENGINEERING workers' union, IG Metall, is the biggest industrial union in Europe. It has three million members and a legally enforceable right to negotiate pay in all engineering and metal working plants except the very smallest. Its officials and leaders sit on the supervisory boards of all big companies. Its shop floor leaders sit on the works' councils of all the main factories.

Over decades of institutionalised class collaboration, the unions have created a powerful bureaucracy which is highly integrated into both the state and the corporate world. In their own terms, the bureaucrats have been successful trades unionists; the high productivity of German labour ensured that industry's high profits could be accompanied by one of the highest standards of living in the world for union members.

Now the system is being threatened. What is at stake for IG Metall's leaders is the system of legally enforceable negotiated contracts. Without that, much of the social power and status of the union bureaucrats would evaporate.

The union leaders are therefore quite

prepared for a fight. But workers should not see in this any change in their politics. IG Metall leader Zwickel's objective in the current pay round is a 4 to 5% deal in which the actual pay rise would only cover 2% inflation and the rest would be used to "create and protect jobs". In the light of the scale of the employers' intended offensive, such a strategy is intended to show how "reasonable" the unions are. The bureaucrats also calculate that they can divide the bosses' camp by appealing to those like Volkswagen who believe that deals with the unions will, in the long run, deliver more profits than the alternative path of confrontation.

In its own terms, this strategy worked in the past. But time is moving on. The danger is that this approach will disarm, divide and demobilise the working class because this time the bosses are preparing for a concerted attack across a wide front. Already, by not mobilising to prevent the change in the law on sick pay and other benefits, the unions have passed up the opportunity of protecting the interests of the whole class, especially those in the public sector where the government

France

French workers are gearing up for a repeat of last November's mass strike wave. Mathieu Roux, of the LRCI's French section, *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, reports.

THE DEMONSTRATIONS were massive – and very angry. On 17 October, workers throughout the public sector responded to the call by all the major union federations and came out on strike in protest against the government's attack on jobs. For the first time in the history of the country, there are to be job losses in the state sector, in particular in education.

The government and their tame journalists have made much of the fact that, compared to last year's day of action, on 10 October 1995, which heralded the massive November-December strike wave, participation in the strike was down. It appears to be true that there were fewer strikers—around 38% as against around 50% last year.

But the number of demonstrators was greater than last year—over 380,000 according to the police. And the overall tone was extremely political and aimed clearly against one person: Prime Minister Juppé. If last year's strikes were marked by chants of "Tous ensemble" ("Everyone together"), the demonstrations on 17 October were dominated by the cry of "Juppé out!"

Furthermore, the day of action confirmed one of the key features of last year's movement: the high levels of mobilisation in the provincial towns.

It is not only in the public sector that there are clear signs of an increasing level of radicalisation. In the private sector, too, a series of struggles against job losses have become increasingly bitter. Moulinex has decided to close two factories and sack 2,100 workers, with a project of moving production to Mexico. When the plan was announced on 18 October, 200 workers stormed the meeting and, under the glare of the TV cameras, surrounded Blayau, the Moulinex boss, and savagely denounced his plan.

One rank and file worker, beside himself with fury, waved his fist under Blayau's nose and attacked not only the Moulinex bosses, but the whole capitalist system: "You bastards—Juppé, Blayau and the rest of you—the day's not so far off when we're going to get the lot of you." Blayau sat there, scared out of his wits. For once the TV news was worth watching.



French Rail workers' demonstration in October

Further problems are in store for the government. As part of their privatisation programme they recently decided to sell Thomson, the world's third biggest producer of consumer electronics and a key component in France's military industry, for the magnificent sum of one franc (15p)! The beneficiary of this astonishing largesse is Lagardère, an arms company run by a close ally of President Chirac and Prime Minister Juppé. As part of the deal, the government is to write off some £1 billion of the debts of Thomson's multi-media sector.

The 90,000 workers in Thomson are particularly outraged at being handed over, all the more so because they know that a massive wave of sackings will follow the give-away privatisation. The key task now is to turn workers' discontent into action.

And that's where the problems begin. The main reason why Juppé and Chirac are still in place, and why the current wave of anger has not exploded onto the streets in a decisive way, is the role of the trade union leaders.

At Thomson, for example, Lagardère has already announced that the multi-media sector will be sold off to the Korean company, Daewoo. This prospective sale has led to a wave of chauvinism encouraged by the union leaders. This will do nothing to help Thomson workers resist sackings and will inevitably divert attention towards a search for a "good French boss" to take over the company.

In the public sector, things are no better. The union leaders are determined to keep the movement under control by organising a series of separate days of action rather than calling all-out strikes. The CGT has already announced another day of action for the middle of November.

The danger of this approach is that it will demoralise workers and lead to a

weakening of the mobilisation. In education, for example, a sectional 24 hour strike on 30 September was highly successful, but was not followed up by any other action. Hardly surprisingly, therefore, the number of education strikers on 17 October was down on the figure a fortnight before.

This, of course, is what the leaders had in mind.

And yet there is widespread distrust of certain leaders, especially the CFDT's Nicole Notat, who last year supported Juppé's "reform" of the joint health and pensions scheme, the "Sécu". Throughout the Paris demo on 17 October Notat was jeered by rank and file trade unionists and eventually had to be evacuated by her bodyguards under a hail of beer cans and café chairs.

Workers' hatred of Notat is understandable. But chucking cans and chairs at her won't solve anything. The key task is to organise against the bureaucracy in the CFDT, and especially against the Notat leadership, and to spread this movement to all the unions.

Despite the fact that the CGT and FO unions have shown themselves to be more militant than the CFDT in recent years, under the skin, their leaders are no different from Notat. They all put their own bureaucratic interests before those of the workers they are supposed to represent. And they are all determined to keep the movement within limits that do not threaten the state.

Last year, the union leaders managed to shunt the massive strike wave into a dead end. If there is to be another movement in the next few months, workers will have to ensure that, this time, their leaders either follow their wishes or get out. Failure to deal with the question of leadership will carry a heavy price. ■

Will the giant fight?

planning big cuts in both pay and jobs.

However, the union leaders are not leaving it all their own way. Rank and file trade unionists can see the way in which both the government and the employers are preparing the ground for an offensive and are demanding a more militant strategy from their leaders. Especially in IG Metall, but also in the public sector union öTV, there are signs of shop floor organisation and independence that could be the starting point for radical changes within the unions.

Union representatives and works' councillors at the Bremen plant of Daimler, for example, have taken the almost unprecedented step of publishing an open letter to the IG Metall leadership criticising its lukewarm strategy and demanding a more vigorous fightback against the bosses.

For such groups the way ahead is to strengthen and extend their own organisation and to use it to force clear and concrete demands on the leaders for an effective campaign in the new wage round. They must demand rank and file democratic control of the regional negotiations

through elected delegates and their accountability to mass meetings

They must demand an end to union acceptance of business secrecy and the opening of the companies' books to workers' inspection. Instead of the pay freeze proposed by the union leaders they must demand increases that protect their standard of living and a cut in hours to absorb the more than 3 million unemployed. To prevent the employers dividing the workers and to ensure the widest possible support within the working class, they should fight for equal pay for workers in the East, for women, youth and immigrant workers.

Full-time contracts should be extended to agency and casual workers. Crucially, to prevent sackings and relocation of enterprises to regions with cheaper labour, and to avoid chauvinist demands gaining support, the German workers should demand pay rises in the Eastern European combines to which business is being transferred

On the broader front, militants in all unions have to fight to alert the membership of the scale of the attack that is planned by the employers and demand

that unions adopt a strategy of mass mobilisation and strikes against any threat of cuts, redundancies or closures. Within the coming year, particular sectional disputes could take on national significance, just as the French railworkers' strikes did last year.

Defeat in those circumstances would open the way to a full-scale employers' offensive. To forestall that, a rank and file organisation to win solidarity action must be built. A major united bosses' offensive would demand a general strike to turn back the bosses strategy. Further determined action by the German workers will give a tremendous shot in the arm to workers throughout Europe in their own interconnected fights against the consequences of the so-called Maastricht convergence criteria.

A rising tide of class struggle will provide a crucial opportunity for revolutionary socialists in Germany and Europe as a whole to break out of decades of isolation. They must build support among a new layer of militant workers for an alternative to the class collaboration of the Social Democrats and the Stalinists. ■

Q The A to Z of Marxism

is for

Quantity & quality

BY RICHARD BRENNER

HAS BLAIR'S New Labour become indistinguishable from the Tories? Has capitalism been restored in Russia? Is Iraq an imperialist power? Is capitalism ripe for revolution?

These are just some of the big analytical questions which face socialists today. To solve them we have to think dialectically.

Dialectics is a philosophical method discovered by ancient Greek philosophers, rekindled by the 18th century thinker Hegel, and given a systematic materialist basis by Karl Marx.

It understands all reality, essentially, as matter in motion.

Today, with the exception of a few "new age" mystics, most people have no problem with the idea of scientific materialism. Materialism is the basis of all scientific knowledge, and it says simply that reality has an objective, concrete independence: there is nothing beyond nature—no supernatural god, fate or destiny. The laws of nature are to be found within nature.

Few people, either, will have a problem with the idea that this material reality is in a constant process of change and transformation. Under a laboratory microscope apparently dead matter is seen to be a mass of living cells and organisms. Scientists have discovered proof that the universe itself is still expanding.

But what are the laws of this motion? Can we begin to discern general features of the way things change? Can we codify these laws without imposing some abstract scheme or model on our investigations?

Marxists recognise the dangers of this, but still believe that the essential laws of motion—both of nature and society—can be codified.

The first attempts to do this was using traditional, or formal, logic. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, systematised these laws which still hold good—within certain limits—to this day.

At the centre of these theories was the idea that a thing is equal to itself, and cannot therefore be at the same time equal to something else.

Crucial as this idea was for the development of arithmetic, basic accounting and the categorisation of the natural world, it contained a basic flaw.

It could not account for change, for a process of becoming. It is precisely when things are in a process of development from one thing into something else, that new and higher forms of logic are needed.

Dialectics applied to a study of all social and physical phenomena show that "something" can be itself and at the same time be in the process of becoming "something else".

There are several laws governing change. One of the most important is

the law of the transformation of quantity into quality: the idea that small, incremental (quantitative) changes can lead, at a certain point to a dramatic and complete qualitative change.

These laws cannot be imposed upon any phenomenon schematically. Only by a careful study of the origin, nature and development of the subject can we discover how this law operates in any particular case.

The process of revolution under capitalism is a good example. Those who see the road to socialism as a series of small quantitative changes—reforms—fly in the face of experience.

Social and political reforms which improve the condition of the working class under capitalism are welcome; in times of expansion and rising profits the capitalist class and its government can accommodate them. They may even welcome them if they provide new markets for them.

Small, quantitative changes can lead, at a certain point to a dramatic and complete qualitative change

But such piecemeal reforms at a certain point collide with the further development of capitalism as high wages, welfare and even political rights cramp the ability of the capitalist class to prosper.

