

# Workers power

## Zaire: a war against genocide

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Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 206 December 1996 ★ 50p



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## 1-in-3 born into poverty

# BREADLINE

# BRITAIN

### Kids are the victims, not the villains!

**THEY RANT** about morality. They call the unemployed "benefit cheats". They accuse workers who strike to get a decent wage or to save their jobs of holding the country to ransom.

The Tories, the bosses and their media mates are never short of scapegoats. The mounting crisis of their rotten system is always somebody else's fault - never theirs.

No matter how hysterical they get, millions are beginning to see through these lies. And recent revelations about poverty in Britain will convince millions more.

One in three babies in Britain are born into poverty. This is the finding of the government's own researchers. According to the House of Commons Library's statistics for 1995-96, over 215,000 babies were born into families living on or below the poverty line.

The *Independent* on Sunday reported that, "about 30% of babies are now born to mothers

who receive means-tested benefits during pregnancy." They calculated that "child poverty has increased as much as three-fold since Margaret Thatcher was first elected."

Behind these cold statistics are kids beginning their lives with all the odds stacked against them. Adequate food, decent clothes, toys and the equipment needed to bring up a child are all denied to these babies because their parents cannot afford them. The parents themselves lead lives of deprivation on miserly benefits or poverty pay.

The Tories, and Blair, preach morality and family values as the answer to Britain's problems.

At the same time the system they defend - capitalism - condemns such vast numbers to appalling poverty. This is sickening hypocrisy.

To plot the further destruction of the welfare state, to concoct ever more elaborate schemes to deny people benefits, as the Tories

are doing, is to ensure that the numbers being born into poverty will stay on an upward spiral.

Labour, instead of pledging to eliminate poverty, spends all its time making reassuring promises to the bosses that they will keep the world safe for profit.

Under the Tories, the gap between the rich and poor has grown to the widest ever recorded.

Poverty is not an act of nature - it is a product of economics: the economics of a system in which a handful of millionaires plunder the entire globe in their quest for profit.

Poverty is the ever present product of capitalism. And it is getting worse, because as we draw to the end of the century capitalism itself is getting ever more crisis ridden.

If we want to get rid of poverty we have to get rid of that system. Join us in the fight for a socialist alternative. ■



## Defend the Welfare State!

**OIL GIANTS:** From Colombia to Nigeria they slaughter for profit

# Nationalise the oil industry!

**T**HE CAMPAIGN against BP's murderous operations in Colombia is gaining momentum. More than 100 people packed into East London's Praxis Community Centre on 22 November. They heard three speakers outline the brutal five-year history of BP's operations in Colombia's Casanare region. The platform included Richard Howitt (Labour MEP) and Michael Gillard, the journalist who first obtained a copy of the suppressed Colombian government report into death squad murders in Casanare.

Ronnie McDonald, the secretary of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) also spoke to the meeting. OILC has 500 members working on BP installations in the North Sea and McDonald confessed that "astonishingly, we have been unaware of the situation in Colombia until very recently".

He explained that 25 years of dealing with BP had left him in no doubt "that BP takes little or no account of local feeling when it sets up its operations, whether in the North Sea or anywhere else."

## Barbaric

The barbaric actions of BP are just the tip of the iceberg. McDonald explained to the public meeting that:

"There is a direct connection between the North Sea oilfield and the Colombian oilfield. BP are involved in a determined strategic alliance with Shell to ensure their oil supplies for the next 30 years. To that extent, they have had the assistance of the British government who have abolished oil revenue taxes on BP and other oil companies' income. The result of this is that of the £7 billion a year North Sea revenue that will be generated over the next six or seven years some £4 billion of this is destined for investment abroad."

BP has channelled a significant and growing share of its global investments to Colombia. For Shell it has been Nigeria, with similar results in terms of destroying the environment, murdering activists and looting third world resources.

Just over a year ago, the Nigerian government hanged Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists for opposing Shell's decimation of Ogoniland's environment and the gross exploitation of its people.

In late 1992, Ogoni opposition to Shell had reached massive levels. Pipes had been spilling oil time and again. As with BP's Colombia operation, this polluted farmland and water, poisoning fish. Clouds of burning gas from flaring operations made whole areas all but uninhabitable, causing terrible breathing problems for local people and children.

The Ogoni people began peaceful protests. Like BP, Shell turned to the army, in this case the rulers of a brutal military dictatorship which slaughtered 2,000 in January 1993. The army and police burnt over 25 villages to the ground, leaving 80,000 people homeless.

So what can be done against the oil companies?

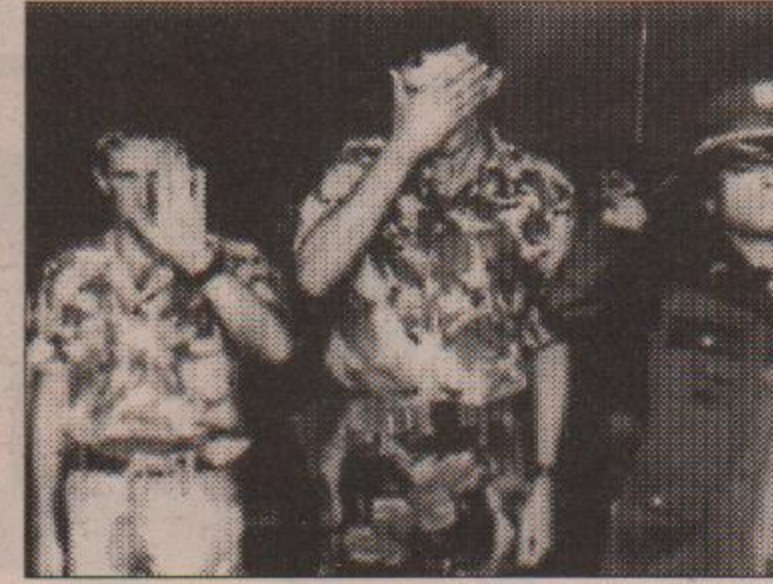
## Boycott

On reading a leaflet for the protest against BP on 10 December one young woman was shocked to read about BP's activities in Colombia and asked: "Who can we buy petrol from, then?" This is a good question. All the oil companies are guilty of exploitation. The US-based giant, Mobil, is running a joint advertising campaign with BP, and they are set to announce a merger soon.

Consumer boycotts, like the campaign against Shell here and in Germany over the disposal of the Brent Spar platform in the North Sea, can be useful to bring pressure to bear against particular outrages. But if in the final analysis all the companies are implicated, boycotts cannot be successful. We could not and should not expect working people to boycott any and all products produced by exploiting companies. Frankly, that would cover everything.

Another alternative strategy, on offer from Richard Howitt MEP, was to get the European Parliament to run a media campaign about the atrocities, and to encourage the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to intervene and act on behalf of the local population in getting more concessions from the likes of BP and Shell. Will this work?

The NGOs are relatively independent of national governments whereas aid and assistance from agencies like the World Bank is channelled directly through the vile regimes themselves. But the NGOs get their money from western governments, churches and



**PARTNERS IN CRIME:** British military advisors in Colombia cover their faces (above). Meanwhile, government death squads (left) prepare to crush opposition to BP - backed by money donated from BP.

priation: nationalisation without compensation.

Richard Howitt MEP has done a valuable job in highlighting BP's Colombian operations but will the Labour Party in office do anything to put a stop to it? Will they even extend their idea of a windfall tax on the big privatised utilities to companies like BP so that their tax breaks are ended and, instead, revenue is poured into the local communities that suffer under BP and Shell?

The vast assets and wealth of Shell, BP and all the oil companies rests on the exploitation of oil workers around the globe and the resources of colonies and semi-colonial nations. The whole of BP should be nationalised. Its affairs should be controlled by democratic committees of the workers who actually do the job of extracting, refining and distributing oil. The parasites who have reduced Casanare to a filthy killing field should not receive a single penny of compensation.

## Advisors

Should we, however, call for BP to pull out of Colombia altogether? Certainly the executives, security "advisors" and profiteers should be driven away by any means necessary. But their plant and equipment should be left in the hands of the Colombian workers themselves.

The assets of nationalised corporations in third world countries should be donated directly to the working class of those countries, who can use it to meet their needs, rather than the greed of imperialist thieves.

They could then build the hospitals,

schools and infrastructure that they need.

Nationalisation of the big companies should not be a dirty word. It is crucial if we are going to go beyond the horrors of the imperialist system towards a global economy based on democratic planning to meet the needs of the world's people. In addition, the obscene spectacle of siphoning off millions of pounds from impoverished countries to pay the interest on foreign debt to the west's banks and finance houses, while hunger and preventable diseases are rife must be stopped.

Who should we rely on in pushing this campaign? Already, Richard Howitt is a victim of a dirty tricks campaign by BP to discredit him among his Labour Party colleagues. Walworth Road is trying to persuade him not to rock the boat. Pressure for real measures against the oil companies will have to come from elsewhere.

## Links

Ronnie McDonald told the November meeting that more than 20 years ago links were made between Chilean oil workers and British North Sea workers, after the military coup against the left wing Allende government in 1973.

But these links were never maintained and this mistake must not be made again. He said: "BP workers in Colombia and the North Sea must make direct links and use them to attack BP here on their home ground in the UK."

Exactly right. A unified mass movement embracing those who work for the oil giants, those who buy its products and those who suffer from its environmentally damaging operations could take the campaigns against BP and Shell from one of embarrassing press reports into a political force that can hit BP where it hurts - its profit base. ★

■ At the public meeting the Coalition Against BP in Colombia outlined its plans for a protest on 10 December - international human rights day. At least two camera crews will be on hand to ensure that the action gets widely publicised.

The leaflets and posters to build the protest were eagerly snatched up at the public meeting. Let's make sure we build a campaign that BP cannot ignore. ■

## Left MPs duck fight with Blair

**O**N 20 NOVEMBER a meeting at the House of Commons took place to explore the possibility of organising a "socialist campaign for a Labour victory" in the coming election.

The omens were not good. The issues which this campaign was supposed to "highlight" were very minimal indeed. While a series of important demands were made, under the name of Pete Firmin for the Socialist Campaign Group (Supporters Network) - such as the repeal of all anti-union laws, scrapping of the JSA, re-nationalisation, and the repeal of the Asylum and Immigration Act - the programme fell far short of

the key demands that socialists should be fighting around in the run-up to the general election.

For example, there was no call for British troops out of Ireland and self-determination for the Irish people; no mention of a massive wealth tax on the rich, nationalisation of the drug companies etc. to provide the money for the "increased investment" demanded for the NHS and other services.

Workers' control of industry figured nowhere in this socialist campaign's programme, nor did any demand for the repeal of all immigration controls.

Nevertheless, as the programme was

open to amendment, Workers Power supporters attended to gauge the support for such an initiative and propose amendments. In the event, the campaign never got off the ground.

The half dozen comrades who turned up (even Jeremy Corbyn MP failed to show despite having agreed to book the room) were quickly informed of a letter from the Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, Alan Simpson, saying that they were effectively not interested in a socialist campaign.

"There was a strong feeling (in the Campaign Group)..." Simpson wrote, "...that the tactics being proposed were

seriously flawed and dangerously close to being seen as an anti-Labour coalition".

The reaction of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs is instructive. They are running scared of Blair and have decided that - whatever the manifesto says - this and only this is what these "socialists" will be fighting on.

This should come as no surprise to regular readers of *Workers Power*, since it has consistently pointed to the cowardice of the Labour left when it comes to standing up to the right.

From 1982 when Tony Benn did a deal with Michael Foot so as not to "split the party", the left has retreated before every

right wing offensive. Following the maxim "he who lives and runs away, lives to fight another day", they have surrendered virtually every gain made by the left in the 1980s rather than risk being disciplined or expelled, to the point where they are completely marginalised by the Blairites.

What is perhaps more surprising is that left groups such as *Socialist Outlook* in the Socialist Campaign Groups (Supporters Network) continue as footsoldiers for these charlatans, ditching key aspects of their own politics in the vain hope that these "leaders" will come out of hiding and fight for the workers who elected them. ■

# EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 206 DECEMBER 1996

in this issue



## Britain on the eve of the election

Workers Power recently held its annual conference. The theme running through the conference was the coming election and the likely change of government. Extracts from our conference resolutions look at what this will mean for the British political situation and the tasks of revolutionaries today.

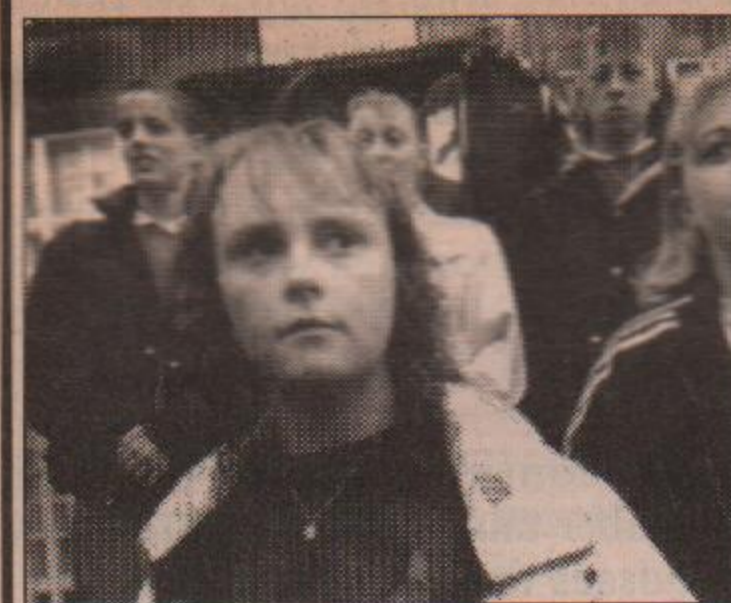
- pages 8 & 9



## Central Africa

The recent events in Zaire have once again highlighted the role that imperialism has played in the conflicts in Africa. Here Keith Simpson examines the roots of the present conflict and how Africa has become a new arena for age old imperialist rivalries

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## What's wrong with youth today

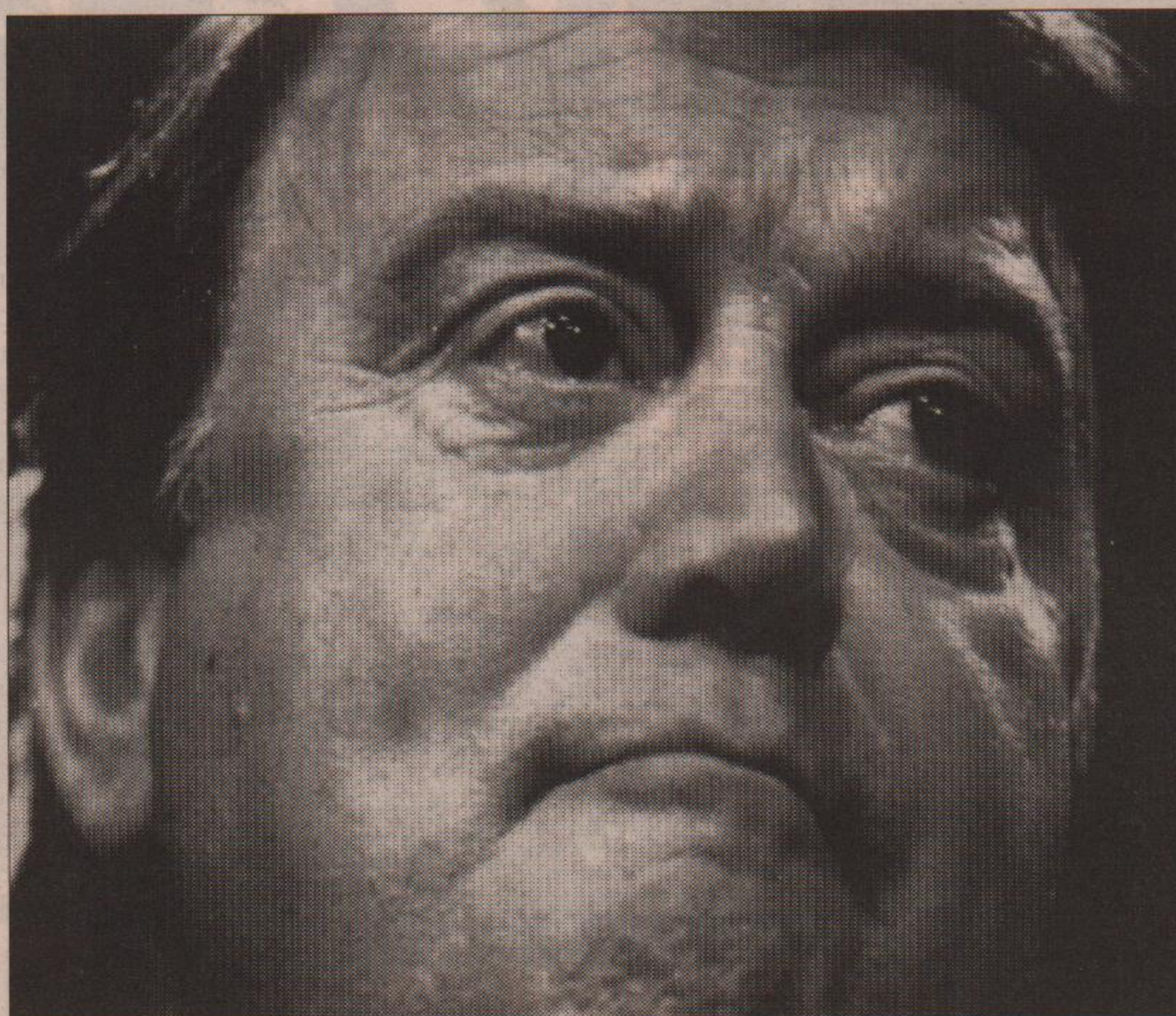
In the papers and on our television screens youth are constantly being scapegoated for society's ills. From gang violence to ruining schools it's the kids who are getting blamed. Karen Pearson examines the reality of growing up in modern Britain and shows why it is the youth who are the real victims.