The struggle for reforms, or the defence of existing ones from attack, can suddenly blow apart the whole institutional

framework (parliaments, trade union/employer forums) in which the reforms were granted and overseen; reform gives rise to revolution and, of course, its opposite—counter-revolution.

The contradictions of a system accumulated slowly over many years suddenly burst to the surface of society. The small talk of parliamentary debate gives way to the actions of millions on the streets. The whole character of change speeds up; change is drawn on a huge canvas.

The key scientific task in politics is to locate the precise nature of the contradictions. What degree of reform is acceptable and which intolerable to sustain, which will mesh into the fabric of society and which will tear it apart?

A scientific understanding of the system, of its processes of change, of the contradictions in the enemy camp as well as our own are vital for any party that wants to lead the struggle, not just tail behind it.

A commitment to dialectical thinking is, in and of itself, no guarantee of success. The universities of Stalinist Russia were full of self-proclaimed experts in dialectical logic who—when it came to concrete reality—could not tell their arse from their elbow (to use a famous Marxist phrase).

But without some attempt to understand change systematically, would be revolutionaries will always be lost in a sea of change. Two thousand years ago the philosophers discovered that "everything flows". Only scientific socialism has the answer to "which way?" ■

CANADA: Car workers spark massive strike wave

"It's going to be a hell of a fight"

BY JEREMY DEWAR

CANADA IS gripped by its biggest wave of strikes for over a decade. Over 250,000 working days have been lost in the province of Ontario this year, the highest figure since the great Winnipeg general strike of 1919.

In the spring, Ontario civil servants staged their first indefinite strike in protest at job cuts at the hands of the new Conservative provincial government. There have been similar strikes in Manitoba, alongside impressive strikes in parts of the private sector, such as Aerospace.

One of the key disputes occurred in the car industry last month. On 2 October 15,000 car workers at two General Motors (GM) plants in Woodbine, Ontario and St. Therese in Quebec came out on strike. By 10 October the strike had spread as the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) pulled out all 28,000 of its members in General Motors. The strike, which aims to set a precedent for workers at Ford and Chrysler, is against outsourcing (contracting out of parts and components manufacture), compulsory overtime working and the threatened closure of two plants.

CAW President, Buzz Hargrove, was clear about the nature of the dispute: "We are challenging their right to sell a plant, to close a plant or to decide whether they are going to build parts or purchase them. This is about the company's right to manage."

GM is the biggest of the "big three" car manufacturers in Canada. It has been estimated that one in six jobs in

the Toronto region are related to the car industry.

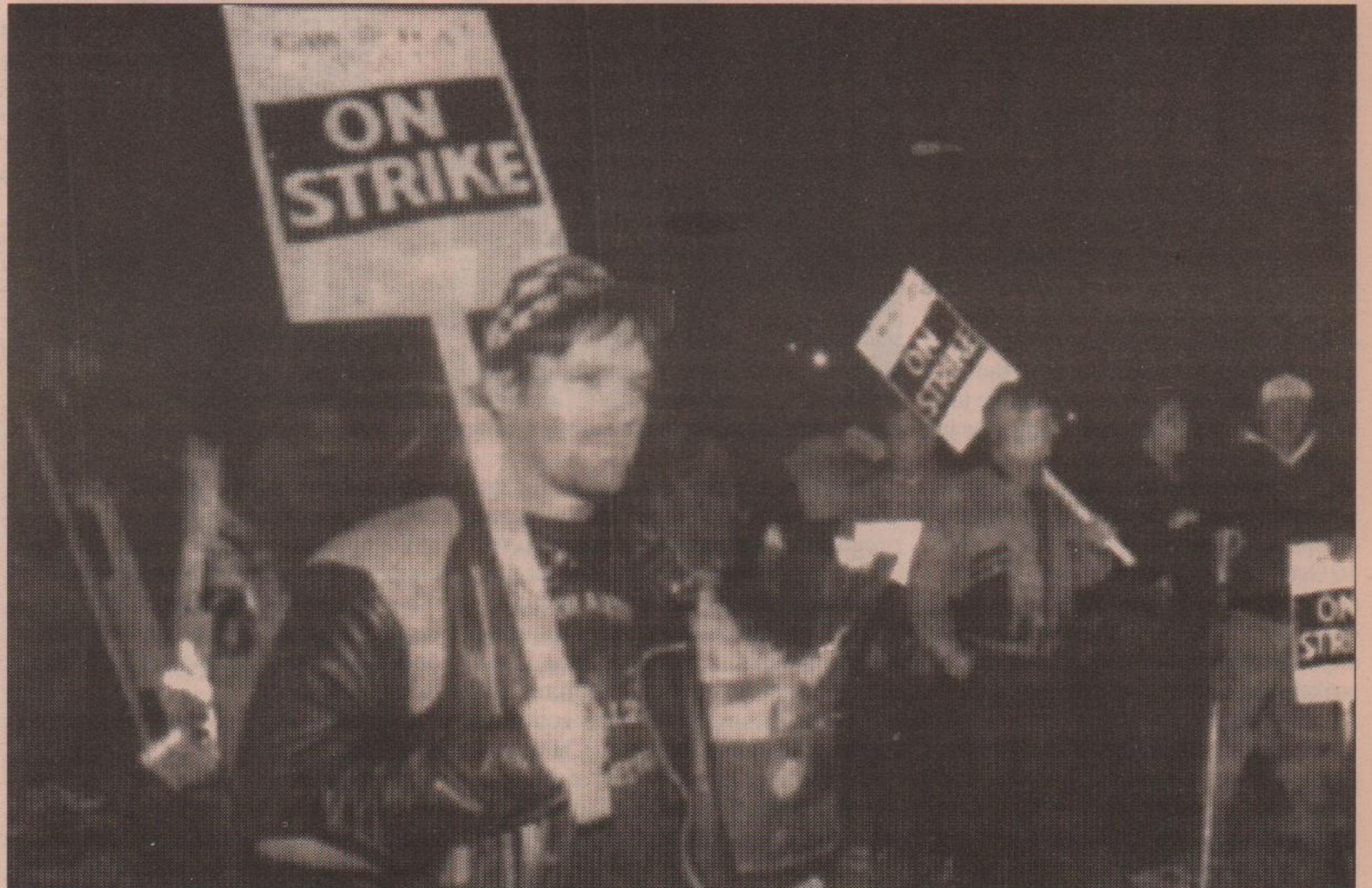
The CAW also, for once, looked like they meant business. Encouraged by the partial success of the Dayton Ohio strike against contracting out last spring, which cost GM US\$50 million a day, the CAW had built up a strike fund of C\$50 million—enough to last out for eight weeks. Hargrove also said he was prepared to double that by mortgaging the union's assets.

Such determination from union presidents is all too rare. It was undoubtedly based on the militancy and strength of the membership. The strike was totally solid, there were round the clock pickets at all the plants. The strikers also received support from US carworkers, who visited the picket lines.

A key turning point in the dispute occurred when several hundred strikers stormed and occupied a dye-casting facility, throwing out management. The occupation was designed to prevent equipment being moved out of the facility prior to closure. The occupation was successful, the equipment stayed in its place and suddenly the GM management wanted to talk.

The dispute was finally settled on 24 October. Strikers voted at mass meetings to accept a deal which included concessions from management on outsourcing and stopped the plant closures and compulsory overtime. The CAW may not have won everything but they succeeded in sending a clear message to GM management and beyond.

Over the last ten years in both the US and Canada non-union firms like Toyota, Nissan and Honda have chal-



Canadian car workers' strike won concessions from General Motors

lenged the traditional US manufacturers and are set to produce three million cars in 1996. The drive to contract out and concentrate on assembly is being fuelled by this competition.

Canada's GM workers made it clear that they won't pay the price for this capitalist free for all. As the car workers voted to go back to work, tens of thousands of public sector workers were coming out on a two day strike in Toronto.

On 25 October the Ontario Federation of Labor (OFL) launched its fifth, and so far the biggest, regional strike against the provincial government. Previous one day strikes have been very active and well supported. When the industrial heartland of Hamilton came out for a day, over 100,000 workers

demonstrated on the streets.

The strikes are against the Tory administration run by Provincial Prime Minister, and Thatcher-devotee, Mike Harris. He launched the so called "common sense revolution" in Ontario. The measures involved in this revolution include slashing benefits, cutting thousands of public sector jobs, cuts in the health service and merging all 168 education authorities across Ontario into one.

The October strike was a thunderous response. The Toronto public transport system was brought to a halt, Pearson International Airport saw large scale disruption and the post was stopped as postal workers honoured picket lines. Much of the picketing was illegal, secondary picketing. Museums

and government buildings were the target of demonstrations and strikers attempted to break into the stock exchange. The second day of action saw a concentration of forces in a march on the provincial legislature.

The leader of the Ontario section of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Sid Ryan, spoke of the determination of the strikers:

"We can't have passive resistance. We have to send a strong message to Mike Harris and business that if they want to change the social settlement it is going to be a hell of a fight."

And the fight looks set to continue. Unions are preparing for a possible General Strike across Ontario in the New Year. ■

ITALY: Bosses launch wage offensive

Rifondazione backs budget

BY EDUARDO ROSSO

AS IN THE rest of the EU, the Italian government's attempts to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria have over the last two years sparked a number of big protests against attempts to reform pensions. Now anger over declining pay levels has given a new impulse to the class struggle.

Real wages have fallen since 1993 when the indexing of wages was abolished with the consent of the union leaders. The agreement that replaced it pegged pay rises to productivity performance, and to the government's estimate of inflation rather than the real figure.

Transport workers struck on 16 October in protest at the pay offer of *Confindustria* which does not allow workers to recoup the purchasing power lost over the last three years. Airport ground staff struck on 15 October as well. Engineers are to strike for the second time on 15 November against the engineers employers' federation offer.

Meanwhile, the centre-Left coalition of Romano Prodi has re-written the government budget, only agreed in July, to cut public borrowing by £26 billion over the next two years. This will be achieved by a combination of new taxes and cuts in welfare. Failure to get the



Italian workers shape up for a new round of strikes

new programme through Parliament would have led to the collapse of the government and was, therefore, a test of the strength of the coalition.

True to form, the Deputies of *Rifondazione Comunista*, the supposed "hardliner" successor party to the old Communist Party, voted to support the government.

Their leader, Fausto Bertinotti, has managed to retain some public credibility by opposing parts of the package, notably cuts in the main pension scheme. He has also reversed policy on opposing Maastricht, claiming that if Italy does not meet the criteria, Germany will force it to bear the economic consequences in isolation.

However, within the party, there is reported to be widespread opposition to the leadership. This has been strengthened by the decision of the "Left Alternative" within the trade union confederation to oppose the budget. Until recently, *Rifondazione* was part of this grouping and its attacks on the party's policy have undoubtedly

ly struck a chord within the party.