- page 6



## Clinton's hollow victory

The recent elections returned Clinton as President on the lowest turn out since the 1920s. However the Republicans maintained their control of the Congress and the Senate. G R McColl looks at the implications of the results for the US working class. - page 10



# Tax the rich!

**A**S WE GO to press parliament is about to discuss Kenneth Clarke's pre-election budget. Discuss is the word. There will be no fight over the budget, no conflict at all between Labour and the dying Tory administration.

Most observers predict that Clarke will put together enough cuts to deliver a 1p or 2p income tax cut, or some other sweetener for the Tories' middle class voting base. Labour will probably abstain on tax cuts, like last year. Its alternative budget will again be based on the Tories' own tax and spending figures.

The shadow boxing over the budget shows just how successful the Tories have been in altering the terms of the argument over tax. Major and Blair agree that "tax and spend" is a thing of the past. Labour competes to offer bigger tax cuts.

When the Tories issued a list of Labour election commitments, and "costed" them at £30 billion, Blair's "rebuttal unit" was quick to deny they were commitments at all.

Against this background it is easy to forget the facts:

- Major has raised taxes. Over the last five years taxes have risen by the equivalent 7p in the pound, mainly by reducing allowances and bringing in new taxes on fuel and air travel. There have been 22 tax rises in all.
- Taxes are higher than under Labour. In 1979, taxation was just over 34% of national output (GDP). This year it is 36%.
- Tax increases have shifted wealth from poor to rich. Under Tory rule income tax has fallen as a share of total taxation from 34.4% to 26.8%, but VAT has risen from 9.6% to 19.3%. The top rate of income tax fell from 85p in the

pound to 40p. "Progressive" taxation - where the richer you are, the more you pay - has been replaced by regressive tax. According to the Labour Research Department:

"The burden of VAT and other indirect taxes falls much more heavily on the poor... in 1994-95 VAT took 11.1% of the incomes of the bottom fifth... but only 6.7% of the incomes of the top fifth."

At the same time corporation tax - the direct tax on capitalist profits, has fallen from 52% to 33%.

- Huge tax breaks are given to big business. The oil companies, for example, now pay only 16p on every £1 of profit. In 1986 they were paying 56 pence. The British tax system takes just 33% of their cash flow in tax, while Denmark's takes 54%. This means up to £3 billion in tax a year is lost to the Treasury - money that could be spent on hospitals or schools.
- The bosses are encouraged to avoid tax. This year the Treasury expects a shortfall of £6 billion on predicted VAT receipts and £5 billion on corporation tax - because of known loopholes in tax rules.

The facts are clear: the tax system penalises workers and rewards the bosses. Corporation tax accounts for just 9% of tax collected. The Income Tax and National Insurance deductions that appear on your wage slip account for 35% of tax. The rest comes from indirect taxes: VAT and Excise Duties, in other words, mainly from what workers spend on consumer goods and services.

Behind the arguments over who will cut taxes the most, lies the common acceptance by both Tories and Labour that the cost of the public sector will rise unless services are cut. Despite

all their vicious attacks, the Tories have actually presided over an increase in public spending. In part that was due to the backhanders to their friends via privatisation and contracting out, and the huge costs of mounting unemployment. But that is not the end of the story. In common with, for example, industrial production, the costs of modern equipment and more highly skilled labour are bound to rise.

That is why the ruling class' economists predict that, whoever wins the election and whatever they promise, taxes will have to rise. The only alternative is to abolish - not diminish, not cut - but abolish, welfare provision in this country. That is what is really at stake in the arguments over taxation.

The Labour left and centre call, traditionally, for higher income tax. Clare Short's announcement that "people like me" (she makes £35,000 a year as an MP) should "pay a bit more" was typically short-sighted. To a reformist it is unthinkable to challenge the social power of big business by massive taxes on the wealth of the rich.

That would be revolution. Instead, the old Labour tradition has been to make the middle classes and better paid workers shell out more tax, while big business carries on scamming to the tune of billions a year.

Such taxation policies are self-defeating. It is no use punishing doctors, computer programmers and small business people because Labour is too cowardly to punish the big corporations and their bosses.

Socialist policy on tax comes down to this: all wealth is created by workers, here and abroad. Part of that is paid directly to the workers as wages, what is left is ultimately divided between the direct consumption of the capitalists and their hangers on, capitalist investments and public spending.

Taxation policy should be aimed at increasing the share of total wealth returned to the workers via the state provision of services. Consequently, taxation should come from that part of total wealth taken as profits by the major capitalist institutions.

In practical terms that would mean a steeply progressive income tax, which starts to bite where salaries tail off and the income levels of the ruling class begin - around £50,000. On top of that we need a massive tax on profits and unearned wealth - dividends, capital gains, inheritances and so on.

The total wealth produced in UK plc is more than enough to provide decent housing, education and health services for everyone.

Any government that was serious about defending public services, reducing poverty, protecting the elderly and raising living standards would recognise that the taxation system was the most direct means of achieving its goals. Millions of workers believe, or at least hope, that the Labour Party, even under Blair, will make a start on shifting the balance of taxation back to the rich.

To them, Workers Power says that passively voting Labour and waiting for an improvement is guaranteed to encourage Blair to continue Tory policies.

Massive pressure in the form of strikes, demonstrations and occupations of threatened services could force Labour to reverse policy on some fronts but that would be met by a counter-attack from big business.

That is why even a progressive taxation policy will never be enough to achieve a socialist society.

The working class has to take control of the production of wealth itself and for that a different party from Labour old or new - a revolutionary

## WORKERS POWER

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## Higher Education Strikes

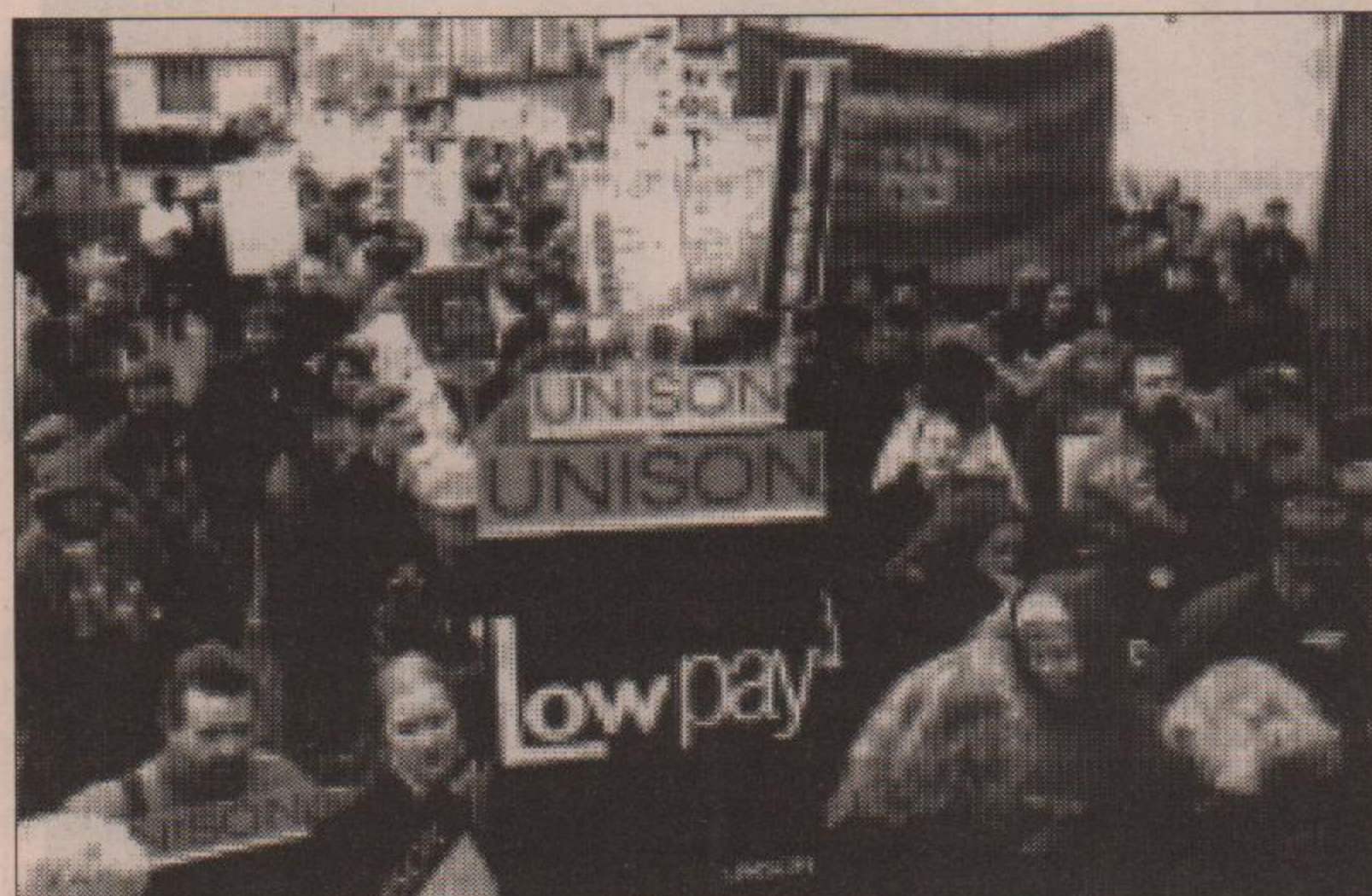
## University Challenge!

**UNIVERSITY WORKERS** staged their biggest ever strike on Tuesday 19 November. Picket lines went up around Britain. Libraries were closed and lectures cancelled.

The strike had solid support from members of eight different unions. In Bristol 1,000 marched; another 1,000 in Brighton and 2,000 packed a rally in Central Hall, Westminster. The General Secretary of the AUT lecturers' union told the rally it was a "general strike in higher education".

A Unison steward at Queen Mary and Westfield (QMW) college in East London described to *Workers Power*: "a lively day as around 100 people came on the picket line. It was great - deans of faculties alongside dinner ladies."

The action is in response to a pay offer of only 1.5% for lecturers and clerical workers and 2.5% for manual workers. But there is also a desire to fight the Tory cuts and restructuring which have led to an appalling deterioration in conditions. Lecturers have had to take on many more students, and so more administrative work with less resources. Jobs have been cut; as people leave they are not replaced and oth-



ers are expected to take on the extra work.

At present, the unions have announced no further strikes. Many Unison members are confident, but frustrated that no more strikes are on the cards. At QMW, Unison has been recruiting heavily since the strike was called. The action even won support

from some non-union staff. The danger is that anger will subside and momentum will be lost over the Christmas break.

University workers, particularly lecturers, have launched action short of strikes. They are boycotting quality assessments by external examiners. NATFHE members are discussing a

boycott of admissions procedures, preventing university management from recruiting students for next year. Unison clerical staff are also withdrawing goodwill. Staff are looking at a possible boycott of work related to exams, which would mark a significant escalation of the dispute.

A problem with all of these limited actions are that most take time to bite. Union stewards may also find themselves bogged down in supervising what can and can't be done, rather than campaigning. But the major problem is that they don't involve all workers in joint action. The single most impressive aspect of the November strike was the unity of workers from the eight different unions.

The employers are seeking to break up the alliance. Six universities have already broken with national bargaining and offered separate pay deals to their staff. Others will be watching the dispute closely to see if they too can get away with local deals.

An adequate reply from the unions will require more national strikes, alongside a boycott of recruitment and exams. ■

## Link the fights

**MANY STUDENTS** fully supported the strike action. Even the Blairite leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) backed the day of strikes.

The action had, however, given them a cynical excuse to oppose a national demonstration the following day in central London. That march still attracted 5,000 in opposition to tuition fees, now advocated by the NUS leadership.

When combined, the two events highlight the potential for a movement that could win both dramatic improvement for university staff and students. The Campaign for Free Education, which called the 20 November march, needs to organise student action groups on every campus, linked to activists from the staff unions around the fight to win staff support for student actions and to force both the NUS and Labour Party to give unconditional support to strikes by the university workforce. ■

## Benefit Agency

## Strike out this blueprint!

**BENEFITS AGENCY** (BA) offices throughout Wales shut early on Friday 15 November as staff walked out. Their unofficial strike was a spontaneous show of anger at the government's announcement of massive job cuts and office closures.

The so-called "consultative" document, *Blueprint for the Future*, is explicit in its aims of cutting BA jobs and services in preparation for contracting out and full-blown privatisation.

While privatisation is their eventual goal, management also plan to subcontract work from elsewhere and develop a "mixed economy", with the involvement of the private sector.

The plan is to cut staff by 20%.

Initially, the agency's bosses are looking to slice administration costs by 25% through "greater exploitation of information technology, wider involvement of the private sector... and through 'Purchaser/Provider' contracting". After the implementation costs, they project annual savings of £12.3 million.

The Tories' blueprint will have a devastating impact on claimants' lives.

Seventeen out of 32 Benefits Agency Offices are to close, some in 1997 and the rest by 1999. In addition, all Public Caller Offices, many serving isolated rural areas, will be closed by 1998.

The remaining 15 offices will not be

able to provide the same service and rural areas will be especially hard-hit. The remaining offices will become "processing units" and "telephone banks", where everything will be done by phone. Payment books and giro cards are to be replaced by cards to prevent fraud. Anyone in need of a crisis loan will have to contact one of only three offices left in Wales to deal with such emergencies.

The only staffing section not facing cuts is - surprise, surprise - the one dealing with fraud. These BA "police" will become responsible for all interviews, designed to further intimidate those signing on.

The substance of the document is

not up for negotiation; management only want to discuss how to implement the job cuts and office closures.

In response, the PTC has planned strike action for 19 January. CPSEA activists are now trying to force their own leadership to ballot for strike action to stop the plans dead in their tracks.