This explains why the oppositional group around Franco Grisolia, previously a leader of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) group in Italy, although still a small minority, managed to increase its support on the national executive of RC. It proposed an alternative party programme which was critical of the leadership's sell out and called for a turn to opposition to the government and a fight to mobilise the masses for a new party—without actually specifying the political basis of this new party.

Grisolia has previously won only two votes on the executive, this time he gained 24.

Rifondazione's national conference will take place in December and it is widely believed that the leadership is having to resort to heavy-handed measures to contain opposition and restrict criticism.

It is too soon to say whether this will be enough to hold the party together but the strains and divisions can only get worse as the government's measures begin to bite. The coming months will make it all the more clear why the Italian working class needs a new party committed to a programme that can turn the approaching struggles into a fight for power alongside the workers of the rest of Europe. ■

MIDDLE EAST: Clinton backs Israel's demands for more concessions

Palestinian youth

"Waiting for the signal to start!"

BY RICHARD BRENNER

THE FLURRY of diplomatic activity since the renewed Palestinian uprising at the end of September has exposed the real interests of the main forces involved in the conflict.

The Israeli government – under the right-wing Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu – has used the explosion of Palestinian resistance as an excuse to renege on its obligations under the Oslo peace agreement. It has indefinitely postponed troop withdrawals from the occupied West Bank.

Yasir Arafat, President of the toothless Palestine National Authority (PNA), has tried to get negotiations "back on track" by the only means he knows: further unilateral concessions to Israel.

Most revealing is the response of the major imperialist powers. President Clinton, under pressure from the USA's influential pro-Israel lobby, has remained loyal to his Middle Eastern watchdog. But the European Union powers, with France taking a lead, have attempted to play an independent role, adopting a more supportive attitude to Arafat and the PNA.

Netanyahu's decision, on 23 September, to open a tunnel through the Muslim holy place of the al-Aqsa mosque into the heart of the Islamic quarter in Jerusalem's Arab Old City was a calculated provocation. It came after months of him blocking the implementation of Israel's minor commitments under the Oslo deal.

Palestinian anger was already mounting, with Arafat's cowardice increasingly apparent to Palestinian activists and youth, even within his own Fatah faction. The issue of Jerusalem was uppermost in the minds of Palestinians after the Israeli government bulldozed Bedouin homes to build new housing for Jewish settlers on the outskirts of the city. A slight against an Islamic shrine was guaranteed to exhaust Palestinian patience and provoke a furious response.

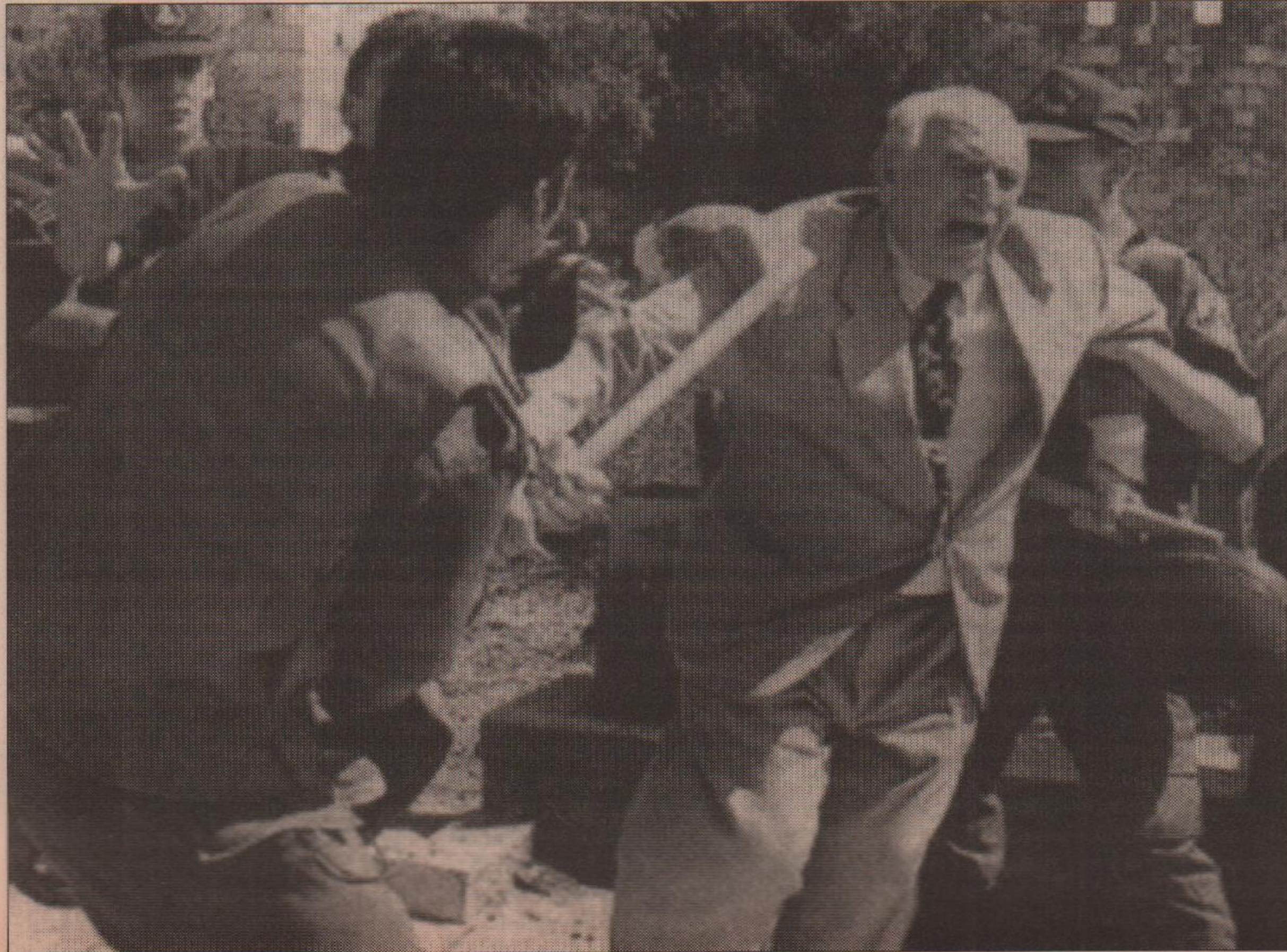
Palestinian response

The Zionists got the response they had been looking for, and reacted with characteristic brutality. Palestinian marches were violently attacked by the police. Then, on 25 September in Ramallah, hundreds of students from Bir Zeit University, including supporters of Fatah, the Islamic movement Hamas and leftist factions such as the PFLP and DFPLP, marched on an Israeli Army checkpoint.

The heroism of the students, who fought against plastic bullets and tear gas with stones and petrol bombs, put the PNA's own armed police under tremendous pressure. They had been standing by, under orders to take no action against the Israeli occupiers. But as the Israeli soldiers persistently entered PNA territory and opened fire on the protesters, the students' agitation began to have an effect. At last, the PNA police returned the Israelis' fire.

On 26 September, armed battles between Israeli army units and PNA police spread across the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip. Israel declared a state of emergency, and sent in tanks against the insurgents. On 29 September, they imposed a closure order on the areas under PNA "self-rule", cutting off two million Palestinians, preventing them from going to work in Israel and threatening slow starvation.

The situation had come close to a total collapse of the peace process.



Palestinian finance minister, Mohammed Nashashibi, beaten by Israeli border guards during last months uprising

Instead of tolerating continual concessions by the PNA and an abandonment of their democratic struggle, the Palestinians had recovered the will to resist and proved to the world that they were a force to be reckoned with. As one PNA police lieutenant told the International Herald Tribune, if Netanyahu failed to honour the agreement to withdraw troops or sent the army into PNA-administered towns:

"There is going to be an uprising again. But this time, it won't be an uprising of stones. You saw what happened last week. I'm telling you it will be an uprising of arms."

But this was not the intention of the PNA leaders. Marwan Barghouti of Fatah made clear that the PNA's decision to allow its police to fight back in no way signalled a return to mass struggle or full-scale resistance to the occupation. He was speaking for the whole PNA when he said that, "our protests are not intended to kill Oslo, but to restore it to life."

More concessions

This played straight into Netanyahu's hands. Under US pressure renewed negotiations now focused on bringing the situation back under control, not on Israel's refusal to implement its modest obligations under the accords. The Zionists were able to demand new concessions from the Palestinians in return for implementing what had already been agreed.

Clinton's summit initiative drew a response from Netanyahu's senior adviser David Bar-Ilan, who insisted that "Palestinian violence" (i.e. self-defence), now necessitated new conditions and concessions. These had to be granted in return for the agreed withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank town of Hebron, which was due to take place last March under the terms of the Oslo deal. In return for this "breakthrough" Arafat agreed, on 3 October, that the Palestinians would refrain from any violent action provided Netanyahu agreed to further discussions. The Zionists, of course, gave no commitment to refrain from "violence".

On 6 October, with a 24 hour curfew still in force in Nablus, Julkarm and Qalqiliya, Netanyahu declared that once a date had been fixed for withdrawal from Hebron, discussions could move forward to "final status" talks. Though framed as if it were a magnanimous concession, this announcement signified the postponement of all existing troop withdrawal dates until May 1999, when the final status talks are due to conclude!

Arafat responded to this affront to the Palestinian people with a real concession of his own telling Israeli President Ezer Weizman that PNA police would never open fire on Israeli soldiers again. Emboldened, Netanyahu then refused to discuss a timetable for troop withdrawal, demanding massive concessions from the PNA:

- More protection for the 450 armed Jewish fundamentalists who are occupying the centre of Hebron, a town of 94,000 Arab inhabitants.
- The Israeli Army to have the power to decide when it can enter PNA controlled areas.
- The Israeli authorities to have a right of veto over any PNA construction plans.
- PNA police to be restricted in their right to bear arms.
- The Palestinian police who returned Israeli fire to be identified and punished.

The entire package is designed to reassert the Zionists' notion of what the Palestinian police are for: to impose Zionist domination on the Palestinians, to fire only on their own people, to prevent resistance and suppress dissent.

The USA's commitment to "peace" has been exposed as a commitment to support Israel no matter what. Netanyahu's proposals for talks were described as "very positive" by one US official. At the UN Security Council Madeleine Albright, US envoy, negotiated a very soft statement which avoided all mention of the tunnel incident but still dared to call for an end to "all acts which have aggravated the situation" and mentioned casualties on both sides. When even this proved too much for the Zionists Clinton attempted, unsuccessfully,

to stall and veto the resolution.

The European Union, by contrast, has done its utmost to encourage Arafat to pursue concessions from Israel, at the same time as counselling continued restraint. President Chirac of France has taken the lead, arguing for an EU role at the talks. "We have valid reasons to be involved", he explained on 20 October.

Imperialists fall out

The EU is the biggest source of financial aid to the PNA, and has a compelling interest in promoting social peace in the Middle East and trade with the new Palestinian entity as one element of a hoped-for European-Mediterranean economic zone. A more independent political role is essential for the EU if it is to hold its own against US diplomatic hegemony in the region. France, with its recent history of colonialism and ties to post-colonial regimes in the region, such as Syria - not to mention its continued military presence in Africa - has naturally taken the lead in this reassertion of European interests.

Chirac's diplomatic tour of the Middle East was well-timed. After being greeted with considerable enthusiasm by the Ba'athist regime in the former French colony of Syria, Chirac set off for Israel and the Occupied Territories. There he pointedly refused a chaperoned Israeli tour of east Jerusalem and insisted, against Zionist objections, on visiting a PLO headquarters in the Old City.

Zionist bodyguards and police actually jostled Chirac during his walkabout, providing him with a perfect opportunity to win the Palestinians' hearts through a high-profile outburst of anger against the Israeli security apparatus. In several highly publicised speeches he called for renewed talks, referred to the long suffering of the Palestinians, and gave his support to calls for a Palestinian state and land for peace. The EU itself added warnings that unless progress is made in the talks, there will be a Palestinian "explosion".

US imperialism immediately recognised this as a threat. Secretary of State Warren Christopher wrote to the EU

telling them to keep their noses out. Chirac retaliated by warning of "the explosive potential of poorly managed international situations", a scarcely veiled criticism of US backing for Netanyahu's intransigence. Malcolm Rifkind demonstrated the unease of the British ruling class at the EU's assertiveness, declaring that "no one in the region wants Europe to get into some competition with the US for influence".

The Zionists are furious at this "foreign interference". David Bar-Ilan summed up their attitude, explaining that Israel could not agree to EU inclusion in the talks because, "Europe and particularly France have taken such a one-sided position that it would be foolhardy." The USA, by contrast, stand out as a shining example of objectivity and even-handedness!

Chirac is suddenly basking in unprecedented popularity among the Palestinians. In addition to promoting French imperialist designs in the region, this may also serve to defuse some of the contempt in which he has been held by Muslims, North Africans and anti-racists in France as a result of his viciously racist policies, without alienating the traditionally anti-Semitic French right.

But the Palestinian youth, workers and urban poor would be wrong to imagine that Chirac or French imperialism are their allies. Forty years ago this month French armed forces, together with Israel and Britain, invaded Egypt in order to assert imperialist domination over the Suez canal and humiliate the entire Arab world.

Despite his tough talking, Chirac completely supports the subordination of the Palestinians to Israel. He merely believes this can be maintained through Arafat's weakness and that compromises in negotiations are the best way to achieve stability in the region, rather than Netanyahu's "hawkish" approach of further land seizures, repression and armed conflict. This is why Chirac told the Palestinian Council that:

"In rejecting violence as a way of expressing your claims, you will be faithful to the action pursued indefatigably by President Arafat."

The "action" being the surrender of the Palestinians' historic and justified claim for national self-determination.

Where next?

Where next for the Palestinians themselves? They should put no faith in Chirac and French/European imperialism who will use them as so many bargaining chips in the imperialist power play. Nor should they trust the USA, whose troops Arafat unbelievably proposes should form a "peace keeping force" in Jerusalem. Instead they must rely on their own strength and the support of the working masses of the region.

The standing of Arafat and the PNA has improved in the eyes of the Palestinians. But this will not last for long. As one young militant told the press in the midst of fighting at the Al Aroub refugee camp in Hebron:

"The moment the Palestinian police opened fire on the Jewish troops last week they became our brothers. Before that they had been Israeli rent-a-cops in Arab uniforms... there is a whole generation with nothing more to lose. All they are waiting for is the signal to start."

Unless real concessions are won from Israel, the Palestinian people will lose patience. And concessions are one thing that Netanyahu is simply not offering. ■

ARGENTINA: General strikes challenge Menem's attacks

"Down with the bosses' dictatorship!"

IN LATE September the main Argentine trade union federation, the CGT, called a 36 hour strike to protest against the attacks of the Menem government. Following the successful 24 hour general strike of 8 August, the strike on 26/27 September was acknowledged by Menem himself as "relatively successful".

The main demonstration in the capital Buenos Aires brought out over 80,000, one of the most important demonstrations since the downfall of the military dictatorship in 1983 and comparable in scale to the demonstrations against the junta during the Malvinas war of 1982. There were also about 20 protests in the main cities in the interior of the country such as Cordoba, Rosario, Nequen and Ushuaia.

Between the 8 August and 26 September, the Menem government had stiffened its resolve to attack the foundations upon which post-war labour legislation was based. Two days before the 36 hour strike he announced new anti-union proposals, including:

- an end to the bosses' duty to pay a month's wages to sacked workers for each year of service;
- scrapping industry-wide wage agreements and the introduction of company by company pay negotiation;
- an end to bonus pay for overtime and the extension of the maximum length of the working day to 12 hours during peak periods, to be compensated for by time off in lieu only;
- more freedom for the bosses to dictate holiday times;

These proposals threatened the living standards of the employed workers. They also undermine the established position of the trade union bureaucracy in Argentine society and its partnership with government and business.

Since Menem's re-election as President in April 1995, the workers' movement has been ravaged by recession and unemployment. Officially at 17%, the jobless count is far higher, especially in



the interior where levels in excess of 25% are not unusual. From the end of 1993 there have been frequent spontaneous protests, often violent, throughout Argentina. The government's popularity in the polls has slumped to barely 10%. Over 70% of the population are against the proposed changes to labour laws.

The union leaders were forced to go further than the usual petitioning of the government or issuing joint appeals with the bourgeois opposition parties. They had to organise visible mass protests on the streets. But there is no doubt that the action in September throughout the whole country exceeded the expectations and desires of the CGT leadership.

The strike was well supported by all layers of the working class (and even gained active support from small businesses hit by recession) but it was especially well supported by the "permanent" workers, those on contracts whose wages and conditions are precisely the target of Menem's new legal attacks. These are the best organised and protected sector of the working class and voted in their majority for

BY KEITH HARVEY

Menem in 1989 and even 1995.

The demos in late September did not attract many of the unemployed, the poorest and least organised workers. They have been the hardest hit since 1989 and while they backed the strike passively they have not yet, in any significant numbers, joined the protests of the organised workers' movement.

Nevertheless, the events since 8 August indicate a broadening and a deepening of the mass struggle and the formation of new alliances between the working class and poorer middle class which some bourgeois newspapers fearfully refer to as an "explosive" mix.

Moreover, the trade union bureaucracy is being challenged from below. In the days before the 36 hour strike a factory (CORMEC) which employs 1700 workers was occupied in protest at new contracts signed by union officials.

The workers overturned the internal commission and elected a new assembly. On the march in Cordoba, during the 36 hour strike, the

CORMEC workers were enthusiastically received and the bureaucracy was forced to allow the newly elected plant leader to speak.

The slogans of "Down with the bosses' dictatorship" rang out on the march. Elsewhere in Cordoba flying pickets clashed with police outside a supermarket that opened during the strike. In San Luis lorry drivers used their trucks to block the main roads for 14 hours. Reports from all over the country suggest that the workplace, not just the officials' office, is once again becoming an organising centre for workers' action in a way not seen for more than 10 years, a development which underlines the lack of faith many workers have in the national union leadership.

The CGT are between a rock and a hard place; on the one hand, Menem has hardened his stance and even threatens to bypass Congress to implement the main measures; on the other, the workers are mobilised as never before against Menem.

For this reason, the trade union bureaucracy finds it difficult to surrender to the government at the nego-

tiating table but is unwilling to advance a plan of action that can force Menem to retreat. Above all, they want to stay at that table and prove their worth to the government. That is why they have made it clear that they do not want any more general strikes.

As for the parliamentary opposition (the UCR and Frepaso) they fear that the movement will get out of control. They have only one ambition—to capitalise upon the general discontent with Menem and gain ground in next year's Congressional elections and the Presidential elections in 1999.

The mass movement faces dangers. The unity of the workers' movement has been undermined by six years of attacks. The laws that Menem wants to introduce for contracted workers already apply to around 40% of the labour force not covered by present union negotiated agreements.

A revolutionary party, embracing the vanguard of the working class presently in struggle, is essential if the protests are to reach their goal and force Menem into full-scale retreat. The Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) in Argentina and their allies in the Movement for a Revolutionary Workers Party aim to construct this pole of attraction. They have participated fully in the strikes and marches, arguing, among others, for the following key demands:

- Out with Menem!
- For a general strike to defeat the government and its plan!
- Make imperialism, the big bosses and the banks pay for the crisis!
- For an emergency workers' plan: repudiate the external debt; for a six hour day and \$1,000 monthly minimum wage for all!
- For a National Congress of Workers' Organisations, drawn from the employed and unemployed, to vote on a plan of action to bring down the government and to decide on an emergency workers' plan. For a workers and popular government!■

WHEN MENEM announced his "labour flexibilisation" reforms in September, the former leader of the CGT union federation said they "would reject the proposals in the name of Peronism". Even some deputies from the Peronist party (PJ), which President Menem heads, spoke out against various of the measures. Eduardo Duhalde and Antonio Cafiero argued the reforms would "dismantle the historic relations between Peronism and the trade unions".

General Peron himself, addressing the Buenos Aires stock exchange in 1944, defined his movement in this way:

"My dear capitalists, don't be afraid of my labour movement! Capitalism has never been safer, because I too am a capitalist. I own a ranch and there are labourers on it. What I want is to organise the workers so that the state can control them and lay down guidelines for them and neutralise in their hearts the ideological and revolutionary passion that might endanger our post-war capitalist society. But the workers will become easily manageable only if they are given some improvements."

In the 1930s, Argentina had been wracked by economic and social crisis. The slump of 1929 and the ensuing world recession had exposed the fragility of the neo-liberal agrarian economy based on grain and cattle exports. The ranching bourgeoisie, together with

What is Peronism?

those linked to a transport sector dominated by British imperialism, controlled Argentina's political life.

The 1930s saw the rise of the military as a relatively independent political force. As a caste, the army was disillusioned and wanted a strong national economy that could support mighty armed forces. For this they needed a strong state industrial sector, especially iron and steel industries.

Juan Peron admired the Italian fascist Mussolini and wanted the same degree of incorporation of the working class into the state, and through this to tie them into an alliance with a national bourgeoisie. Unlike Mussolini's fascist movement, which faced a strong organised working class, Peron did not need to smash the independence of this class; rather he needed to build up working class organisation from scratch, but under his control.

As Minister of Labour between 1943-46 Peron outlawed the Communist Party in the trade unions and built up his own unions with his own appointed leaders. The number of trade unionists doubled to 3 million in four years. But the government supervised the elections, controlled the trade union social funds and outlawed strikes.

On becoming President in 1946,

Peron used the massive foreign reserves accumulated during the war to create state owned industries. To ensure a strong national capitalist class he had to build up demand in the home market. So he boosted wages and jobs to create demand; real wages grew 35% between 1945-48. An eight hour day, 48 hour week, a system of unemployment benefit and annual wage bonuses were introduced into the 1949 Constitution.