The united response of both unions in walking out was an excellent start. Now the task will be to maintain and increase the pressure to force management to back down. Union members cannot rely on their bureaucrats to deliver effective action. It is necessary for militants in the workplaces to organise together and, where

possible, to link up with all those using the service to force the government to back down.

This is not just a Welsh fight. Across Britain, BA management are preparing similar attacks on their workforces and on all claimants. The struggle to defend jobs and the services we provide can be won.

The confidence shown on 15 November must be built on to show the bosses that we will defend ourselves, even if it means defying the anti-union laws. It will also warn the trade union leadership that they must take up the issue and lead effective action. And if they won't: we can - and will! ■

## School exclusions

## Fight the real enemy

**THE NUMBER** of children excluded from school continues to rise. The media debate over who is to blame grows fiercer.

One day the tabloids say the kids themselves are to blame. According to Gillian Shephard, Tory Education Secretary, teachers are responsible. According to the Observer's Melanie Philips the whole nation is in a state of dreadful moral decline.

The truth is that schools are failing children because of:

## ● Selection

Schools have been encouraged to select their students. More state schools now seek to attract the best students and keep out the difficult ones.

## ● Competition

Schools are pitted against each other. League tables are published and parents advised to send their children to those with the best results. These schools can then select those they want, leaving all the disruptive and needy kids with no choice.

## ● Resources

Everyone knows about the education cuts. But resources are also targeted, not on the "bad" schools, but on the allegedly good ones. Extra funding goes to grant maintained schools. The gap widens and it becomes increasingly difficult for the weaker schools to do anything about the situation.

The result is a growing list of "dustbin schools".

These realities stem from years of Tory education policies, which have led to sink schools and abysmal education for millions of working class children.

The Ridings School in Halifax illustrates all too well the end result of Tory policy. Chronically underfunded, it was formed out of an involuntary amalgamation of two local schools. The school received promises of millions in extra money to help the transition - promises which were never kept.

There are two selective grammar schools in the same area as Ridings. It cannot have a mixed ability group of pupils because the most able have

already gone elsewhere. The Ridings also has to pick up all those kids which the other school want: those with learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Over 100 pupils at the Ridings have Special Educational Needs; the two grammar schools have a total of three.

Faced with the impact of Tory education policy, the response from the two major teachers' unions has been either hysterical or complacent. The NAS/UWT has run a high-profile campaign, motivated by a drive to recruit at the expense of its rival, the NUT. The NAS/UWT has no strategy for addressing the fundamental problems of underfunding and the divisive impact of selection.

General Secretary Nigel DeGruchy joined the tabloids in demonising kids. If his members at Ridings School are made redundant - they are currently under threat - or when they collapse after endless inspections, will they thank DeGruchy for taking up the case?

The NAS/UWT campaign has played straight into the hands of the

Tories. At Ridings 60 children, not cuts and selection, were singled out by the NAS/UWT as the cause of the problem. It was not difficult then for Shephard's inspectors to suggest that the Ridings teachers weren't doing their job.

The NUT - supposedly a more progressive union - has been utterly silent. NUT chief Doug McAvooy won't say anything of substance for fear of embarrassing his New Labour friends. They are not promising to reverse cuts, stop league tables or abolish selection.

The political weakness of the left within the NUT is evident in the lack of any coherent alternative to the NAS/UWT offensive.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has committed its members to opposing all exclusions: a hopelessly liberal policy that allows the NAS/UWT to pose as the real defenders of teachers' conditions at work, and of the right of the majority of pupils to an uninterrupted education.

The SWP brands as "reactionary" all teachers who are willing to take action to exclude a pupil. But exclusions and removal to special units - and strike action to enforce this against the will of penny-pinching education authorities - are a legitimate tactic. Such actions represent the attempt by teachers - usually supported by the majority of working class parent - to impose their own will on management: to make the authorities pay for special educational

needs for the minority; to refuse to let the effects of cuts damage the education of the majority.

The SWP's position rests on the fact that all the kids excluded are working class. The vast majority of excluded kids are indeed working class and a very large proportion are black. Evidence based on OFSTED inspections in 1993-94 show the rate of Black Caribbean kids being excluded is almost six times that for white kids.

Yes, these are the pupils who end up going to sink schools. They deserve much better. But so do other working class kids who go to these schools and so do the teachers who work in them. Basing your response solely on the social class of a pupil who is excluded does not address the central problems.

The response to the rise in exclusions has to be a fight against the damage inflicted by the Tories: fighting every cut, every job loss, every attempt to increase selection, and for the re-imposition of the tests boycott. Putting the blame on either teachers or children will only play into the Tories' hands.

At the same time trade unionists should support teachers' strikes to force the authorities to meet the special needs of pupils, whether that be in the form of special provision, special schools or - in the worst cases - temporary exclusion as part of the fight for such provisions. ■

## Hours: Row over EU directive exposes Sweatshop Britain PLC



"Dinner ladies": The EU working time directive would give them three week's paid holiday a year.

**JOHN MAJOR** promised no end to the Inter-Governmental Conference unless they assured him there would be no limit on the working week for British workers. To the cheers of the Tory backbenchers, Major promised to block the implementation of a European Court ruling, issued on 12 November, that would require Britain to introduce a maximum 48-hour week.

The government, together with significant sections of the bosses, are dead against any regulation of the working week.

British workers spend more hours at work than their brothers and sisters anywhere in the European Union (EU). More than a fifth do a week exceeding 48 hours. Thirty one per cent of all full-time employees in Britain regularly work more than 46 hours, compared to less than 2% of the Dutch workforce and under 8% of the German. Figures from the government's own Labour Force Survey suggest that in any given week, more than four million will work more than 48 hours.

A key component of the Tories' strategy for giving British capital a competitive edge, and attracting investment from abroad, relies on maintaining a low wage economy. In industries like transport, hotels and catering, and sig-

nificant non-union parts of manufacturing, low wages and the fear of the sack compel workers to do punishing amounts of overtime.

New Labour offers no real alternative. Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown has already reassured the bosses, in his speech to the Confederation of British Industry, that a future Labour government might well defy the introduction of this and other EU social legislation that damages "British competitiveness".

Ironically, despite all the fuss, the impact of the EU directive will be minimal since it is riddled with loopholes. Under the directive bosses will still be able to require workers to work weeks above 60 hours, so long as the four-month average does not top 48. Likewise, many jobs in agriculture and the tourist industry will be exempt.

There are progressive elements in the EU directive, but it does nothing to address the underlying causes of overtime working and over long working weeks, which lie in poverty pay and the chronic understaffing of vital services like the NHS. Nor does it guarantee real protection.

The effective enforcement of its provisions will depend on dramatically increasing the strength of unions in the workplace – not the goodwill of the

judges in Brussels.

Long hours translate into a much greater danger of accidents at work, stress and ill health. It is an indictment of capitalism that instead of using technological advance to increase the leisure time of workers, it is using it to sack thousands and force those in jobs to work longer hours. As ineffective as the EU ruling is, the Tories' stance on it shows them to be the sweatshop party. Labour's hesitancy on it is unpardonable.

More than a century ago, much of the European labour movement rallied behind the call for a 40-hour week. The idea that we are arguing now over 48 hours shows just how little capitalism has progressed in that time.

Labour must be forced to act on this question, not only to end the terrible working conditions that are being inflicted on us by long hours, but to tackle head on the problem of mass unemployment.

We fight for:

- A legally enforced 35-hour week now with no loss of pay and no intensification of work;
- A ban on all overtime working;
- A sliding scale of working hours : divide the available work between all those fit to do it, with no loss of pay.■

## POST: Unofficial strikes spread Vote no and fight the victimisations

**TENS OF** thousands of postal workers will be casting their votes in December on the deal finally stitched-up by their union leadership and the Royal Mail negotiating team.

The executive of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has recommended acceptance of an agreement that only postpones a national battle over teamworking and related issues until the spring of 1997. Meanwhile, provocations by Royal Mail bosses continue.

As we go to press 2,000 CWU members in Edinburgh and Fife are staging unofficial strikes, rejecting the advice of John Keggie - their divisional representative and the supposed leader of the "left" on the union executive - to return to work. Management at Edinburgh's main sorting office triggered the dispute by bringing in temporary staff, riding roughshod over agreed procedures.

Though rebuffed by the strikers at a mass meeting on 22 November, Keggie spoke of the justified "anger and frustration" of CWU members. He said of Royal Mail bosses:

"On the one hand, they want a

national peace deal and on the other they try and erode terms and conditions locally."

He is right on that score.

Elsewhere, workers at the NDO sorting office in North London have staged a pair of one-day strikes in defence of Garry Welsh, a sacked workmate. A ballot in Oxfordshire indicated massive support in the branch to win the reinstatement of a victimised branch secretary.

CWU members in Liverpool also walked out unofficially in November over management provocations. And from Manchester to Birmingham there have been ballots for action in response to the sacking of activists.

At a national level, postal workers should vote to reject the latest package – not least because it does not address the question of victimisations up and down the country. It also falls far short of the union's original demands around the length of the working week. Crucially, the "joint working parties", due to report back next year, will operate in a framework where the introduction will be seen as both acceptable and necessary.

The Tories' privatisation plans for the Royal Mail may be off the immediate agenda, but New Labour's schemes for greater commercial freedom will dictate many of the same management measures.

It is clear that the CWU national leadership used the second national ballot, which registered continuing support for the fight against teamworking (61% in favour on a 78% turnout), merely as a bargaining chip. Now, militants face an uphill battle to secure a rejection of the deal. It is not enough, however, to just say "no".

CWU members urgently need an alternative strategy for resisting Royal Mail's attacks that goes beyond the limits of localised skirmishes, on the one hand, and bureaucratically managed national disputes on the other.

The building of an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement is urgent. It must be based on the activists who came forward in the past six months of struggle and committed to the building of an indefinite national strike to secure a victory on teamworking, second deliveries, job security and the 35-hour week.■



## Defend Brian Higgins

Brian Higgins was the author of the very first "Whistleblower" column in Workers Power 18 months ago. Brian has, in recent years, been central to sustaining the Building Workers Group, an organising focus for militant members of site unions, especially UCATT. **G.R. McColl** reports on recent attempts to silence this militant class fighter.

**I**N THE first "Whistleblower" column, Brian Higgins offered a devastating indictment of the bosses' system for the treatment it metes out to blue collar workers and their families hit by mesothelioma – a cancer triggered by exposure to asbestos.

The piece was passionate and well-informed. Over the past 25 years, Brian's name has become synonymous with stubbornly militant trade unionism on building sites up and down the country. He has sacrificed his livelihood in defence of the health and safety, pay and conditions of his fellow construction workers.

During the lock-out at Laing's British Library site in 1986, he was the subject of death threats, but successfully defied a High Court injunction.

Though blacklisted by the industry's bosses, Brian is secretary of UCATT's Northampton branch, from where he is a scourge of overpaid, time-serving bureaucrats at the top of the unions.

Now, one of those bureaucrats, regional official Dominic Hehir, is out to silence Brian's critical voice using the courts.

Hehir has initiated High Court libel proceedings against Brian. The suit is in connection with Brian's blunt assessment of Hehir's conduct in the case of a Southwark Direct Labour Organisation worker and UCATT shop steward, John Jones.

In another Southwark 1995, Jones and another Southwark worker (a plumber in the EPIU) lost their jobs when the Council hived off building repairs to the private contractor, Botes. The protection supposedly afforded by the European Union-backed TUPE provision did not extend to these workers.

Hehir, as a full-time official in the London region, had responsibility for Jones' case. Not only did Hehir categorically refuse to back the November 1995 unofficial action mobilised in support of the two sacked men – all too common for any union bureaucrat – but he also declined to represent Jones in the subsequent industrial tribunal process. The EPIU member received this basic support from his union.

Brian sought to bring Hehir's real record to light in a letter to the Irish Post in September 1996, in leaflets produced by the Building Workers Group and in a pamphlet documenting the Group's history.

For his troubles, he received a letter from a firm of supposedly left-wing solicitors, Christian Fisher, claiming that his written allegations "... have caused considerable loss and damage to our client [Hehir]".

The letter goes on to demand "an unconditional apology and retraction", as well as a commitment to "pay substantial damages and legal costs within the next seven days." Louise Christian, partner in the firm of Christian Fisher, has represented UCATT in the past and wrote a regular column in the UCATT journal, *Viewpoint*.

Since this letter in early October,

a writ has been served on Brian and Christian Fisher have applied for an injunction in an attempt to block Brian repeating his charges against Hehir. Clearly, an argument – albeit a bitter one – within UCATT over the conduct of a little-known, local dispute has taken on a whole new dimension.

Hehir's decision to pursue a libel case in the courts is an abuse of the power of his office. The union has long-standing grievance procedures for resolving arguments between members. Any member of the union can also appeal directly to the rank and file members if they feel that their position has been unfairly criticised. Hehir has not used these internal democratic procedures.

If he succeeds now in this legal assault on Brian's right to criticise his performance as a full-time paid official, it will set a dangerous precedent for the whole labour movement. And an unelected judge, steeped in hatred for the organised working class, will become the censor of debate within the unions. The rights of rank and file members to criticise officials will have been successfully challenged and union democracy seriously damaged.

The case of Hehir versus Higgins poses another question: where exactly is the money coming from to finance this action? Libel cases are notoriously expensive, and legal aid is not available to them.

UCATT members must start asking questions about how their money is spent. The libel action raises serious issues about UCATT's democracy and the accountability of officials whose bloated salaries are paid for by the membership.

Could it be that Hehir is using UCATT funds to underwrite his pursuit of Brian Higgins? We don't know. But, if evidence emerges that Hehir, or any other bureaucrat, is using UCATT money in this fashion, members should use every available channel to block such a gross misappropriation of funds and oust from office anyone responsible for a real crime against both UCATT and the labour movement.

Brian needs and merits the support of all our readers and every decent union member in UCATT and beyond.

A campaign was launched in November to defend Brian's right to free speech through raising the issue in union branches and collecting donations to pay for his legal defence. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 10 December at 7.00 pm in the Jolly Gardeners pub, Euston Street, London NW1.

Resolutions in support of Brian against Hehir's legal action should go UCATT's national office, 177 Abbeville Road, London SW4.

To find out more, please contact:  
Brian Higgins Defence Campaign  
c/o Colin Roach Centre  
56 Clarence Road  
London E5 8SW  
Tel: 0181 533 7111

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE YOUTH OF TODAY?

# NO JOBS NO MONEY NO FUTURE NO FREEDOM

**F**IRST IT was asylum seekers, then it was beggars and single mothers: now it is "kids". Young people have become the latest in a long list of scapegoats for the ills of capitalist society.

We are told with monotonous regularity that declining discipline and respect for authority among youth is the root of all Britain's social ills. We are told that young people are violent, unruly and need to be taught how to act as responsible law abiding citizens. "Cane them, expel them from school, tag them and jail them" is the recipe of the guardians of the establishment.

In response to the crisis that erupted in the Ridings school in Halifax, Gillian Shephard, Education Secretary, advocated the return of corporal punishment as the solution to "unruly" students. What she failed to mention is that Tory policies have left schools under-resourced, with large classes and a demoralised workforce. It is not surprising that under these conditions, frustration from both teachers and students can lead to the sort of problems witnessed at Ridings.

### Wrecked lives

The Tories are hypocrites. It is their ruthless cuts in education, their policies of mass unemployment, their refusal to provide decent training that has increased young people's alienation, creating the conditions for a minority to turn to violence and crime.

The Tories have done everything in their power to wreck the lives of working class youth. Since they came to power they have thrown millions of youth on the dole. Government statistics from the Labour Market Trends show that in 1979 there were over two million people under 21 in work; by 1994 there were only 700,000.

The Tories have ruthlessly driven youth into low-wage, casual labour. Should 16-18 year olds be lucky enough to find work the wages they are expected to live on are pitiful. A 1995 study by the Labour Research Department revealed just how badly young workers are exploited.