The result was massive electoral sup-

port for Peron, and later the Peronist party, by those organised into the state controlled union, the CGT. In surrendering its trade union and political independence a layer of the working class enjoyed rising living standards.

But by the mid-1950s this economic model was eating into profits badly and the bourgeoisie got rid of Peron in a coup, something that ensured that Peron was etched into the minds of many workers as their saviour.

Menem, elected in 1989 as a Pero-



Teachers demonstration Buenos Aires

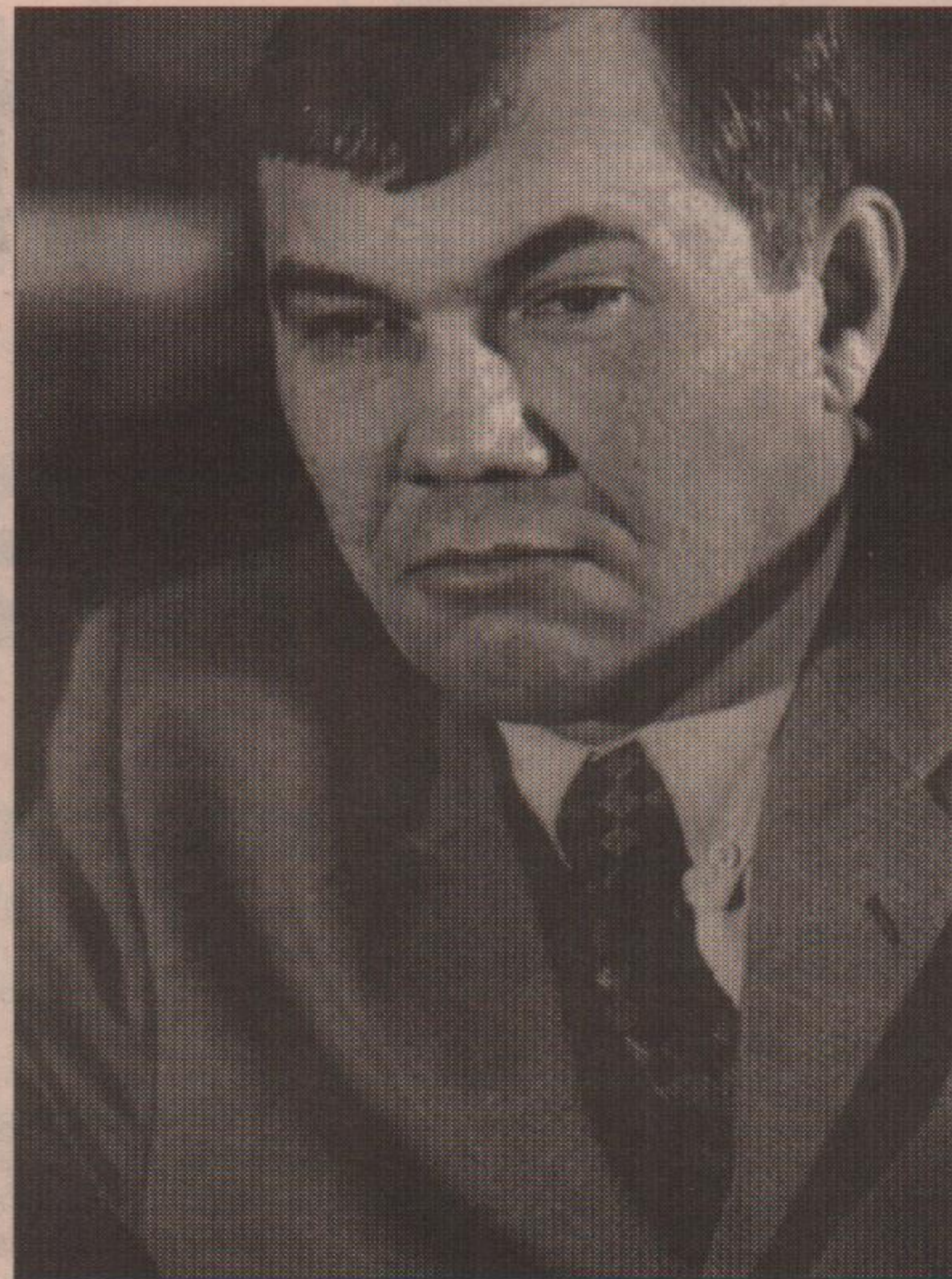
nist candidate, promised a typical raft of Peronist measures but immediately abandoned them once elected. Together with the IMF and the foreign multinationals, Menem privatised most state industry and let unemployment rip to nearly 20%. The CGT split into three federations under the impact of this "betrayal" but many bureaucrats became part owners in this privatised industry and very wealthy; it was the working class that lost out.

Menem is determined to break with the remaining institutions of post-war Peronism, having long broken with its economic model. The ties between the bosses, the government and national union bureaucracy are holding Menem back from full deregulation of the labour market. In this project he increasingly relies only on the support of the IMF, the big multinationals and major banks. This narrowing of the social base of Peronism makes Menem vulnerable to attack.

The danger now is that many workers will look back romantically to the days of "authentic" Peronism. Those days are long gone and can never return; they corresponded to a particular stage of development of Argentine capitalism that can never be repeated. Class independence is critical for further advance, starting with full freedom of the unions from state control and rank and file fighting democracy within them to kick out the corrupt and treacherous officials.■

RUSSIA: power struggle raises coup fears

Kremlin vultures fall out



Lebed will not go quietly

A NEW GENERATION of political leaders is struggling for power around the bed of the stricken Boris Yeltsin. The Russian and international press speculates on whether he will survive an operation in November or whether a new election will take place in three months or in a year's time, with premier Victor Chernomyrdin holding the reins of power till then.

It is now clear that Russians went to the polls in early August and elected a man who had just suffered an incapacitating heart attack. This fact was kept from the electorate and explains why Yeltsin's grand public inauguration had to be cancelled in favour of a nearly private indoor ceremony.

To add to this irony, the man who ensured Yeltsin's electoral victory, former Lieutenant-General Alexander Lebed, 46-year-old veteran of the war in Afghanistan, former commander of the Russian 14th Army in Moldova and appointed Secretary of the Russian Security Council by Yeltsin, has now been publicly and unceremoniously sacked.

The 17 October dismissal of Lebed represents a victory for the clique headed by Anatoly Chubais, architect of the 1992-94 privatisation programme, now chief of staff in the Kremlin. Chubais is regarded by *The Economist* as "the last best hope of radical reform".

Lebed offended not only Chubais and the family circle around the moribund president, but also the Interior Minister, Anatoly Kulikov, the secret police and the oil and gas clan around Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. The peace deal Lebed negotiated in Chechnya won him enormous popularity with the rank and file and junior officers in the army and with the average Russian in the street but is very unpopular with the political and military elite.

Clashes

His clashes with Kulikov over the Chechen peace deal and over control over the various sectors of the armed forces brought about the explosion in which Kulikov publicly accused Lebed of organising a coup d'état, aided by 1,500 Chechen rebels. This ridiculous charge is not believed by anyone and Yeltsin did not endorse it but rather sacked Lebed for "arguing with everybody" and "sowing discord" amongst the members of the government.

Lebed is probably sanguine about his dismissal because he realises that it will do him no harm with the mass of Russian voters. On the contrary, like Gorbachev's rather similar dismissal of Yeltsin from the Communist Party Politburo in 1988, it could be the springboard for future success.

Lebed, aware that the Yeltsin presidency is extremely unlikely to run its course, is preparing himself as a candidate in the elections which would

BY DAVE STOCKTON

have to be held if Yeltsin either stands down or dies. His attempts to form an organised political base have hitherto been much less successful than his promotion of his own popularity. Forced to resign as head of the army in the Transdnistria region of Moldova in 1995, he joined the Congress of Russian Communities (CRC), a party formed to champion the interests of ethnic-Russian minorities in the newly independent CIS republics.

Although the CRC had high expectations for the December 1995 parliamentary elections, it gained a meagre 4% of the vote and only five Duma seats. Lebed himself easily won a seat in the city of Tula. After the CRC's poor showing, he eventually decided to run for the presidency as an independent, while relying on the CRC to collect the one million signatures needed for registration.

Covert

It now seems that Lebed's campaign only took off after he received covert assistance from figures close to Yeltsin. Whilst Lebed has denied these allegations, the head of his presidential campaign, Gennadi Tupikin, has conceded that Yeltsin pursued a strategy of "not disturbing" or "opposing" the "natural growth in the authority and image" of Lebed.

Alexander Khorzhakov, Yeltsin's long time crony and head of the Kremlin bodyguard until early August, now claims to have advocated Yeltsin's bloc with Lebed. Indeed, he claims to have tried to bring about a tripartite bloc with the KPRF (Russian Federation Communist Party). He says he was in favour of giving them the Labour and Social ministries in order to prevent a social upheaval. The reason given for Khorzhakov's ousting was an accusation of coup plotting—made by Chubais. At the time it appeared that Lebed was the beneficiary of this "palace coup".

Now it is his turn to be accused of coup plotting. What is curious is that in mid-September Khorzhakov formed an open alliance with Lebed. Lebed has publicly endorsed him in the by-election for Lebed's old Duma seat in Tula which he had to resign when taking the post of secretary of the Security Council. Khorzhakov is supposed to have left his Kremlin post well armed with compromising files on many people in the Kremlin hierarchy.

Chubais future is entirely linked to Yeltsin's survival and good will. The social base of the hardline neo-liberals is completely eroded. Generals like Kulikov could not play an independent role given the sympathy of the lower ranks for Lebed and the disillusion of the army with its leaders and with the Yeltsin camp.

Only Chernomyrdin—a direct representative of the high managerial bureaucracy which has helped itself to the former state owned industries on a grand scale—could stand a chance of replacing Yeltsin as president in the short run.

The problem with this representative of the "oil and gas lobby", lies precisely in his association with the narrow interests of an embryonic sector of monopoly capital, making it hard for him to effectively represent the whole of the emerging capitalist class. This would make it difficult for him to impose the laws of the market to destroy unprofitable sectors of production, or fight the rampant corruption and criminality which threatens to undermine the completion of the restoration process.

In contrast, Alexander Lebed's popularity is based on his hitherto clean image, that of an incorruptible, straight-talking army officer. His colourful denunciations of corruption and of the political elite strike a chord with wide layers of the masses who are suffering terrible deprivation whilst the former bureaucrats line their own pockets.

Despite flirting with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), and despite not ruling out future deals with it, he says he rejects communism. "The Communists talk about the past, whereas we want to look to the future. They talk about class divisions, whereas we want national peace."

He advocates a free market economy but he wants it to be accompanied by a firm commitment to law and order. His election manifesto, Freedom and Order, was influenced by the neo-liberal economist Vitali Naishul, who advocates modern capitalism but with an authoritarian political system sanctified by old Russian Tsarist traditions.