- Workers under 18 have seen their wages fall from 42% of the average adult wage in 1979 to just 35% in 1994.
- Almost half the vacancies in Job centres fall between a rate of £3-£3.99 an hour, and 27% of the jobs offered are less than £3 per hour. The survey found that 47% of jobs advertised were part time.
- It is estimated that one third of the jobs on offer to youth between 16-18 are below subsistence level and that they would be better off on benefits. The problem is that Tory laws has denied them any right to benefits.

The government's Youth Training programmes are a joke. For £45 youth are expected to work up to a 40 hour week without any real chance of a job at the end. In many cases the training amounts to nothing more than being a general skivvy.

When the Tories negotiated Britain's opt-out from the European Union directive giving a measure of protection to young workers the then Employment Secretary, David Hunt, said it was "good news for the UK and for our young people in particular. It means that teenagers will still be able to deliver newspapers and do part-time jobs at the weekend as they have always done."

### Cheap labour

It was certainly good news for the employers. Labour Research estimates that the bosses save £400 million a year in labour costs and national insurance contributions through youth employment. For example, a checkout assistant under 18 gets paid £2.80 an hour while an adult gets £4.08 an hour. Because many under 18 year olds are working part-time, in between school or college, the bosses save millions of pounds through not having to pay national insurance contributions.

Discrimination is not limited to low pay. Young workers are often employed in workplaces with no union recognition. They are victims of unsafe conditions and work practices, unfair dismissal and no redundancy rights.

Last year a Staffordshire firm was fined £3,000 for employing nine children between the ages of 13 and 14. The factory itself was a health and safety disaster area: an inadequately trained young worker was using a fork lift truck; there were unsafe electric sockets; a guillotine was not properly fenced.

Employers fined for forcing youth to work in dangerous conditions are the



Pupils at Ridings school: the press blames the victims of Tory cuts

exception rather than the rule. There are thousands of sweatshops up and down the country employing cheap labour, putting young people's lives at risk and getting away with it.

The Tories boast about having drawn more young people than ever before into post-16 education. The reality is that this has created an even larger "reserve army" of cheap labour. Education no longer comes with a living grant and student poverty is reaching epidemic proportions.

Young people are forced to work for a pittance in part-time, casual jobs which suits the bosses and their drive for profit. When recession hits, the bosses can sack youth without having to pay out redundancy money.

Poverty wages ensure that young people are still dependent on their families for support. Working class youth are forced to stay at home because they simply cannot afford to move out. This denies them independence and places a greater burden on families to support young people rather than the state.

For many youth leaving home isn't a matter of weighing up the pros and cons of whether they can afford to live independently. Thousands are leading a des-

perate existence of fear, pain and violence and are forced to leave despite having nowhere else to live.

### Poverty trap

Shelter, the housing charity, estimates that there are 195,000 homeless young people in Britain - 50,000 of them in London. This is a 300% increase from 1979. It is a direct consequence of Tory rule.

There is a severe shortage of affordable accommodation. Since the Tories brought in their home ownership policies over one million council houses have been sold. There have been no major new building programmes by councils and the 1988 Housing Act, which led to the deregulation of rent controls, means that rents have soared in the private sector. Thousands of youth cannot afford to rent their own place and are forced onto the streets.

All benefits for 16-18 years olds have been scrapped. This shifts the responsibility for support onto families who are already struggling to cope. But what do you do if you have no family to support you? You beg, like thousands of young people. It is estimated that 63% of youth staying at Centerpoint's homeless hostels in London have no income at all. The new job

Seekers Allowance (JSA) introduced two months ago is yet another attack on youth. Benefit rates for the under 24s have been cut by 20% to £37.90 a week.

The DSS no longer offers grants to help young people buy essential furniture to kit out their new home. The consequence of this policy is graphically illustrated by the example of a 17 year old from Cardiff, reported in a study by Dr Barnardo's, who was offered a council flat but had no furniture. He was forced to turn down the offer and instead was housed in a Bed and Breakfast which cost £120 a week. He couldn't find work that paid enough to cover the rent and so remained on the dole. Thousands of youth are caught in this poverty trap.

Entitlement to full Housing Benefit for under 25s is no longer guaranteed if the rent is deemed to be above the "market rent" for their area. This means youth will be forced into slum housing or expected to stay at home until they are 25.

### Discrimination

In every aspect of social and political life youth are discriminated against. The Age of Consent law tells us we are unable to make decisions about our sex life if we are under 16 and can be prosecuted even for having consensual sex.

Tory cuts have eroded leisure and entertainment facilities. Cinemas, clubs and sports facilities are overpriced and there are very few safe, cheap venues for youth to hang out. You are forced to hang out on street corners and put up with regular abuse from the police, particularly if you are black.

When young people try to express themselves through the music and dance scene they are harassed by the police. The Criminal Justice Act (CJA) gives the police the right to shut down raves and parties, requisition equipment and lock up the organisers. Despite the fact that youth have to suffer the consequences of this system they are denied the right to vote until the age of 18.

All this isn't just the product of Tory rule. This is what capitalism means for youth. In a system based upon exploitation and profit, it is youth - along with other oppressed sections of the working class, women, black people, lesbians and gay men - who suffer the worst.

The bosses have no interest in helping young people make the transition into independent adulthood. Instead they want young people to remain under the authority of the family for as long as possible. They know how important the role of the family is for the maintenance of their system. The family is where we learn to obey authority and "respect our elders". It is where we learn to do as we are told.

In the family we have no power. If we challenge the authority and values of our parents we face the possibility of being

thrown out. The family also provides a very important economic function for capitalism. It feeds and clothes young people, provides a home, helps support youth through school and college, ensures that young people don't starve when they are unemployed.

When the family doesn't fulfil this function, when hundreds and thousands of young people are forced to leave home, capitalism is incapable of supporting them. Instead, it leaves young people to scrape out an existence on the streets through begging, petty crime and prostitution.

To give young people support would mean to offer us the opportunity to have training, free education, decent wages, a decent home. This costs money, money the bosses aren't prepared to spend.

### Fightback

This system is incapable of giving equal rights to young people because it serves the interests of the capitalist system to keep young people in their place. Under capitalism, youth are just another commodity to be used in workplace or as cannon fodder for wars to defend profits.

That is why youth have to fight against not just unemployment or the JSA or the CJA but the whole system.

Only socialism can offer an end to the oppression of youth. A socialist society would ensure that youth have an independent income, full access to benefits and a vote - all from the age of 16.

Under socialism the functions of the family would be progressively replaced by other, more communal forms of living - providing the escape from abuse and oppression that the capitalist "care" system can only reinforce.

That is what young comrades in *Revolution* - the youth magazine produced by supporters of Workers Power - are committed to fighting for: a socialist society that can really free young people from all the ills of the profit system. ■

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The fighting paper for working  
class youth

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# Michael Collins and the Irish Revolution

**NEIL JORDAN'S** film *Michael Collins* has been greeted with outrage by the Tory press. They have denounced it as "IRA propaganda". Even now, 75 years later, the ruling class cannot stomach a film that shows even a glimpse of British imperialism's bloody repression of Ireland.

It is a gripping film which shows the

courage and resourcefulness of the tiny Republican forces pitted against the most powerful and ruthless empire in the world.

Yet it is also a film with a propaganda message. This is not the Michael Collins who sanctioned the partition of Ireland, split the Republicans and fought a civil war with British arms and support.

Rather, this is the Michael Collins who "went the final mile" for peace and paid for it with his life.

In effect, this is Michael Collins as Gerry Adams in his incarnation as "man of peace".

**John McKee** looks at Collins' role in the revolutionary crisis that gripped Ireland and the politics that led him to sue for peace.

**WHEN MICHAEL** Collins emerged, hands in the air, from the wreckage of the Dublin Post Office in 1916, he was convinced that defeat had been caused by bad organisation. Within three years, he had transformed the republican forces and went on to become a legendary organiser of modern guerrilla war.

Collins was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), a secret society formed in 1907. The IRB were revolutionary nationalists who saw winning independence as an essentially military question.

The 1916 Easter Rising had already shown the weakness of such a perspective. No attempt had been made to involve the Dublin workers despite their record of mass militancy. As a result, most viewed it with bewilderment, even hostility.

It was the reaction of the British which turned the Rising into a popular mass cause. The leaders of the movement were summarily tried and shot. James Connolly, unable to stand and suffering from a gangrenous wound, was tied to a chair to face the firing squad. Fourteen leaders were executed and 5,500 imprisoned or deported.

Collins was deported to an internment camp in Wales where he proceeded to recruit for the IRB. Released and back in Dublin by 1917, he was elected Director of Organisation at the Sinn Fein convention in October.

## Changing

The political situation in Ireland was already changing. Lloyd George had proposed Home Rule again after the Rising, suggesting it be applied first to the 26 counties in the South - a clear threat of partition. The constitutionalist Irish Party lost a series of by-elections to Sinn Fein. In April 1918, the British Parliament extended conscription to Ireland. The result was a massive explosion of opposition that united all nationalist forces.

In April, a Conference brought together the Irish Party, which had withdrawn from Westminster, Sinn Fein and the Irish TUC and formed a "National Cabinet". The ITUC called a 24-hour general strike which was massively successful. Two days later the British government discovered a "German Plot" and again interned the majority of the leaders of Sinn Fein.

In December 1918, Lloyd George called a snap election. Sinn Fein stood on a platform of abstention from Westminster and for an independent Republic. Despite the fact that 43 of their 73 candidates were in jail, the party won an overwhelming victory.

By 1919, a revolutionary crisis was developing. In Dublin, Sinn Fein deputies met as the first Dail Eireann (parliament) and ratified the establishment of the Republic that had been declared in 1916. It called a tax strike and a boycott of British institutions such as the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).

Sinn Fein grew by leaps and bounds. So too did the labour movement as workers flocked to join the unions. The ITGWU, which was built by Connolly and had 12,000 members in 1917, grew to 68,000 by 1918 - and doubled



this by 1920. Between 1916 and 1920 affiliates to the Irish Labour Party and TUC rose from 100,000 to 225,000, a quarter of Irish wage earners.

A wave of strikes gripped the country. In Belfast, the engineers led a general strike for the 44-hour week, uniting catholic and protestant workers, much to the discomfort of Carson's all-class Unionist movement. May Day saw 100,000 strikers marching behind red flags.

As in the rest of Europe, workers looked to the Russian Revolution and tried to imitate its organisations. In Limerick workers protested at the shooting of an IRA man in hospital. The protest led to a strike against the military occupation. For two weeks in April a "Limerick Soviet" was declared and nothing moved in the city without its permission.

## Strike

Dockers refused to unload military cargoes and for several months railworkers would not move military personnel. In April 1920, there was a hunger strike by republican and trade union prisoners held without trial in Mountjoy prison. Demonstrations of 40,000 pressed at the prison gates. Tanks and troops were deployed and the government refused to release the prisoners.

A national general strike, called by the ITUC, was so big that within 24 hours the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord French, ordered the prisoners' release.

But, despite the growing strength and militancy of the workers' movement, it had one crucial weakness. Its Labour Party and trade union leaders opposed mobilisation in the struggle for national independence and socialism. They argued that workers' demands would have to wait until after independence.

Exactly the opposite path was necessary at this time. The best possibility to win protestant workers away from Unionism lay in the fight for a Workers' Republic. That meant fighting the influence of the church and the petit bourgeois nationalism of Sinn Fein, and for socialist revolution as the only sure method of achieving self-determination and national independence. It meant fighting for the perspective of permanent revolution.

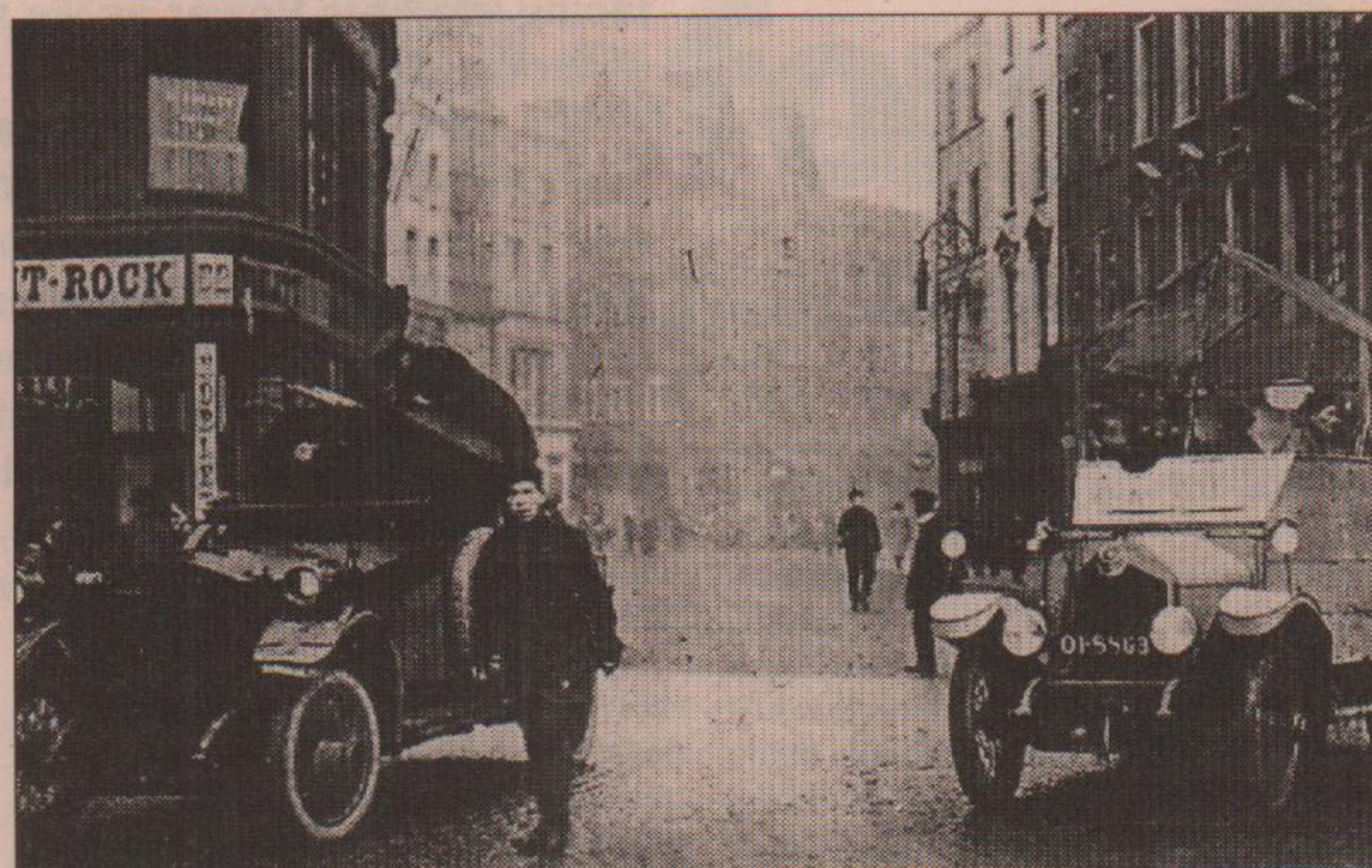
## Perspective

This chance was lost. In 1919-20, there was no party in Ireland, or Britain, which would fight for such a perspective.

Soon the British were pouring reinforcements into Ireland. The Dail was suppressed and Sinn Fein papers banned. In early 1920, in response to an IRA campaign against RIC members, a new force of "Black and Tans", British ex-servicemen, was given free rein to terrorise the Irish population.

In March 1920, Tomas MacCurraigh, the Lord Mayor of Cork, was shot in front of his family by a group of men who broke into his home. The inquest jury found that he was "wilfully murdered" and that the "murder was organised by the Royal Irish Constabulary, officially directed by the British government".

The jury was absolutely right, but these extra-judicial killings continued throughout 1920 and 1921. While Republicans bore the brunt of murder and torture, the labour movement was also a target. Many co-operatives were ransacked and burnt to the ground. Trade union officials were targeted, many were murdered. In December, in retaliation for an attack on Auxiliaries, Black and Tans entered Cork and set fire to the city, leav-



Collins (left). Black and tans (above)

ing a million pounds worth of damage.

As the military struggle increased, Michael Collins came into his own. He organised the network of agents and supplies necessary for a guerrilla struggle. He set up underground newspapers, organised the national loan bonds which financed the war and established an intelligence network of porters, cleaners, postmen and warders. His spies were active even in the heart of Dublin Castle.

With de Valera, the president of the Republic, absent in America, Collins became a legend; the man the British most wanted eliminated. A special group of intelligence officers, known as the Cairo Gang because of their experience in the Middle East, were brought in to track him down. However, it was Collins' squad that raided the gang's safe houses, killing 19 officers and RIC men and virtually eliminating the gang.

Dublin Castle's reply was swift. Black and Tans drove to a Gaelic football match at Croke Park and opened fire on the crowd, killing 14 and injuring hundreds. This became known throughout Ireland as "Bloody Sunday".

Despite the heroism of the IRA and the ingenuity of its leaders, the struggle was on the defensive by 1921. A major blow to the mass struggle had been struck in the North. Following big Sinn Fein gains in the local elections of 1920, the Unionists unleashed a ferocious assault on catholics. The government set up the B Specials, part time policemen recruited from the Orange lodges, to wreak sectarian terror.

## Pogroms

In July, a prominent Unionist addressed shipyard workers, calling for a "holy war" to drive the catholics out. In the next five days, pogroms were launched, 17 catholics were killed, 200 injured, thousands driven from their homes. By 20 August not a single catholic was left of the 5,000 who had worked in the shipyards. British troops stood by without intervening. Between June 1920 and June 1922, 428 catholics were killed, nearly 2,000 wounded and 23,000 made homeless. The Unionist statelet was established in a sectarian bloodbath.

Throughout 1920, Lloyd George kept lines of communication open to "moderate" Republicans, while the "war party" in the cabinet was given its head. The May 1921 elections gave him his chance to take the initiative.

In the South, Sinn Fein swept the board. In Ulster, the Unionists won a solid majority. Lloyd George announced that the Home Rule Act would come into force in the North and by June a Northern Irish government had started functioning. At the same time, he proposed peace negotiations with Sinn Fein, backed up by the threat of two hundred thousand troops being sent to the South.

The leadership of Sinn Fein, de Valera, Griffith and Collins, knew that the

British would never concede a 32-county Republic. Yet they agreed to enter negotiations. When they were offered dominion status within the empire for just 26 counties, the negotiating team, led by Collins and Griffith, could see no alternative but to accept it.

Collins argued in the Dail that the Treaty was a "stepping stone" to an all-Ireland Republic. Privately, he argued that the IRA's limited armed forces could never defeat British imperialism. For de Valera, who stayed in Dublin during the negotiations, the treaty went too far, although he too would have settled for some sort of external association with the British empire. When the Dail ratified the Treaty in January 1922, by 64 votes to 57, Sinn Fein was irrevocably split.

## Split

More seriously for Collins, the IRA also split, with the majority against the treaty. From January to June, both sides armed and manoeuvred for position. The elections of June gave the Collins forces a resounding victory in the Dail and the new Free State army opened hostilities against their opponents.

The Civil War that followed played out to the bitter end the cruel contradictions of the republicans' strategy. Free State forces, now armed by the British, pounded the centre of Dublin and, on 22 August, Collins was assassinated by the Cork brigade he himself had trained. In May 1923, the last units of the anti-Treaty forces were stood down by de Valera.

The creation of the Free State was a defeat for the British, but a limited one. At the high point of mass working class mobilisations, the potential existed not only to liberate all of Ireland but to spread revolution to Britain itself. By limiting the struggle to military objectives and tactics, the Collins leadership demobilised the mass of the population and handed the initiative to the British.

Militarily superior, the British were able to limit their losses, setting up a sectarian statelet in the North and, most importantly, avoiding the possibility that the Irish national question would coalesce with the wave of working class struggles in Britain and on the continent.

The result of the treaty Collins signed was the partition that led directly to the struggle in Ireland today. It was a cruel betrayal of the fight for national independence for the whole of Ireland and it was the direct result of the republicans' refusal to recognise the centrality of the working class for the triumph of that struggle.

Workers in Ireland today, North and South, should learn this lesson from Collins' life and ensure that there is no repeat betrayal as the century draws to its end. Only working class leadership of the national struggle, as part of the fight for socialism in Ireland, can guarantee the final defeat of British imperialism. ■

**PERSPECTIVES** Workers Power Conference debates the shape of the class struggle

# Britain on the eve

## Labour vs the unions

**T**ONY BLAIR'S *Road to the Manifesto* indicates his readiness for government office. It is a codification of New Labour's new policies. While it retains some promises of reform for the working class (minimum wage etc.) it is a thoroughgoing break with the policies of old Labourism.

The biggest question facing us, and the Labour Party, is how long it will be before the mass of workers revolt against an anti-working class Blair government. At one level, the "wait for Labour mood" is still powerful amongst the masses but, at another, sections of the labour movement are already going beyond that. Within the trade union bureaucracy those leaders most under pressure from beleaguered public sector and other low paid workers, such as Bickerstaffe and Morris, are "preparing for Labour" by raising demands well beyond what Blair is promising (a minimum wage of £4.26, an extensive charter of union rights etc.).

**OVER THE** weekend of 16 and 17 November Workers Power held its annual conference. The conference discussed the current political situation, in Britain and internationally, and the tasks facing Workers Power as we move towards a general election.

The recognition that we are entering into a period of major change in the political situation, with the prospect of a Labour government for the first time in almost eighteen years, informed most of the conference's discussions.

The resolution on the British political situation passed by conference dealt with many aspects of the current situation, including Northern Ireland, the national question in Britain,

the anti-racist struggle, the state of the trade unions and the struggles of the youth and unemployed.

Here we print extracts from that resolution which deal with the state of the Labour and Tory parties in the run up to the general election, and the political character and significance of the Socialist Labour Party.

The conference also debated Workers Power's position on Scotland and voted to change it. Previously we called for a referendum on the question of a sovereign assembly but Conference decided it is now necessary to call for the immediate establishment of such an assembly. The resolution is printed below.

The "left" bureaucrats - such as the rail union leaders - have been preparing for Labour by taking action (albeit limited) both to win immediate demands and to remind Blair that they can bring pressure to bear on him should he decide to ignore their demands. Even the more right wing leaders of the postal union - despite buckling in the face of a legal threat from Royal Mail - risked a fall out with Blair by temporarily con-

tinuing their dispute despite pressure from the Labour leader to call them off. The labour movement is already preparing for a Blair government, not just waiting for it. And this will have consequences once Blair is elected.

We expect that disenchantment with Blair will occur sooner rather than later - in his first year of office rather than his third. This flows from the way in which he has ensured that Labour has "got

all of its betrayals in before the election" as an anonymous Labour MP put it. In particular, Blair is setting up the split with the unions in advance of getting into government. This is clear from a number of factors.

There has been no let up on structural changes in the party; union influence continues to be reduced. In particular, Blair and his allies are looking at alternative ways of financing the party

to finally free it from dependency on the unions. While union contributions remain vital for Labour to fight and win this election, their declining share of total party income is a trend that Blair will seek to deepen and extend, possibly through the provision of state funding for political parties.

This is part of Blair's strategy of breaking the union-party link. Stephen Byers' suggestion, during the TUC congress, that a split would be considered if a Labour government faced public sector strikes is, despite Blair's denials, a clear signal of the direction in which Blair hopes to take the party - away from the unions, towards an individual membership party with funds coming from rich supporters.

His book, *New Britain*, makes clear that he regarded his victory on Clause 4 as the means of reshaping the party's ideology and that he now wants to "create an organisation to match and reflect the [new] ideology." That means an organisation free from the block vote and, ultimately, the formal union link.

Blair's project to remove all union involvement and power in the Labour Party will not be achieved easily - it is not simply a matter of national organisational reforms. The trade unions

## Tories' Euro crisis

**THE TORIES** have had a disastrous year. They remain every bit as divided as they were before the Major leadership election last year and they are still deeply unpopular with the mass of British people. A crisis could yet push them from office.

The final period of the Tories' reign will be vicious. The Queen's speech, and the massive moral panic that backed it up, shows that a very right wing agenda will be pursued on social issues. Crime, law and order, sexuality, schools, bad parents and censorship of the media are the main issues being taken up by the Tories.

By advancing an authoritarian answer on these issues - frequently egged on by Labour - the Tories are hoping to rekindle one aspect of the spirit of Thatcherism, its right wing populism. Youth, in particular, will be a target for their attacks, under the guise of legislation on knives, the Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) etc. But they will not be the only victims. The Tories will also attack public sector workers. The green paper on anti-union laws is a charter for breaking public sector unions by taking away their immunities. While it will not become law before the election it is a sign that attacks on the public sector are planned.

If Labour gains an overall majority Major will probably resign. There could even be a split in the Tory Party, which would open the way to a regroupment in both the centre and the far right of British politics, but this is by no means a certainty. Its pace and extent would depend upon the magnitude of the Tory defeat, whether remaining Tory MPs calculate that a split party would be unelectable, and the possibility that a two stage EMU, with Britain outside the central European core, might allow a breathing space before any decision over monetary union would be necessary.

The underlying factor driving the Tories towards such a potential split remains Europe. With the emergence of Germany and France from recession, and with the French government determined to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria, all the arguments about European unity and the Single Currency are once again coming to the fore. The setting of 1999 as a target date for a Single Currency has given the whole issue a very real immediacy.

One consequence of this will be mas-



sive class struggles in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, as governments attempt to make the working class pay the costs of convergence by attacking the public sector. Another will be a stark choice for Britain. Should it continue to hover at the edge of Europe, waiting to see what happens, attempting to maintain its position as a low wage offshore island serving as a base and entry point for the USA and Japan, or should

it throw in its lot with France and Germany in a bid to become part of a united rival to those countries?

Different answers are coming from different sectors of the British economy. The sectors of capital with world wide interests, sections of British based multinational capital, typified by Goldsmith and the Referendum Party and small scale producers for the home market, are the material base of Euroscep-

ticism in the Tory Party. Those sections of capital whose main market for exports is now Europe are encouraging Clarke to give voice to the need for Britain to place itself at the heart of a Europe-wide economic bloc.

These sectors of capital are again finding open factional expression in the Tory Party. Clarke and the Grandees favour a clear and positive attitude to the Single Currency while the Tory right are dead

against any moves towards it. In opposition this conflict will not be contained. It will erupt into open war, if not immediately then certainly during the lifetime of a Blair government when the issue of the Single Currency will most probably have to be decided.

The divisions within capital over this issue are so deep that the Tories may not be able to contain them within a united party. ■

## For a Scottish Assembly!

**O**UR PREVIOUS position on the demand for a Scottish Assembly was wrong. Instead of opposing the establishment of a Scottish Assembly and demanding a referendum, we should call for the immediate election of a sovereign Scottish Assembly with unrestricted powers.

This is in no way a concession to Scot-

tish nationalism. It is the only principled application of our Leninist position of supporting self-determination for the Scottish people.

What does self-determination mean? It is the right of a nation to determine its own future, up to and including seceding and forming a separate state. We have correctly argued against secession/separation and should continue to do so because it would weaken the united struggle of the Scottish, English and Welsh workers, and because workers have no interest in the proliferation of small states.

Of course, if the majority of the Scottish people wanted to separate, then we would uphold their right to do so.

But we should not maintain our posi-

tion of opposition to a Scottish Assembly, coupled with support for the right of the Scottish people to such an Assembly if they so choose, because history has moved on. The Scottish people, in effect, have chosen.

- every opinion poll, most recently that commissioned by the Scotsman, reveals that a majority want an assembly;
- on the last occasion that the Scottish people were asked they voted by a majority for an assembly (in the devolution referendum carried out under the last Labour government);
- every political party in Scotland bar one supports an assembly. The only party that does not is the one that Scottish people do not vote for: the

Conservative Party;

- this overwhelming support for an assembly explains why the Scottish working class did not greet Labour's call for a referendum as an opportunity to get an assembly but saw it as a Blairite retreat from a commitment to an assembly in favour of further delaying tactics.

In their overwhelming majority the Scottish people want an Assembly. If the right of self-determination means anything, it means we must uphold their right to have one.

But would an assembly not play into the hands of the nationalists? Certainly, if its powers were limited, they would use its inadequacy to back up their argument for total separation. But to



uggle in 1997

# of elections

remain involved at every level in the party, particularly in the constituencies. A thoroughgoing removal of the unions from the party would not be tolerated in the way current measures have been. Nor should we think simply in terms of the removal of formal union ties to determine whether the Labour Party has become a straightforward bosses' party.

Blair is also showing intransigence on the minimum wage, rejecting the union figure of £4.26 and refusing to promise that it will be introduced in the first year of a Labour government. His refusal to countenance union demands on this question, in advance of the election, is a sign of the conflicts that will occur relatively quickly under a Blair government.

There is a clear indication that there will be more anti-union laws under Labour. Blunkett's threats to impose new rules on balloting in the event of management offers and binding arbitration (no strike rules) in the public sector, and Blair's refusal to distance himself from such proposals, infuriated the trade union bureaucracy.

Taken together these attacks do not yet constitute a split with the unions but they are a stark confirmation of Blair's plans for such a split. If his election victory is by a significant margin then he will move to provoke it sooner rather than later. The problem for Blair, however, is that he could lose, notwithstanding the attacks he has already made on the unions. The union leaders' anger at Labour's performance during the TUC shows that they will not take such attacks lying down.

With Labour in power these bureaucrats will no longer be bound to rein in their members in order to get Labour elected. They will have the option of using the anger and expectations of those members to pressure Labour and they may well find allies in the John Smith faction of Prescott/Beckett. Blair will find it less easy to get his own way than is currently the case. Moreover, though it will not reach anything like the proportions it did in the early 1980s, a revival of the left of the Labour Party will take place under these conditions.

If a battle within the labour movement and Labour Party and the defeat of Blair, or at least the curtailing of his plans to break Labour from the unions, is a possible outcome of the initial revolt against him (forging a link between the non-Blairite centre right and the union bureaucracy) it is not the only one. Blair could win outright, with the unions finding themselves having to re-negotiate a relationship with Labour.

The track record of the left of the Labour Party, and more especially the Smith faction, in conceding ever more ground to Blair, means that such a Blair victory - resulting in the transformation of Labour into a social democratic party or even a US Democrat style party could happen.