However, Lebed realises that a considerable degree of social demagoguery will be necessary to win mass support for this project. In this sense he is like Yeltsin in his earlier days—a "plebiscitary" not a military bonapartist. His preferred route to power is not through a military coup, but through elections to a strengthened presidency which will then rule through a council of generals and bureaucrats, largely immune from parliamentary and judicial interference.

To win, he has to stigmatise the corrupt methods by which a narrow layer of former bureaucrats have cleaned up on Russia's privatisation programme. He claims that the benefits of market reforms must be spread wider to avoid a social explosion. His record in brokering the peace deals in Moldova and in Chechnya has earned him a reputation as a peacemaker that he hopes will stand him in good stead with the masses.

A further political crisis is likely in the next few months, whatever Yeltsin's

fate under the surgeon's knife. Obviously, were he to die on the operating table this crisis would come sooner rather than later. But in any case an economic crisis is looming.

Once more millions of workers are not being paid. The so-called miracle of achieving "only" 31.6% inflation over the last year has been brought about by running up three to six month wages arrears. Some were paid off just before the election. Now the unions are threatening a nation-wide general strike unless they are paid. Inflation is set to rise again after the massive bribes Yeltsin handed out to the key regions to ensure victory in the Presidential elections and now in the governorship elections going on across Russia.

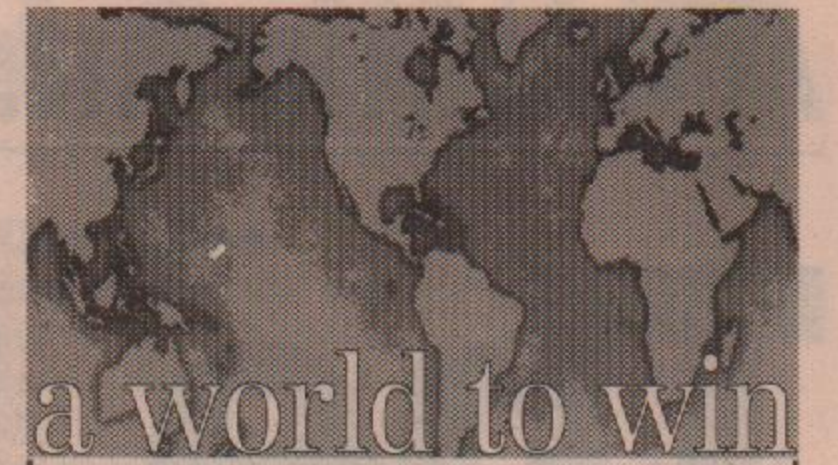
The KPRF, rather than give a lead to workers in struggle, is concentrating on forming another patriotic alliance with extreme Russian chauvinists. It warmly supported Lebed's ousting, primarily because of the latter's "betrayal" of Russia in the Chechen peace deal, which involves the withdrawal of Russian troops (now underway) and a referendum in five years time on membership—or not—of the Russian Federation.

Confidence

Although Ivan Rybkin, Lebed's successor, has pledged to carry on with the agreement and Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen leader has affirmed his confidence that the deal will be honoured, forces within the core of the Russian state are bitterly opposed to it. In addition, Chechen guerilla fighters, led by commanders like Shamil Basayev and Ruslan Galayev, are also deeply dissatisfied with the deal. It will only take one serious clash to unleash the war again.

The repulsive Great Russian chauvinism of KPRF leader Gennadi Zyuganov can be no basis for an effective fightback in defence of the interests of the workers of the Russian Federation. As Marx said many times, a nation which oppresses another forges its own chains. Russian workers must defend the rights of all the minority nationalities to self-determination and the right of the Chechens to secede from the Federation. Zyuganov's decadent Stalinism, transforming itself into far right Russian chauvinism is no basis for a class fight.

Workers in the coming struggles over their stolen wages, must realise that the rule of nomenklatura "privateers" like Chernomyrdin, or of neo-liberals like Chubais, let alone the rule of Lebed, offer nothing but further and intensified misery for them and their families. Only a massive workers' uprising, one which creates democratic mass organs of struggle (workers' councils) can save Russia from the completion of the process of capitalist restoration. ■



NIGERIA

General Sani Abacha, the military ruler of Nigeria, has announced his long awaited timetable for a return to civilian rule. It came in a speech on 1 October celebrating 36 years of Nigerian independence.

The speech did not include a date for elections. Abacha's regime of brutal repression continues. Five right wing parties have been promised legal status. The other ten parties which applied for such status remain illegal. So it is business as usual for the country's military rulers and their international backers.

This year has seen the arrest of Gani Fawehinmi, founder of the National Conscience Party, its director of organisation Femi Aborisade; Ledum Mitee, leader of the Ogoni people's resistance; and Milton Dabibi, General Secretary of the union Pengassan (Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association).

This is in addition to the imprisonment of thousands of other activists such as Frank Kotori, general secretary of Nupeng (National union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers of Nigeria). He has been detained without trial since August 1994. The regime reorganised the trade unions by excluding union activists making the leadership a pliant tool of the government.

To fight these attacks the Campaign for Independent Unionism was set up to defend union democracy in the face of increasing repression.

This harassment of the workers' organisations takes place in the context of a worsening economic situation and increased sackings. The workers and peasants of Nigeria are being made to pay the cost of the military trying to carry out the dictates of the IMF and World Bank.

Over 10,000 civil servants have been made redundant in the past year along with the same number of bank employees. And the situation will worsen. One of the main proposals of Abacha's speech was the setting up of an economic planning committee which will endeavour to get the country's economic "reforms" back on track. These reforms are in fact a programme of opening up Nigeria to direct exploitation by the imperialist multinationalals. The reforms will mean another attempt to break the strength of the organised working class.

British trade unionists must organise political solidarity and material aid to the Nigerian workers. We should also fight our own government and multinationalals who are some of the biggest backers of the ruthless Abacha regime.

For further information contact the Campaign for Independent Unionism (Britain), PO Box 256, London SE11 5TH

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AFGHANISTAN: Islamic reactionaries squabble for control

The "socialists" who backed the Mullahs

AFGHANISTAN IS in the grip of a ruthless, brutal and reactionary government of Islamic medievalists, the Taliban.

They are preventing women from working, violently enforcing a code of dress which involves totally covering your body, and are attempting to keep women literally in the home. Every girls' school in the country has been closed.

But women are not their only target. Everyone is affected. In Kabul, if you break the 9pm curfew, you are liable to be shot on sight. Suspected thieves can expect to have their offending limb severed. Men are expected to grow "proper", untrimmed beards. Anyone with long hair is likely to have it cut off in public. All men are required to attend mosque five times a day. Registers are taken, and failure to attend is punished with 20 lashes. All young men are being called up into the army with the promise of a chance to die for God.

Since their successful seizure of the Afghan capital at the end of September the Taliban have met with some opposition. The main military threat has come in the Panjshir valley from the forces of Commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, a Tadjik and former Defence Minister, and General Abdul Rashid Dostam, an Uzbek warlord, who controls the only other route to the north, the Salang pass and tunnel.

Each of these factions—including the Taliban—emerges from the Mujahedin, the Islamist alliance that fought against the reforming governments of Karmal and then Najibullah and their Soviet backers in the 1980s. The emergence of the Taliban only demonstrates how reactionary the Mujahedin were, and what a catastrophe their victory has brought for the small Afghan working class, for women and for all supporters of democratic rights and national development.

Yet from 1979 many on the British left, and in particular the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), supported the Mujahedin, backing them because they were supposedly struggling for freedom against "Soviet imperialism". They opposed the Soviet troops who had been invited in by the PDPA government in Kabul, which was an alliance between the pro-Soviet Stalinists and bourgeois nationalists who wanted to promote land reform and industrial development.

Forward

Incredible as it may seem today, for the SWP the victory of the Mujahedin was a step forward. Don't take our word for it. Read what they said at the time. Their journal *International Socialism* carried an article by Jonathan Neale which described the Mujahedin as "brave freedom fighters, giving their lives in a struggle against imperialism", and which declared: "If I were an Afghan I would be demonstrating in the streets or fighting in the mountains alongside the rebels. I do not see any way out of the impasse of the Afghan left which does not involve getting rid of the Russians". (*ISJ* 12 Spring 1981)

This completely misunderstood both the Mujahedin and the real nature of the Afghan civil war in the 1980s. The "rebels" were engaged in a civil war before the Soviet troops arrived. They were not freedom fighters but fighters against democratic rights, progress and land reform. They represented the interests of the most reactionary classes in Afghanistan, in particular the landlords

and the rural clergy. They were openly funded and backed by the USA and its client dictatorship of General Zia in Pakistan. Theirs was a right-wing rebellion.

Prior to the Soviet invasion, the Mujahedin—which means Crusaders, or fighters—were formed from extreme right wing groups who opposed attempts in the 1970s to modernise and liberalise the country. In particular they opposed attempts to improve the position of women, opening up schools for girls and making the brideprice a token rather than women literally being sold.

Their bases were the refugee camps. Before the Soviet invasion over 80,000 Afghans had crossed the border into Pakistan and were living in camps. Organising the Afghan refugees was aided by the Pakistani dictatorship. To get rations in the camps it was necessary to sign up to one of the political groups. If you refused to join the "jihad" and fight with the Mujahedin, your membership would be terminated and so were your rations. It was a blunt choice: fight or starve.

Reactionary

Workers Power opposed the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979. This never involved supporting the reactionary war against the regime. Rather it was a recognition that the leadership of the USSR would, as a result of their policy of "peaceful co-existence" with imperialism, work to restrain and limit the land reform and force compromises on the regime. This was borne out subsequently when the Karmal government installed by the USSR began to retreat on the PDPA's reform programme. Instead of calling for a Soviet invasion, or "hailing the Red Army" as the Spartacists did at the time, socialists should have called on

BY KATE FOSTER

the USSR to give military and financial support, without strings, to the PDPA government to enable it to win its war against the Islamist reactionaries.

At the same time socialists would have fought to strengthen the class independence of the small Afghan working class and cement its alliances with those sections of the urban population and peasantry committed to reform and modernisation.

But once the Soviet armed forces were committed in the civil war, we also recognised that they were fighting on the progressive side. We warned what a victory for the reactionary anti-communist forces would bring.

The *Weekly Worker*, claimed in its 10 October 1996 issue that we "replicated" the call for Soviet withdrawal. This is a barefaced lie from a group which increasingly makes its facts up as it goes along. Workers Power refused to join in the chorus in the Western press calling for the Soviet forces to withdraw in the midst of the fighting and actively opposed this demand wherever it was raised. We wrote:

"A victory for these forces [the Mujahedin] would signify a reversal of land reform in Afghanistan, the reversal of improvements in the status of women, the reassertion of the power of the mullahs and landowners. . . . At the moment this call [Soviet troop withdrawal] can have little meaning other than a tacit acceptance of a victory for Afghan domestic reaction and US/British imperialisms designs against the Soviet Union and the liberation of South West Asia. . . . In the present conflict between the Soviet Armed Forces and the pro-imperialist rebels, we are not neutral. We are for the defeat of the pro-imperialist forces. This does not mean that we give political support to

the Karmal government or the Soviet bureaucracy's policies. We point to their counter-revolutionary role." (*Workers Power* 12)

We were proved correct. The *Weekly Worker* still today regards our calls for the workers and poor peasants to organise themselves independently of the pro-Moscow government as "revolting anti-Sovietism" (*Weekly Worker* 163). Yet at the same time they recognise the counter-revolutionary character of certain key actions of the Soviet Armed Forces, including the killing of Hafizullah Amin and 97 other PDPA leaders who did not fully support the Kremlin's conciliatory line.