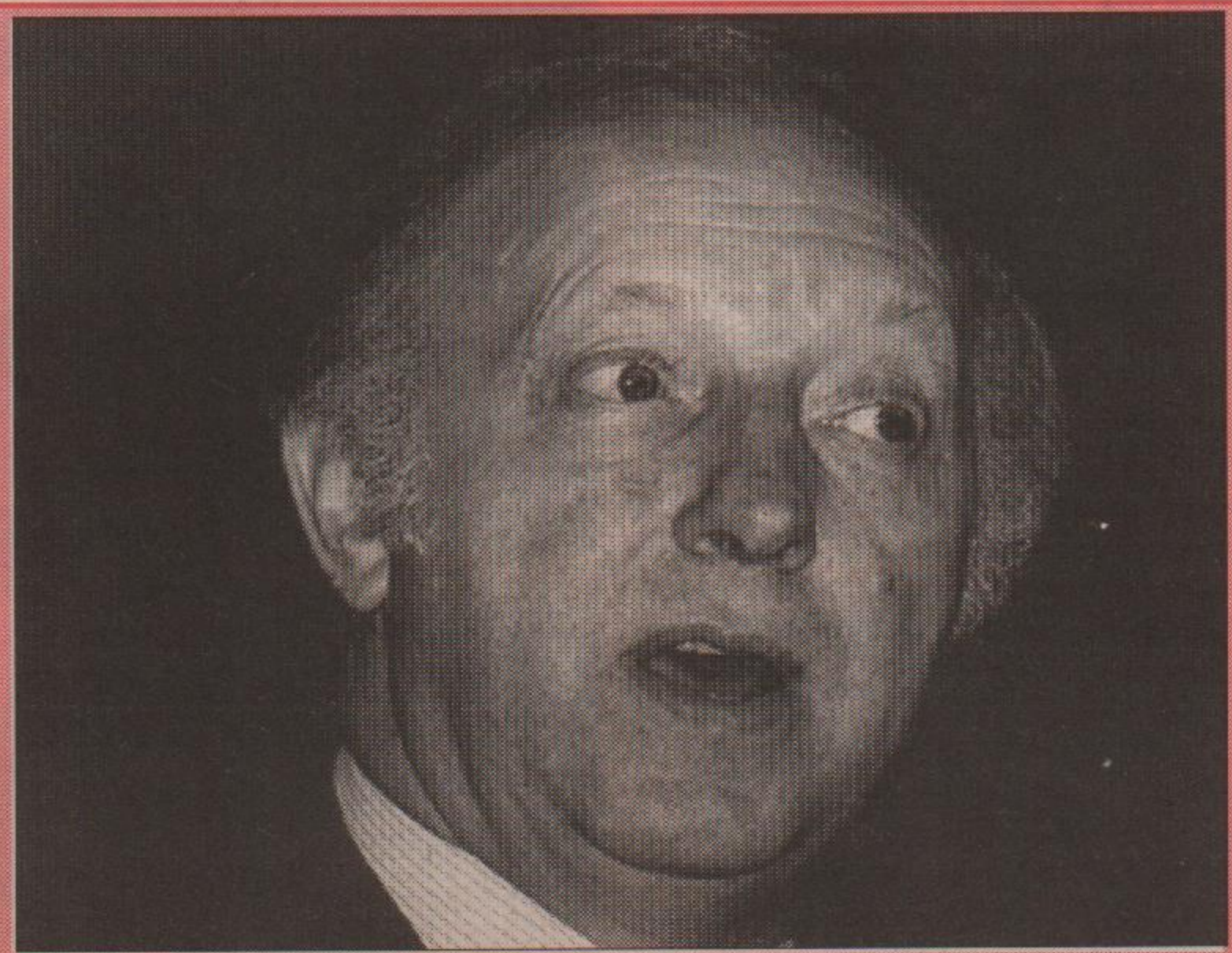
The circumstances that would produce this outcome would be a very sharp conflict between the unions and the

Labour government in which Blair successfully united the party around his project of breaking the union link. A rump "old Labour", based on the left and the die-hards in the Smith faction, could emerge from such a process, but it would soon be forced to join in the process of realignment that would inevitably flow from Labour breaking its links with the unions.

The period of a Blair government will be a vital time for the entire labour movement, leading to its reshaping one way or another. What is not in doubt is that the Blair leadership is shaping up

for a major confrontation with the unions once in power. Either Blair will successfully split with the unions or Blair's leadership itself will face a crisis it may not survive. If the former happens, the SLP will grow and Labour will probably split.

If the latter happens, we may see a resurgent Labour left, encouraged by splits within the leadership and by a union backed revolt against Blair. Both alternatives hold enormous potential for revolutionary intervention. ■



## Which way for SLP?

**T**HE SLP will wait for Labour, knowing that it cannot achieve much until there is a mass revolt against Blair. The SLP is not a mass split from Labour but this does not minimise its importance in the labour movement. It represents the disenchantment with Blair felt by the most left wing reformist trade union bureaucrats and activists.

While the party is led by a clique around Scargill and while many of its branches are made up of ex-members of far left groups, its real core is a small layer of politically advanced reformist workers, many of them blue collar industrial workers. It is this core - together with leaders like Scargill, Marino, Nolan and Crowe - which makes the SLP a significant entity on the left and not something that will quickly come and go.

It is this core that could provide a pole of attraction for other workers who become disenchanted with Blair when he is in office. This is because this layer represents an important component of the vanguard of the British working class; activists who are crucial in getting strikes called (and some of them in getting them called off too!), in building solidar-

ity and in fighting for left positions inside the industrial unions. The relatively small size of the SLP at the moment partly reflects the small size of this layer of militants, a layer more decimated than any other inside the unions during the Thatcher years.

The politics that dominate this core, and hence the SLP, are a classic mixture of left social democracy and Stalinism - a variant of the British Road to Socialism but shorn of its more outlandish populist frontist aspects. They can be summed up as a combination of militant trade unionism allied to Bennite parliamentarism (without Benn), guided by a state capitalist and protectionist economic policy.

These politics have been severely discredited over the past decade in the eyes of the mass of workers, but not always because the mass of workers have stood to the left of such politics. The weakness of left reformist politics in Britain is a consequence of the class struggle victories achieved by Thatcher (and inside the Labour Party by Blair) over the proponents of these politics.

However, mass disillusionment in Blair could see a revival of popularity in the left reformist politics on offer from the SLP. We do not have to exaggerate its importance now to recognise that it holds the potential to become a very important left reformist alternative to Blair in the not so distant future. ■

conclude from this that we should oppose an assembly is a violation of the right of the Scottish people's right to self-determination. Instead, we should support the democratic rights of the Scottish people and oppose each and every limitation of the Assembly's powers.

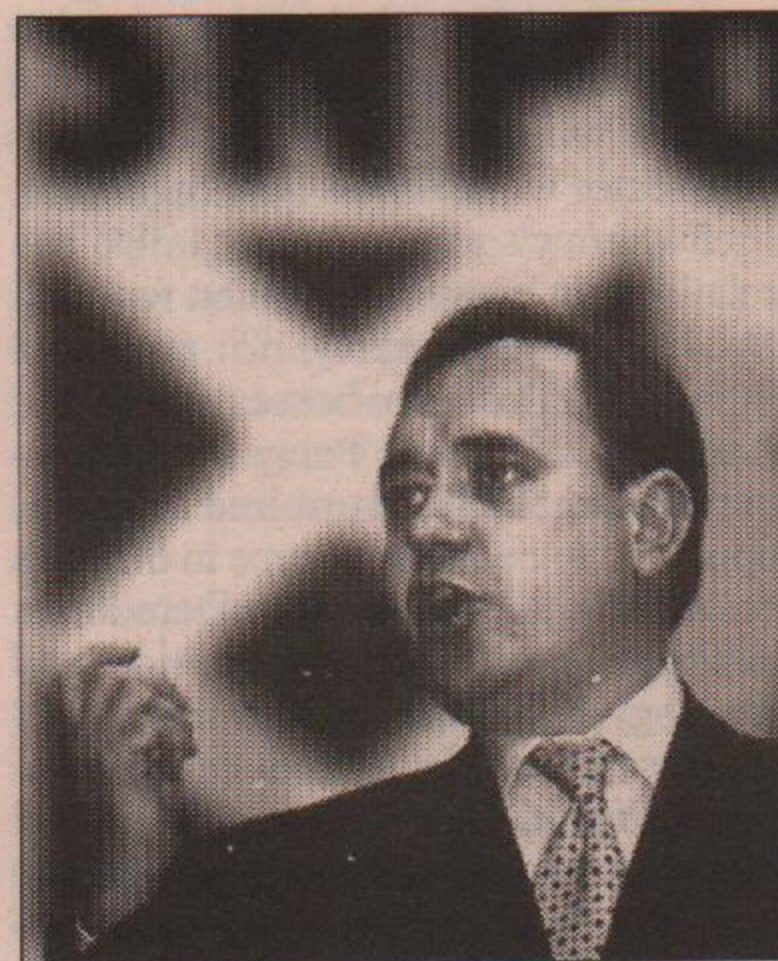
Support for a sovereign assembly is not a call for separation. Nor would it inevitably lead in this direction. Communists in a sovereign Scottish Assembly would argue for it to act in the interests of the international working class. They would oppose separation, whilst advancing proposals for the taxation of the rich, the arming of the class, workers' councils etc.

They would attack the bourgeois nationalists and centrist semi-separatist

and argue for the closest unity of the Scottish, Welsh and English workers. They would use it as the German Communists sought to use the regional (Land) assemblies in Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia in the early 1920s - not to break the unity of a nation state, but to provide a platform for revolutionary propaganda and proletarian organisation across the whole of Britain.

**Our new slogans are:**

- Self-determination for the Scottish people.
- Sovereign Scottish Assembly now.
- No to separation.
- Scottish, Welsh and English workers unite and fight.
- For a Socialist Republic of Britain.



SNP leader Alex Salmond

# R

The A to Z of  
Marxism

is for

# Revolution or Reform?

BY MARK HARRISON

**O**NE BANNER, from a National Union of Mineworkers' branch in Yorkshire, used to be a regular on demonstrations in the 1980s. It showed a large picture of the Houses of Parliament and underneath was written, "The Hope of the Workers".

The banner's meaning was obvious - the only hope for a radical change in the life of workers was to elect a Labour government. It expressed the dominance of reformism inside the working class.

The reformist strategy rests on three fundamental beliefs.

- the idea that what is wrong with capitalism is how it distributes the wealth it creates;
- that political reforms can ensure a redistribution of wealth and transform capitalism into a society in which injustice, inequality and the social conflict they generate will cease.
- given parliamentary democracy, all these changes can be brought about legally and without violence.

Each of these ideas is fatally flawed. Unequal distribution is a result of unequal, private, ownership of the main means of creating wealth. As long as that remains, attempts to share out the capitalists' wealth will always be sabotaged by lay-offs, pay cuts, or even the closure of plants.

As for reforms transforming capitalism into a just society, the idea is ridiculous. Nowhere have the capitalists allowed reforms that have altered the basic structure of their system. Even in once prosperous Social Democratic Scandinavia - a model for reformists everywhere - the capitalists are now attacking the welfare gains of the workers because their profits can longer sustain such systems.

Finally, the idea that the capitalists will give up their wealth as a result of a vote in parliament, is a very sick joke. In 1973, in Chile, a left reformist government did attempt to carry through major reforms as part of a peaceful road to socialism. The bosses used a bloody military coup to overthrow the government and smash to pieces the legal workers' movement. The workers paid for the reformist strategy in blood.

Faced with a serious threat to their power, the British bosses would act just as viciously as those in Chile. They could do this because real power lies not in parliament but with the police and army high command, in the secret services and with the unelected judges and civil servants the capitalist state machine which exists for the purpose of guarding the capitalist system.

For all these reasons, revolutionary socialists reject the reformist strategy, not because we are indifferent to reforms but because we do not believe that reforms, however extensive, can end capitalism. The capitalists have an enormous stake in their system. They will not sit back and see that stake seized from them.

Only a revolution can abolish their system. Only a revolution, in which the working class organise their own power - their own democratic councils and their own militia - to paralyse and destroy the power of the capitalist state machine, will open the way to a social-

ist society.

Only workers' power can begin the transition to socialism, because only such power could enforce decisions to use the economy in the interests of the majority.

Reformists will tell you that this is pie in the sky, that revolutions never work, that they don't change anything. But this is a lie, every "democracy" that exists today - Holland, Britain, France, Germany, the USA, not to mention numerous states throughout the "Third World" - has been created courtesy of a revolution. Virtually every significant reform has been a by-product of revolution or the threat of revolution.

In 1917, the Russian working class conquered power for themselves in a revolution that swept away the monarchy and capitalism. It was a marvellous achievement. But it was strangled - from outside by the pressure of international capitalism and from inside by a bureaucracy led by Stalin, who made peace with capitalism.

Nevertheless, that revolution, in its early days, created the most democratic society the world had ever seen. It showed that a workers' revolution could be made and that such a revolution was the living alternative to the reformist utopia of reconciling workers and capital.

Exactly one hundred years ago, a former Marxist, Eduard Bernstein, concluded that revolution was utopian and advocated a reform strategy instead. He remains the theoretical father of reformism. A Polish revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, replied to him in a brilliant pamphlet called Reform or Revolution.

In it, she answered the reformists' objections to the revolutionary strategy and concluded that revolutionaries and reformists did not simply have different ways of achieving the same goal, but had different goals. The revolutionaries wanted to overthrow capitalism, the reformists to live comfortably within it. As Luxemburg wrote:

"That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society."

Bernstein's politics were summed up in his famous dictum, "the final goal is nothing; the movement is everything". Luxemburg showed how this rejection of the goal of working class power must lead the reformists to dissolve the working class movement itself. If all that matters is what can be won peacefully by negotiation in the short term, then "the movement" must not limit itself to working class goals but try to appeal to the "middle classes".

And this is exactly what reformism does - it begins by redefining the socialist goal and ends by rejecting socialism altogether. As the new millennium approaches and as workers' struggles world wide begin to unfold, it will be revolutionary socialism that will triumph, and R for revolution will replace R for reformism. ■

# personal view

## COLIN LLOYD

### Where there's brass, there's class

**T**HE FILM *Brassed Off* uses a colliery brass band to symbolise the devastating effects of pit closures on a mining community. Its success has prompted a spate of media interest in brass bands. The script almost writes itself. "They may be products of a bygone age but people had dignity then - and the music made grown men cry".

There is a lot more to be said about brass bands. The history of the brass band movement is one of conflict between workers' desire for self-education and the employers' attempts to "incorporate" a section of the working class as their allies within the workplace.

Brass bands first appeared at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. By the 1830s there were brass bands amongst agrarian working class communities in Wales and Norfolk. In the 1850s brass bands spread across the northern industrial towns and the first ever national brass band contest was held at Belle Vue in Manchester.

But it was between 1870 and 1914 that brass bands really multiplied. They began to move away from their military-marching origins towards serious musical aspirations.

The rise of the brass band movement, then, coincides exactly with the British workers' movement's transition from Chartism to Labourism: the waning of the revolutionary tradition and the rise of what Marxists call the "labour aristocracy" - a relatively better-paid section of the working class, consciously nurtured by the employers.

Brass bands were created out of the relentless drive for self-improvement and education by the working class. Out of the original marching bands self-taught players of great skill emerged. Soon they were learning to write music themselves and to arrange Handel and Beethoven for brass. They brought classical music to a working class audience which had no access whatsoever to orchestral music.

But brass bands were not formed "from below", like the unions. They were consciously fostered by the coal owners and mill owners.

Up until the Second World War many bands were literally "owned" by the bosses of the pits and factories. The bosses encouraged a hierarchy within the band, reflecting the hierarchy within the factory and the working class community at large.

Women were not allowed in. The "band trainers" - as the conductors were called - were usually drawn from the small stratum of middle class professionals associated with the industrial production process.

Within the band there was a rigid hierarchy - not of musical skill but of long service and "who you knew". The Bickershaw Colliery Band in Lancashire, for example, was formed in 1919 under the aegis of the pit manager, Adam Prescott. A local historian writes:

"To be able to play a brass instrument was a distinct advantage in securing a job... Auditions were conducted at the colliery with Mr Prescott, and often some of his cronies, present. If Adam Prescott liked you, you were in the band." (*The Major and His Band* by Keith Hollinshead)

Band players were paid a retaining fee on top of their wages. In many, as at Bickershaw, "the majority of the bandmen were not employed on underground duties at the colliery"

and bandmen were allowed to leave work early on practice days.

The bands often became battlegrounds in the class struggle. Many of us will have seen colliery brass bands marching on miners' demonstrations. But in the early days this was unthinkable. The bands were limited to armistice parades and church ceremonies, local concerts and the all-important competitions.

The labour aristocratic view is reflected in the titles and "subjects" of much of the work of the brass composers: "Pride of Race", "Clive of India" and dozens of "elegaic" pieces extolling the virtues of the British countryside.

But the bosses didn't have it all their own way. During the 1926 General Strike, Bickershaw's Adam Prescott called in band members one by one and tried to sign them up to a "Conservative Club" - a strike-breaking posse. Not one joined-up, and band rehearsals were suspended throughout the six-month long miners' strike that followed.