Fantasy

So how were the working class to oppose this? We are not told by the *Weekly Worker*, and the very idea of the workers and poor peasants struggling "to organise their own state power" is dismissed by them as "fantasy". In this they prove that they have not broken from their Stalinist past. By writing off the possibility of working class independence and power, they show that in the final analysis the Soviet intervention was for them an alternative to the self-emancipation of the working class. Such people have learnt nothing from history.

The SWP made the opposite error. They supported the Mujahedin for one reason only: because they were fighting troops from the Soviet Union. For the SWP the defeat of the Soviet troops was the highest priority and their eventual withdrawal was a welcome "blow against imperialism" (*Socialist Worker Review*, February 1989).

This shows how their much-vaunted theory of "state capitalism" blinded them to the realities of the conflict. In fact Soviet foreign policy reflected the interests of a conservative caste in

a bureaucratically degenerated workers' state, not a rapacious exploiting colonial bourgeoisie. That is why they acted, as in the Spanish Civil War, to back the progressive side in the conflict, but used their influence and control to restrain progressive policies.

This Trotskyist analysis led Workers Power to support the right side in the civil war, and at the same time to warn of the need for the Afghan workers to build a party of their own that would pursue workers' revolution in alliance with the poor peasantry to complete the expropriation of the landlords and bring real democracy and national development. The crude theory of state capitalism led the SWP to side with an utterly reactionary rebellion.

The SWP are fond of claiming that their theory has been proved right, because of the collapse of Stalinism in the East, a collapse which Trotskyism also predicted. In reality their theory has been proved utterly false and misleading, by the spilled blood and broken bones of Afghan progressives, democrats and women.

Rather than account for these embarrassing facts, the SWP are now keen to describe the history of Afghanistan as an unavoidable tragedy. In 1989 it was a "cycle of misery"; in a recent issue of their paper the victory of the Taliban is described as the "latest in the long series of tragedies to beset the Afghan people" (*SW* 5 October 1996). As for the future we are told that "the sorrow of the people of Afghanistan is far from finished".

Neglect

The SWP offer no way forward and shamelessly neglect to remind us that this tragedy is the work of the people who they supported, this misery is the "progressive" solution they called for. We shouldn't be surprised by this. The SWP are fond of boycotting their own positions and analysis when it doesn't seem too popular.

Their method—which Marxists describe as economism—leads them to raise positions only when they already have a resonance in the working class. This cowardly theory ignores the fact that right-wing ideas will sometimes resonate more loudly than progressive ones. The SWP left the Afghan working class to their fate because it was difficult to counter the "Soviet imperialism" argument inside the British working class.

Worse still, the SWP did not believe that the Afghan working class were even capable of their own liberation. In an ironic twist, the state capitalists ended up with the same pessimistic and anti-working class conclusions as the Stalinists. Back in 1989 we were told that the cycle of misery would not be broken "until genuine socialist revolutions in more advanced countries provide the resources to overcome its economic backwardness" (*SW* 4.2.89).

In the meantime, the Afghan workers and peasants are to be pitied. In an article written at the time, Workers Power accurately described the meaning of this position:

"As true metropolitan chauvinists, blinded by their anti-Sovietism, the SWP condemn the defenders of Kabul, the PDPA militias, to death and destruction until the day the western workers take power and come to their rescue. This, as Lenin pointed out a long time ago in relation to backward Russia, is Menshevism." (*Workers Power* 115) ■



"Brave freedom fighters giving their lives in the struggle against imperialism" - *Socialist Worker* 1981

Imperialism's role in Zaire

Dear comrades,

The escalating conflict in eastern Zaire between Zairian army and Hutu refugees on one side and elements of the Rwandan and Burundian armies on the other is already being portrayed in the bourgeois media as a result of "traditional enmities" and as a spill-over from the conflict in Rwanda two years ago.

It is vital that revolutionaries, particularly those in the imperialist countries, take a clear position on this conflict and expose the lies of the bourgeois press. We should point out that the Rwandan conflict was a product of colonial domination of the area and added to by the imperialist-made problems of Zaire and its President Mobutu Sese Seko.

President Mobutu came to power in a CIA backed coup in 1965. This was after the United Nations had intervened to help overthrow the popularly elected President Lumumba in 1960-1, again in 1965 Belgian paratroops put down a rebellion in its ex-colony. Since then Zaire has been one of the most loyal allies of imperialism in Africa. In the mid seventies Zaire was used as a base for UNITA - US backed guerillas - against the left wing MPLA in the Angolan civil war. In 1978 the US air-lifted advisors to Zaire to prevent the secession of the mineral rich Shaba province in the South. In return for UN

and US military support Mobutu has maintained a steady flow of valuable minerals to the West and supported its foreign policy in Africa. Meanwhile Mobutu enriched himself by plundering the country's resources and cracking down on any opposition to his regime.

With the strategic importance of Zaire diminishing as the cold war ended and the country reeling under the effects of the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes, Mobutu found himself more and more isolated as his international backers abandoned him. To shore up support for his regime he has gone on the offensive against minorities (80% of Zairians are ethnic Bantu's) such as Hutus and Tutsis who have lived in eastern Zaire for centuries. They have had property stolen by the government and redistributed to Mobutu supporters, and have been banned from holding any office.

Since 1994 Zaire has received nearly two million refugees from Rwanda and Burundi, mainly Hutus. These refugees include members of the Hutu armed forces and their supporters who carried out the genocide against the mainly Tutsi but also Hutu supporters of the Arusha accords. These accords were supposed to usher in a period of power-sharing in Rwandan society. Evidence suggests that Mobutu has been backing the hardline Hutu elements

in the camps, giving them arms to prepare for a re-invasion of Rwanda. The latest incursions by the Rwandan and Burundian armies into the camps have ostensibly been to root out these elements and to try to get the refugees to return. Also they may well be trying to build a buffer zone between themselves and the Hutu military incursions backed by Zaire. The refugees believe that they will be made to pay for the crimes of the hardline government supporters in 1994. They have refused to go back with the result that life has been made unbearable for hundreds of thousands of them.

In my view the British left were scandalously slow to react to the genocide in Rwanda. I hope this will not happen again in the current situation. We have to expose the role that imperialism has played in the region, challenging the succession of TV and radio experts telling us that this latest conflict was a product of hundreds of years of history.

The truth is that the conflicts in this area of Africa along with so many others in that continent were made in the capitals of the imperialist powers which have dominated this century. In London, in Paris, in New York we need to squarely lay the blame at the doorstep of imperialism.

In comradeship
Keith Spencer, London

Kick out scab health union

Dear comrades

The Campaign for Free Education (CFE) demonstration on 20 November is an important part of the fight against the massive cuts in education. It is also important in that it can form a basis from which to launch a massive campaign inside the National Union of Students against the Blairite leadership that opposes a fully funded living grant.

However, as a former member of COHSE and then Unison, I have concerns about the popular frontist nature of the campaign. At their last conference the CFE gave a leading role to the student section of the Royal College

of Nursing (RCN), an organisation that has throughout its history conspired with managers inside the NHS to break every strike and oppose every form of industrial action taken by health workers. To add insult to injury, the RCN sat on the same platform as striking Liverpool dockers.

It is true that cuts in education affect nursing students, and that they need to be won to the Free Education banner, but this can only be done by breaking them away from the reactionary politics of the RCN, not by legitimising them.

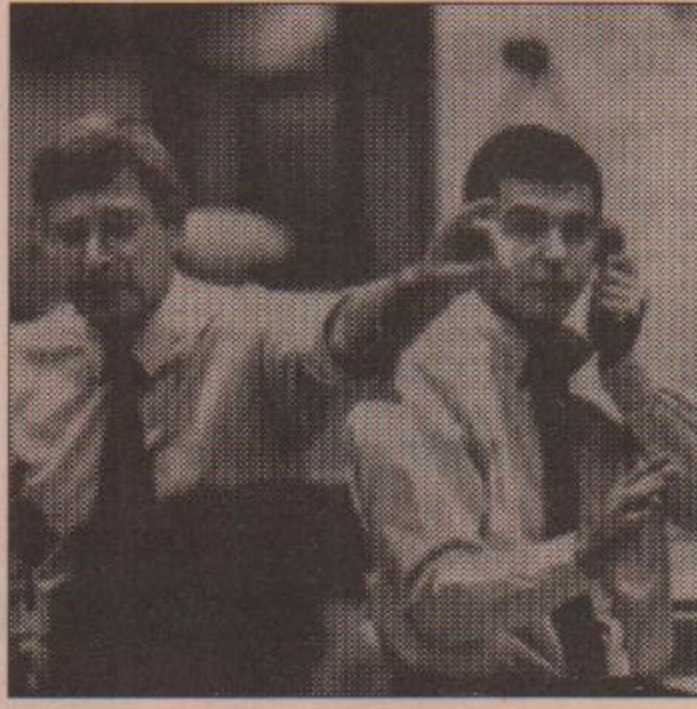
The CFE, by allowing the RCN to

speak on its platform, has presented them as a legitimate part of our movement, not the scab organisation it really is.

It will also make it harder to convince ordinary workers, who have an understanding of what organised scabbing means, that the CFE is serious about its commitment to work to "build links with the education unions and joint campaigning action with all organisations seeking to defend the welfare state". Or, perhaps this vague phraseology means that they really are committed to working with scabs.

Steve Conway, Manchester

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.



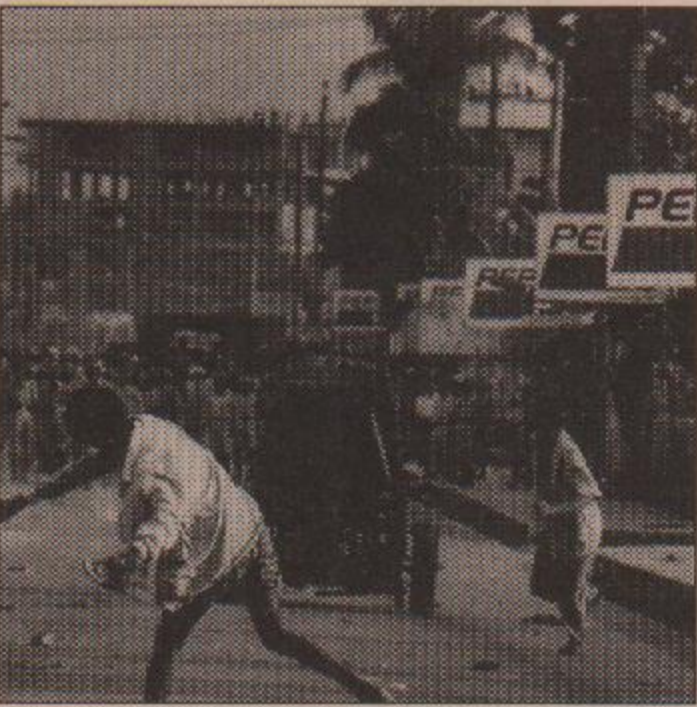
October 1917

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 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.