Prescott's successor, the coal owner "Major" Ernest Hart, drove the Bickershaw band fanatically towards success at the Belle Vue championships - rewarding band members with extra pay when they did well, threatening them with the sack when they didn't.

Hart deplored the attempt to bring serious music to the working class. He complained about the Bickershaw Colliery Band playing "the heavy classical stuff... popular only to a few experts" and called for some "light bright pieces... to please the majority".

But "the majority" wanted exactly the opposite. When workers from older generations talk about brass bands "making the hair on the back of your neck stand up" and of "grown men crying" they are not being sentimental. They are describing the overwhelming effect of hearing the great masterpieces of classical music for the first time.

If this picture doesn't fit with the egalitarian culture depicted in *Brassed Off* - where the players own their instruments and are fiercely independent of colliery managers - there is a good reason. In 1947 the pits were nationalised.

The Belle Vue contests were taken over by the pro-Labour *Daily Herald*. At Bickershaw Colliery the new state managers quickly abolished the various secret payments and privileges of band members.

Major Hart, an arch Tory, responded by breaking up the band and selling off the instruments so that the NCB could not re-establish it. Later, "depressed by nationalisation" as the headlines put it, Hart placed his head under the wheels of a passing freight train.

Meanwhile the brass band movement lived on. By the 1960s the growing combativity of the working class found resonance in the band movement. Rising access to education ensured that it was no longer just the privileged few who could get a musical training.

Love them or hate them, brass bands are part of working class history. Workers will always fight to drag themselves out of the ignorance and squalor the bosses have designed for us.

But it is only when "self-improvement" is allied to self-organisation and class struggle that it brings lasting progress. ■

**O**NE FIGURE stands out from the statistics generated by the November 1996 US elections: 49%. That was the proportion of voters who actually voted. It marked the lowest turnout since the 1920s.

This reflects the widespread cynicism about politics and politicians especially among sections of the working class. One white collar worker in her 30s remarked that the first time she voted was for Clinton in 1992, thinking "it might actually make a difference... I know better now." Turnout was lowest (17%) among first-time voters aged 18 to 22.

Clinton, of course, retained the presidency, but his share of the vote was below the target of 50%. He may have risen from yet another political grave but this was no glorious resurrection. The Republicans still hold a majority in the two houses of Congress. In the Senate, they actually increased their majority to 55-45.

The Democrats' victory owed much to the woeful campaign run by Bob Dole, and to their better funding. Clinton spent an estimated \$350-375 (£215-225) million during the course of the race. Questions over the origins of that money dogged Clinton during the last fortnight of the campaign.

#### Xenophobic

Dole, well aware that the Republicans' hands were at least as dirty, was reluctant to hammer away at the issue of corrupt campaign financing. But when he finally did play this card, he gave it a xenophobic twist by concentrating on the tens of thousands contributed by the giant Lippo corporation in Indonesia.

Total campaign spending exceeded \$1 billion (£610 million). Most of this came from big business and from filthy-rich individuals. But, significantly, some \$55 million came from the AFL-CIO, as the trade union bureaucracy returned as a major source of Democratic Party finance.

Republican House speaker Newt Gingrich was livid at the torrent of advertising attacking his "Contract with America". On election day, he complained, "the unions have succeeded in demonising me." He lashed out at the AFL-CIO's involvement, claiming that the Democrats would be in hock to "Big Labor". In fact, the AFL-CIO achieved only a minimal return on its investment, saving Senate seats for the Democrats in Massachusetts and Minnesota against strong Republican challenges.

In many states, union-funded advertising did shift the focus of campaigns away from the so-called social issues of abortion and gay marriages to "bread and butter" concerns, like the minimum wage, government-subsidised student loans, and the defence of the Social Security and Medicare programmes. Even though Bill Clinton signed into law the most draconian attack yet on America's feeble welfare state, and vigorously opposed AFL-CIO policy on a range of questions, his Congressional supporters often posed as "friends of labor". At least one Democratic candidate boasted of his role as an official of the United Auto Workers.

#### Radical

The AFL-CIO leaders, since the election of John Sweeney as President in 1995, have raised their public profile and adopted some radical rhetoric, in sharp contrast to the 15-year reign of Sweeney's predecessor, Lane Kirkland. They have begun to respond to organised pressure from below, but are also worried about their own survival in a country where barely 10% of the private sector workforce is now organised.

Sweeney's aim is to revitalise the relationship between the union tops and the Democratic party, not to lead a break from this open bosses' party. The fledgling US Labor Party (see *Workers Power* 203), launched in June, appeared to be the best hope in 60 years for an actual split with the Democrats at the level of both organisation and ideology. But it did not stand any candidates and it did not produce any independent propaganda against the record of both major parties in attacking the working class and poor, or scapegoating immigrants.

These failings show that much of its

## US ELECTIONS

# Clinton's hollow victory



Gingrich (seated) and Clinton: Someone to watch over me

BY G. R. McCOLL

leadership-rooted in a section of the union bureaucracy-only sees the "party" as a pressure group on the Democrats, not an expression of working class political independence.

In 1995-96, Congress witnessed the most bitter polarisation between Republicans and Democrats in decades. On two occasions, squabbles over the budget led to the shutdown of most of the federal government. Such debates are likely to persist in a muted form during the new Congress, but would become more urgent if the current slowdown in economic expansion became a full-blown recession. Share prices on the New York Stock Exchange have gone through the roof during the Clinton years, crashing through the symbolic 6,000 barrier in 1996. But a sharp downward readjustment, if not a crash, is virtually certain before 1997 is out.

US imperialism has enjoyed a lengthy reprieve in the 1990s. The collapse of the former Soviet Union has left it as the sole military and political superpower. Although Washington has had enormous difficulties in imposing its will on the "New World Disorder", no other imperialism can wield anything approaching the same might.

The structural problems of the Ger-

man and Japanese economies, which have become obvious in recent years, now appear more severe than those of the US. A vicious offensive against the most powerful industrial unions has generally slashed labour costs in key manufacturing sectors, while the bosses in advanced technological sectors have so far fended off most attempts at collective organisation.

There have been several high profile resignations from the cabinet, including Labor Secretary Robert Reich and Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Clinton now looks set to appoint a number of prominent Republicans to his administration, including the Gulf War "hero" General Colin Powell and Massachusetts Governor William Weld. These moves signal his determination to strengthen a centre-right consensus and to marginalise the remaining broadly progressive components of the Democrats' former New Deal coalition, which include the organised working class.

Such developments make it ever more clear that a crucial task facing revolutionaries in the US is to build up pressure within the Labor Party for a clear break with the Democrats, and the building of a new party of the working class and oppressed which will stand clearly for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. ■

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## ARGENTINA: PTS Open Congress

## New movement launched

ON 5 JUNE this year the Central Committee of the Argentine Workers' Party for Socialism (PTS) adopted an ambitious tactic to increase the size and influence of the party within the vanguard of the working class. It called for a new paper and a new party to be established through an open congress.

Over the following three months an intensive debate took place between the PTS, the youth organisation MOJUVOR (which is in political solidarity with the PTS) and a coalition of workers' groups many of which have sprung up over the last couple of years in the struggle against the Menem government.

The initiative was aimed in the first place at a relatively small part of the vanguard which has been attracted to the PTS' day schools for youth and industrial workers over the last two years. These workers include metalworkers in San Nicolás, dockers and shipyard workers in La Plata, bank workers, teachers, local government workers and immigrant workers throughout the country. In addition, ex-members of various centrist "Trotskyist" groups in Argentina have been attracted to the new project.

## Sharpen

A central undertaking in this period was the drafting of a programmatic manifesto, an action programme to bring together and politically sharpen the growing number of hard but disparate struggles taking place throughout Argentina. At an Open Congress on 26/27 September over 500 delegates and observers drawn from the PTS, MOJUVOR and the workers' groups launched a "Movement for a New Revolutionary Workers' Party".

The Congress adopted a Declaration of Principles, in reality a draft action programme for the new movement:

"We are calling for the establishment of a movement for a new revolutionary workers' party in Argentina. A party which today should regroup conscious workers and revolutionary youth behind a common strategy, a revolutionary programme and a common understanding of our actual tasks."

The draft programme endorsed by the Open Congress is a very positive step in the programmatic development of the PTS. The danger when revolutionaries attempt to regroup with other spontaneously organised sections of the vanguard is the creation of a "half-way house": a programmatic confusion between reform and revolution. The new programme avoids that danger. The aim over the next six months to a year is to create a cadre party of a few thousand, based on a re-elaborated transitional action programme, with a solid industrial proletarian core.

A key weapon in this task is the new paper, *La Verdad Obrera* (LVO - Workers' Truth), launched on 3 October as the weekly paper of this new movement, with an editorial board drawn from all three components of the new movement and based on the Declaration.

## Analysis

The LRCI believes that in the five years since the PTS launched its previous paper, *Rebelión*, it has made considerable gains. Its critique of Morenoism, the developing analysis of the new world order and its analysis of Latin America all represent theoretical and programmatic advances. In our view the PTS is not, in the real sense of the word, a "party": it is still a fighting propaganda group.

The task of the fighting propaganda group is to maintain and develop the revolutionary programme, assemble a cadre of advanced workers and youth, and to act as a lever for the creation of a party which draws in wider sections of the working class.

Any major turn which involves the

ONE YEAR ago the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) and the Trotskyist Faction (TF) signed a common declaration based on the recognition that during the 1990s there had been a convergence of political positions in key areas of perspective and programme (see *Workers Power* 196). We committed ourselves to a process of discussion and clarification aimed, if possible, at fusing our international tendencies. We are still nearer the start of this process than its end. Nevertheless, as **Keith Harvey** explains, over the last months positive developments in Argentina give grounds for optimism.

total restructuring of an organisation and the codification of its programme involves serious dangers as well as opportunities, something the PTS frankly recognised. The PTS stated from the outset that it was not attempting to launch a "party of struggle", that is, a centrist party which is nothing more than the political expression of the many united fronts arising out of the anti-austerity struggle (youth, students, industrial workers, unemployed, immigrants).

The LRCI agrees with this. A party is defined by its central goal and the overall strategy to reach it. In the words of the PTS it would be a grave mistake "to yield over programme, to make the party bigger, less sectarian but more centrist".

The new draft programme has a significance beyond Argentina. It greatly assists the task, set out in the joint dec-

**"During the 1940s the working class put their trust in bourgeois leadership, Peronism. The stoppage of August 8 [the general strike in August 1996] reopens the possibility of a split of the working class from this bosses' leadership."**

laration signed by the LRCI and TF, of establishing more precisely where areas of programmatic agreement already exist between our tendencies, as well as where differences remain. The LRCI hopes that a discussion on this draft will help demonstrate that, as Trotsky said, no national programme can be established in our epoch on a national basis alone.

What then are the main strengths of the Open Congress Declaration of Principles? First, it unambiguously states its revolutionary goal:

"... the necessity of a struggle to the death against capital, demolishing the bourgeois state, hence the struggle for socialist revolution which will culminate in the creation of a Workers' Republic based on the direct organs of democracy of the working class and the urban and rural poor and the



Workers Truth, the paper of the new movement

struggle for international socialism."

The fight for this goal is clearly grounded in the growing fightback against Menem's government and his savage attacks on the economic and social gains of the Argentine workers and popular masses (see *Workers Power* 205). The Declaration recognises the centrality of the historic task of winning the Argentine proletariat to a definitive break with Peronism and freeing it from the stranglehold that the corrupt Peronist bureaucracy exercises over the trade unions. It also recognises the tremendous opportunity of doing this while Peronism, in power under Menem, is demolishing the system of social welfare and nationalised industries created by Juan Peron after 1945.

These gains were as significant to the Argentine working class as those of the 1945 Labour government in Britain.

**"During the 1940s the working class put their trust in bourgeois leadership, Peronism. The stoppage of August 8 [the general strike in August 1996] reopens the possibility of a split of the working class from this bosses' leadership."**

Their effect was to tie the Argentine workers to Peronist bourgeois nationalism, especially as the US-backed army kept Peronism out of power by military coups between 1955 and 1974. As the Declaration states:

"During the 1940s the working class put their trust in bourgeois leadership, Peronism. The stoppage of August 8 [the general strike in August 1996] reopens the possibility of a split of the working class from this bosses' leadership."

This split will require a conscious battle between revolutionary socialism and Peronism within the workers' movement, especially if the new movement is to succeed in gaining adherents from the ranks of those most influenced by Peronism - the industrial workers and especially the "permanently contracted" workers.

The LRCI believes that a more extensive treatment of Peronism is warranted than is given in the Declaration, especially since the degenerate Trotskyist tradition from which the PTS originates, Morenoism, repeatedly bolstered workers illusions in Peronism - in the same way that much of the "Trotskyist" left has bolstered illusions in Labour.

Part of the legacy of Peron is the incorporation of the trade unions in Argentina into the bourgeois state. The Declaration recognises the need to struggle to free the unions from the bureaucracy by organising and aiding the struggles of those presently excluded from the unions, and by fighting within the unions.

It calls for the building of revolutionary fractions in the unions "in order to kick out the union bureaucracy" and in order to build a union movement open to "the most exploited sectors, immigrants, unemployed, those on contracts and the workers who are living most precariously."

In terms of workplace organisation it calls for the creation of "sovereign assemblies for the whole factory" which elect delegates to represent the workers but who are recallable at all times. These bodies will thus uproot the Peronist bureaucracy and constitute the best organs of struggle against the bosses in the factories.

## Repulsed

In the section entitled, "For a workers' answer to the crisis!" a clear set of demands is set out which are needed if Menem's attacks are to be repulsed and if there is to be a successful defence and extension of all existing gains to the unemployed, the youth and immigrants:

"Work for all now! Six hours of work for everyone on \$1000! A plan of public works under workers' control, which would give work to millions! What do you mean there is no money! Lies! There you will find the millions robbed from us in foreign debt, there you will find the millions which the bosses do not pay in tax, there you can discover the funds for the unemployed to have work now! The bankers,

the bosses and the IMF must pay for the crisis! . . .

"These slogans must be combined with others such as: the nationalisation of banks and foreign trade, the abolition of the taxes which affect the popular consumer and progressive taxes on big wealth, the abolition of business secrecy and opening of the books of industry, nationalisation under workers' control of all factories which close down or sack workers, the expropriation of the 14 large national and imperialist economic groups which dominate the private sector and which control the national infrastructure and the large services, etc."

## Critical

The Declaration has other areas where it needs to be developed: for example, on the questions of social oppression - at present only dealt with under the section on democratic demands.

We believe that in a modern revolutionary programme demands that hit at social oppression - which arises out of the bourgeois family and the imperialist nation state - are critical. If the new movement around LVO is to draw in working class women, the best class fighters from among lesbians and gay men, as well as those suffering racial oppression then the present perfunctory sections of the Declaration will have to be enriched.

What is involved here is not only the defence of democratic rights but the fight against reactionary prejudices and ideology amongst the masses, in the workplaces, in the family circle where the revolutionary consciousness of the workers is weakened by these prejudices, where sections of the proletariat are hindered from playing a major role in the movement and where allies in other classes can be won.

Section 12 of the Declaration entitled, "Internationalism", rightly emphasises the need for Argentine workers to solidarise with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited world-wide; with the French strike wave in late 1995 against the Juppé government, with the Palestinian resistance to Zionism, with the urban black revolts in the USA, with the nations or nationalities oppressed by imperialism, and those oppressed in the former USSR, such as the Chechen people today.

## Stand

It calls for the unity and co-ordination of the struggles of the Latin American workers against both imperialism and the national governments which implement its policies. While taking a firm stand against the imperialist blockade of Cuba, the Declaration unsparingly criticises Fidel Castro for refusing to support the extension of the Latin American revolution in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s - and for his capitalist restorationist policies today. It espouses the fight against capitalist restoration in the ex-USSR, the Eastern European countries, in Cuba, Vietnam and China.