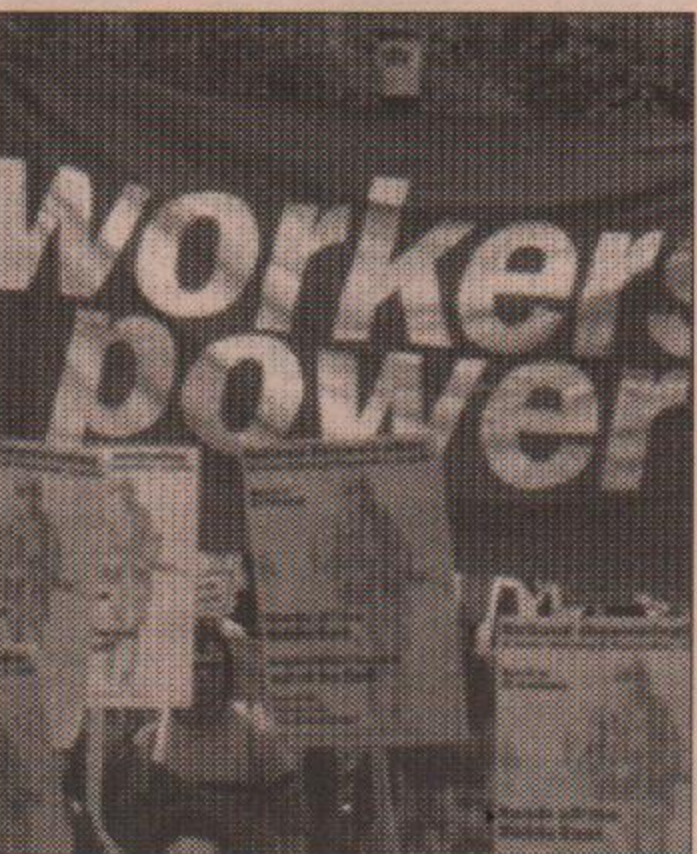
Social Oppression

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 the imperialist 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!★

FIGHTING FUND:

The Workers Power £20,000 building fund received a boost of £530 in October.
Good - but not nearly enough. We need to reach our target by May 1997.
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A series of talks and discussions based on his book, *The Power of Ideology*, will be given by the noted Marxist Professor Istvan Meszaros in the Library of Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London (nearest tube Holborn).

The series will begin on Thursday 31 October, 7pm.

Admission £1 on the door, refreshments included.

Organised by the South Place Ethical Society.

A follow-on series of talks based on *Beyond Capital* are being planned for February/March 1997.

WORKERS POWER

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Workers power

**AFGHANISTAN:
The failure of
the left**

PAGE 14

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 205 November 1996 ★ 50p

Direct action can stop cuts, fees and graduate tax

For free education!

**DEMO
20 NOV**

EVERY STUDENT should go on the national march called by the Campaign for Free Education on 20 November. We need a massive struggle to stop the introduction of the graduate tax, tuition fees and all attempts to make students pay for their education.

The Tories are bringing in more cuts in spending on higher education. Another 5% cut comes on top of the 30% reduction they've already pushed through over the last 3 years. Grants slipping in value against inflation; courses facing the axe; teaching provision and other facilities slowly declining; that's the vision of the future for students under the Tories.

The University Vice-Chancellors have come forward with an idea of their own to help claw back the money they are losing through cuts. Get it from the students! Their proposal for tuition fees—probably a fixed sum payable at the beginning of each academic year—comes on top of the slashing of the maintenance grant. Now students will have to pay for the right to be taught as well as paying for their own living expenses!

Fresh

Finally, for an example of "new" "fresh" thinking, step forward Tony Blair. New Labour is calling for the abolition of the student grant altogether! Instead we will be lumbered with a graduate tax, a deduction from grad-

uates' income over several years to repay the cost of higher education.

In short, the Tories, the University administrators and the Labour leadership all agree: there is a "crisis of funding" in higher education and there is only one group of people who can be made to pay for it: the students.

But students can't pay. The only students who will be able to do it are the children of the well-off. Everyone else—hundreds of thousands of young people—will be unable to go on to higher education. Their right to education will be sacrificed; it will become a privilege for the rich, just as it was in the days before the welfare state.

The danger facing students today is that the leaders of NUS will divert the campaign away from the goal of free education. NUS President Doug Trainer accepts the right-wing arguments about the funding crisis, and supports Blair's graduate tax. Loyal to Blair, he will try to stop students "rocking the boat" by taking direct action in the run-up to the election. Then he will try to follow the course taken by former NUS leaders year after year and jump straight into a job in the Labour Party or the trade union hierarchy, where his experience of selling out and restraining struggles—acquired at stu-

Already, 32,000 students dropped out last year for non-academic reasons. Debts to the Student Loans Company total over £800 million. If the basic grant had risen in line with inflation it would be over £3,000 a year. But it is only £1,710 (£2,105 in London). This is a pittance!

Cynical

No wonder four out of ten students are working during term time, 75% of them for less than £4 an hour. These are poverty wages, a cynical exploitation of young people and a way that unscrupulous employers can undercut other workers' wages. It does not end there. A survey by the Labour Research Department showed a fifth of all

working students reported health and safety problems in their workplaces, and 80% get no sick pay or holiday pay; 10% don't even get meal breaks.

Being forced to work in these conditions has a bad effects on academic work, on health and can produce psychological problems. One in ten of all students failed to attend classes or hand in work because of their jobs, 28% skip meals, and a massive 38% said money worries mean they sometimes have trouble sleeping.

These are the people that the Tories and Vice-Chancellors think can afford to foot the bill for education. And Blair agrees with the Tories. Despite all the rhetoric about the importance

of "education, education, education", Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown will not pledge a penny for better education.

The money is there, today, in

the hands of the rich. There is only one answer to the right-wing consensus of Major, Blair and the pampered Vice-Chancellors: tax the rich. ■

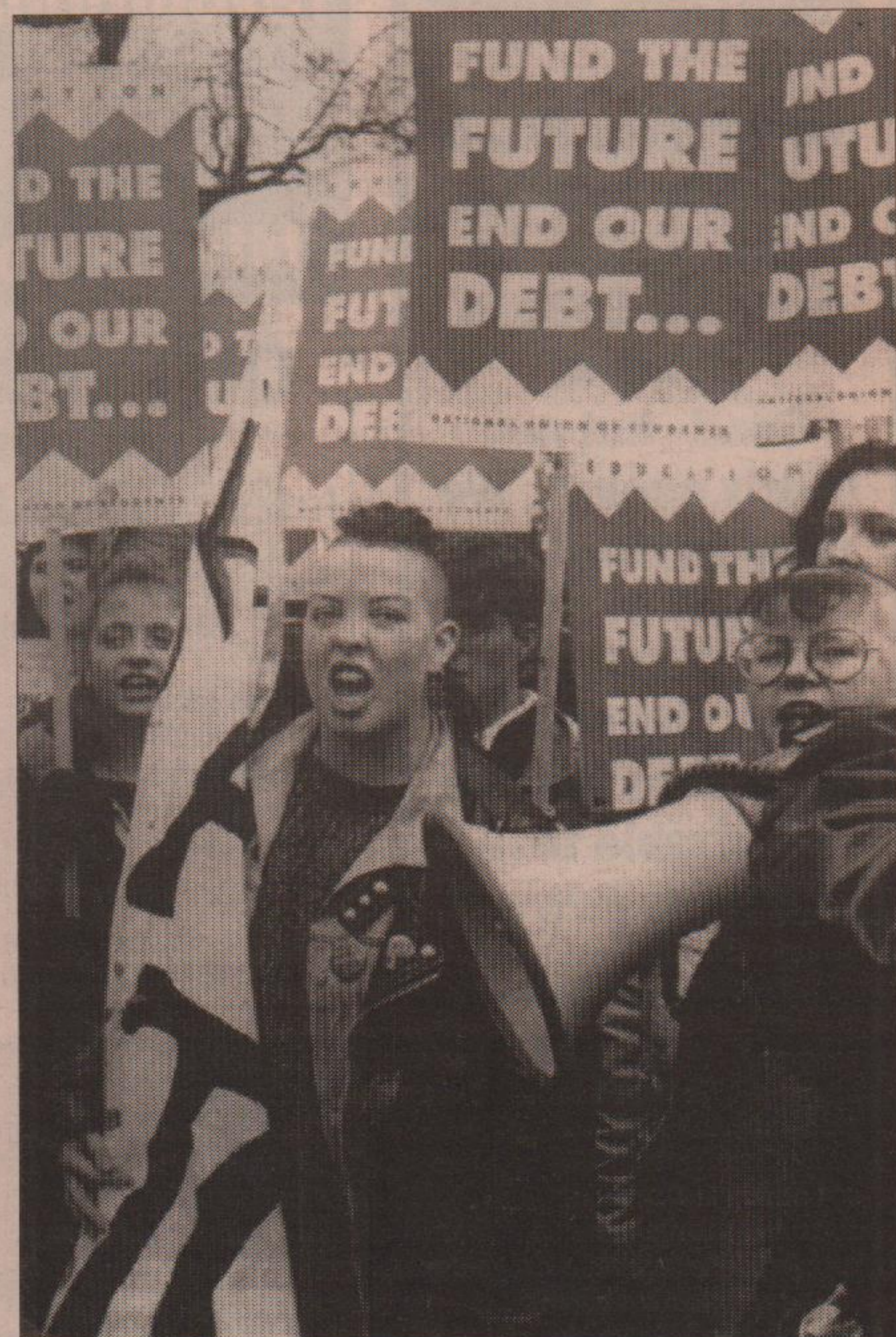
dents' expense—will then be turned to further ill-use.

That is why we need committees of activists in every college, to campaign for occupations, marches and rent strikes against student hardship and tuition fees. We need to build direct links with education workers, and start to press for joint strike action to defend higher education.

- Scrap loans, abolish the Student Loans Company, cancel all student debts
- A living grant for all students, equivalent to a national minimum wage of £6 an hour
- No tuition fees

- Restore benefits for students all year round, including unemployment benefit in holidays and housing benefit
- Build joint committees of students and workers in the colleges
- NUS leaders to be subject to recall and paid only the average income of the students they represent
- For strikes, occupations and direct action against student hardship
- For a massive wealth tax to pay for higher education.

**JOIN WORKERS POWER!
RING 0171 357 0388 TODAY!**



Palestine: before the storm – page 11