The Declaration is not a finished programme, by its own admission. The LRCI believes that it is a good starting point. More can and must be added, for example, on the nature and form of democratic centralism in a revolutionary party, on tactics towards centrism, as well as areas referred to above.

However, we have no doubt that this contribution is a breath of fresh air on the international left, and a confirmation that the LRCI's regroupment perspective with the PTS/TF was not misplaced. ■

**For a full analysis of the political development of the PTS/TF see Trotskyist International No 21, out later this month.**

## CENTRAL AFRICA

## A war against genocide

The crisis in central Africa continues. Hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees are streaming back into Rwanda. French troops patrol the streets of the Central African Republic. Zaire is falling apart.

Meanwhile western aid agencies call for military intervention and western governments are locked in a war of words over where, when and why to send troops. The media presents the crisis as an incomprehensible mess driven by obscure warring factions. But the real culprits are the imperialist powers and their African puppets. **Keith Simpson** reports.

**H**UNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of Hutu refugees are streaming out of Zaire and back to Rwanda. The reverse exodus has been caused by the defeat of the Hutu-chauvinist Interahamwe militia in the refugee camps and has, for the moment, removed the threat of an imperialist invasion of the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Pro-imperialist politicians like to describe this conflict as the senseless product of ethnic rivalry, with all sides culpable. The sub-text is that Africa cannot rule itself and must rely on imperialist troops to maintain order. On the left there is a mirror image of this theory, which sees imperialism as responsible for Africa's descent into chaos but still accepts the idea of a collapse into barbarism, with no progressive forces and no real solutions other than to feed the victims.

Revolutionary socialists reject both of these "explanations". The forces at work in central Africa are class forces: imperialist troops, genocidal military dictatorships, third world despots grown fat on the kickbacks from imperialism, petit-bourgeois guerrilla movements fighting to defend national minorities, and the mass of workers and poor peasants denied their own solution to the crisis by all of these competing forces. Working class internationalists can and must offer a class analysis and a class solution to the crisis.

What is happening in eastern Zaire is the direct result of the genocide perpetrated in Rwanda in 1994 by the French-backed Hutu-chauvinist government of Juvenal Habyarimana. Habyarimana had signed a peace treaty with the Ugandan-backed Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1993, promising an end to two decades of Hutu domination. But Hutu extremists used the pretext of Habyarimana's assassination to rip up the peace deal and launch the genocide in which 500,000 were killed: mainly Tutsis but also progressive Hutus who supported the RPF.

The RPF invaded from its Ugandan bases, quickly smashing the Rwandan Armed Forces, routing the Interahamwe militias and seizing the capital, Kigali, in July 1994. UN troops in Rwanda, there to oversee the peace deal, were pulled out.

The French government - headed by "socialist" President Mitterrand, a personal friend of Habyarimana - invaded south western Rwanda to save the remnants of the Hutu regime.

The French intervention - Operation Turquoise - brought it into direct armed conflict with the RPF. While French politicians claimed that the invasion was an exercise in humanitarian neutrality, its troops were cheered through the streets by the retreating perpetrators of the biggest mass murder since World

War Two.

As a result of the French intervention the Interahamwe were able to lead one and a half million Hutu refugees into the Zairean provinces of North and South Kivu. With them came those responsible for organising and carrying out of the genocide: about 40,000 regular members of the Rwandan army and 10,000 members of the Hutu militia.

The Interahamwe fed them a diet of racist propaganda against the new Tutsi-dominated government in Rwanda using exile radio stations. Controlling the refugee camps, the Interahamwe have used the money earmarked for the refugees - about \$300 million annually - to re-arm themselves, courtesy the Zairean government and Western arms manufacturers.

#### Witnesses

With their new weapons they embarked on regular attacks into Rwanda and Burundi, in many cases slaughtering witnesses to the 1994 genocide. In the last six months these attacks have occurred on a daily basis.

At the same time the Hutu militias became an important factor in the disintegrating Zairean state. President Mobutu, increasingly precarious as the balance of imperialist influence changed, saw the Interahamwe as vital allies against a coalition of opposition forces grouped in the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (the ADFLCZ).

The Banyamulenge's ally in the fight against Mobutu and his cronies is the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (the ADFLCZ) which has, as its stated aim, the overthrow of Mobutu and his cronies including the rulers of South Kivu.

It is made up of the Banyamulenge, the Luba rebels from Kasai province, the Shaba rebels who went into Kasai in 1992 after being heavily repressed by the government and Laurent Desire Kabila's People's Revolutionary Party. The PRP is a Maoist-influenced guerrilla movement which between 1964 and 1986 operated in the liberated zones of North Shaba and South Kivu.



Half a million Hutu refugees return to Rwanda

The central and regional governments of Zaire have always seen attacks on ethnic minorities as a way of enriching themselves.

For example, in 1973 President Mobutu and the District Commissioner of the Equateur district took over 33% of all Rubber plantations, and 30% of all palm growing land in that region. The Banyamulenge were stripped of their citizenship rights in 1981.

The latest attacks on the Banyamu-

lunge began at the beginning of October when the Deputy Governor Of South Kivu, Lwasi Ngabo, ordered the entire Tutsi population out of Zaire with in a week. Meanwhile the district commissioner of Uvira (a large town bordering Burundi), Shweka Mutabazi, ordered troops of the Zairean army to confiscate the land and property of the Banyamulenge. Five thousand troops were drafted into the region to carry out these orders.

## IMPERIALISTS FALL OUT

## A new scramble for Africa

**I**N 1898 a confrontation between Britain and France, at Fashoda in Sudan, signalled the end of the Great Powers' co-operation in carving up the African continent between themselves. It marked the beginning of a period of imperialist rivalry that would lead to total war in 1914. In 1996, just over 500 miles to the south, a modern "Fashoda incident" is unfolding.

Inter-imperialist rivalry over who gets to exploit the third world has fuelled two world wars and countless minor conflicts. It did not go away after 1945, but was subsumed within the Cold War.

The removal of the Soviet threat has opened up a conflict between the imperialist powers striving for a re-division of Africa.

On one side stands the United States and its ally Britain. Against them is ranged France, the traditional power in the region, supported by Belgium. We got a glimpse of this line-up earlier in the 1990s in Liberia where the "Francophone" countries backed the rebel leader Charles Taylor against the "Anglophone" countries of West Africa. The recent events in Rwanda and Zaire have exposed these conflicts more clearly.

Since the 1960s Zaire has been a US

ally within Africa. It was a corrupt and crumbling colony ruled directly by Belgian imperialism. When Belgian rule was overthrown the CIA were implicated in the murder of the bourgeois nationalist independence leader, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. The CIA supported military action against his supporters who fought a protracted guerrilla war between 1963-66. This was backed up by Belgian and French troops intervening in 1961, 1963, 1964 and 1965.

It was during this period that Mobutu came to prominence as an ally of the USA. His help was reciprocated in May 1963 when President Kennedy welcomed him to the USA with the following words:

"General, if it hadn't been for you the whole thing would have collapsed, the communists would have taken over."

Mobutu came to power in 1966 when he dismissed the then President Kuvshinov and his other rival Moise Tshombe, the anti-communist leader of the Shaba secessionists. In 1967 Mobutu had to rely upon US transport planes and troops to help him put down another revolt in Shaba. This marked the first actual US intervention with troops and was the start of real US hegemony in Zaire.

Since 1967 the US has been able to rely

upon Mobutu to support its initiatives in Angola and as an ally in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). During the mid-1970s Zaire was a base for Unita rebels in Angola and again in the late 1980s it was used to back up Reagan's attempts to destabilise Angola. The USA under Carter also defended Zaire and sent planes in late 1977 and early 1978 when Shaba secessionists invaded from Angola.

#### Criticism

However, increasing criticism of Mobutu's human rights record and pillaging of the country's resources created a rift in the US between Congress and the Presidential administration. This was resolved with the end of the cold war as Mobutu no longer served any useful purpose.

While the line in the national security bureaucracies in Washington was "Mobutu or Chaos", Congress was pushing for cleaning up Zaire by getting rid of Mobutu. Despite the various crises in the 1990s, such as guerrilla activity, troop mutinies in Kinshasa in January 1993 and widespread strikes and demonstrations by workers last year, these have not created the degree of panic which would have occurred in the White House during the Cold War.

Instead the USA has switched its favours to Uganda. Since coming to power Ugandan President, Museveni has loyally carried out the diktats of the World Bank and IMF. He has been so successful that this year the World Bank wrote off a sizeable part of Uganda's debt. Moreover the US has also gained influence in post-Cold War Ethiopia (which was pro-Soviet between 1977 and 1991) Eritrea and, since 1994, Rwanda.

This has given it a major power bloc in central Africa. It also enables it to put pressure on Sudan, an Islamic military state. While the recent events in Zaire were occurring the US gave 20 million dollars to Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda in military aid.

The strength of French imperialism lies in its capacity and willingness to use force throughout the continent. In West Africa it has a system of economic treaties to shore up its control in the area. But it is military force which is the cornerstone of French policy in Africa.

Earning itself the nickname of the "Policeman of Africa" it has seven military bases in Sub-Saharan Africa, 28 defence treaties and 25 technical treaties with various governments stipulating the conditions for military intervention.

There are a total of 8,000 French troops in Africa, at their core the battle-hardened mercenaries of the Foreign Legion.

Since 1960 French imperialism has intervened 20 times in Africa, most recently on the weekend of the 15/16 November 1996 when it deployed its soldiers in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, when unpaid troops clashed with police.

#### Flurry

"In exchange", writes the *Financial Times* (14 November), "its companies won the lion's share of government contracts and Paris was assured of a flurry of African votes when key decisions came up in international forums."

The 1994 victory of the RPF in Rwanda was a blow as it was linked to Uganda and the Anglophone countries.

According to the *Financial Times*: "France refused to invite the new [Rwandan] regime to its Franco-African summit in Biarritz in 1994 and did its best to block European aid to a country struggling to rebuild its war-shattered infrastructure."

The recent events have been a further blow to French prestige and interests in the area. The French Foreign Office and

But the Banyamulenge, supported by other opposition forces, fought back. By mid-October they captured Uvira and moved towards the capital of South Kivu, Bukavu, which they captured towards the end of October. They also managed to clear out all Interahamwe forces from South Kivu and thus stopped the attacks on Burundi and Southern Rwanda.

The Zairean army and the Hutu militias fled 300 miles east to the River Zaire to regroup. With them went large numbers of Hutu refugees (estimates vary between 250,000 and 750,000) who either believed the propaganda of the Hutu militias - that the Tutsis had come to kill them - or were being coerced into leaving the area.

There is no evidence of the Banyamulenge and its allies systematically attacking refugees or carrying out persecutions against them.

After the Banyamulenge and its allies secured South Kivu province they sent forces to North Kivu.

Here there were also large refugee camps around the capital Goma with the Interahamwe in control and continuing their attacks on Rwanda. There was also a native Tutsi population in North Kivu, the Banyarwanda, who came to the area about 60 or 70 years ago.

They too had been subjected to attacks by the local government forces and the Interahamwe. In addition to the attack from the South these Tutsis were undoubtedly supported by members of the Rwandan army. There was an exchange of shells between the Rwandan and Zairean armed forces.

The badly armed and rarely paid Zairean armed forces collapsed in the face of the Tutsi rebels and Rwandan commandos. Given the already fragile nature of Zaire and the interests that various powers have in the region it was not long before the imperialists began discussing how to intervene.

However, events moved faster than imperialist plans.

The Tutsi forces in the North took matters into their own hands. After a week of attacking camps north of Goma to drive out the Interahamwe on 14/15 November they attacked the largest camp of Mugunga, home to 700,000 refugees. They broke the resistance of the Interahamwe and drove them away from the camp.

Unlike in the South they were able to separate the militias from the refugees and for the first time in two years the refugees were given a choice between staying or leaving. Within a few days 500,000 had crossed the border back into Rwanda. ■

military elite contains a clique as obsessed with maintaining French interest in Africa as the one in the White House is obsessed with undermining it.

All this explains the hesitancy and shambles which surrounded the attempt to launch Operation Phoenix Tusk.

France urged an imperialist intervention to save its allies, the Hutu militias, and shore up the failing Kinshasa dictatorship. It put its paratroops on standby to seize Goma after it was overrun by the Banyamulenge and Rwandan Army forces.

Meanwhile, the USA and Britain prepared for intervention via Rwanda itself, based on collaboration with the rebels and the RPF government. There is no evidence, but also little doubt, that the USA gave the green light for the Rwandan attack on the camps in North Kivu, which separated the Hutu refugees from the Interahamwe and opened up the route back to Rwanda. This removed the French pretext for intervention (to open up a "supply route" to the refugees).

Within days the plans for imperialist intervention were scaled down and abandoned. Clearly, had they come to fruition, the "rapid reaction forces" of the major imperialist powers could have found themselves at the very least backing different local warring forces, and at worst - in the modern day "Fashoda" incident - a military stand-off unthinkable during the Cold War.

What does all this mean for Zaire? It looks like it will break up.

Four of its largest provinces are already under rebel control (Shaba, Kasai, South and North Kivu) and there is further rebel activity on its borders with Uganda and

# Ethnic conflict - made in the west

**T**HE CONFLICT between Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda is presented as an example of "African barbarity". In fact, it was the deliberate creation of the western colonial powers.

Rwanda was part of German East Africa from 1899 to 1916. After Germany's defeat in 1918 the country was handed over to Belgium, which also "owned" the Belgian Congo - part of which forms modern day Zaire.

Under both German and Belgian rule the Tutsi minority were consciously fostered as a friendly "native" elite, enabling the imperialists to divide and rule. But Hutu and Tutsi shared the same language. The primary division between the two groups had been social,

not ethnic: the word "Tutsi" meant rich, and the word "Hutu" meant servant.

The imperialists took a pre-colonial social division and turned it into an ethnic division, issuing the identity cards which irrevocably divided the population along ethnic lines.

The overthrow of imperialist rule also took on an inter-ethnic character. In 1959 the Hutu majority rose against the Tutsi elite, massacring 100,000 and driving the rest into Uganda. Meanwhile in Burundi, the Tutsi minority seized and held power against the will of the Hutu majority, unleashing a state orchestrated massacre against them.

The Hutu majority of both Rwanda and Burundi cannot, and will not, trust

the Tutsi elites to protect their democratic rights. They are learning, the hard way, that the genocidal militias hold no answers either.

The only answer to continued ethnic rivalry is to forge an alliance of workers and poor peasants throughout the region against the main enemy: imperialism.

At the same time this movement must grant the right of self determination and full democratic rights to all the minority nations and ethnic groups.

Only an international struggle against imperialism and for a socialist federation of the African continent can end the murderous legacy of divide and rule. ■

## Where we stand

**I**N THE PRESENT conflict revolutionaries stand for the victory of the ADFLCZ over the Interahamwe and its Zairean army allies. Without giving an ounce of political support to the forces grouped in the ADFLCZ we recognise their struggle as progressive on two counts.

It was a legitimate war of self-defence by the Banyamulenge against the attempt to expel them from Zaire and a legitimate struggle against the pro-imperialist Mobutu dictatorship by an alliance of petit bourgeois opposition forces.

The Banyamulenge was backed by Rwandan army commandos, in turn backed by the pro-US Ugandan regime. Whilst opposing any attempt by Rwanda to annex Eastern Zaire, revolutionaries recognise that the Rwandan state forces' war against the former Hutu-chauvinist government is also a just war.

In 1994 the LRCI gave critical support to the RPF in its struggle against both the Hutu militias and the French intervention forces and advocated that all progressive forces form a military bloc with the RPF to halt the genocide.

At the same time we pointed to the totally bourgeois character of the RPF, and explained that it remained a Tutsi-dominated elite, determined to place Rwanda within a pro-US bloc of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. Once the war was over this general position of critical support ceased. The main enemy of the Rwandan people as a whole became the RPF government itself.

But wherever the RPF government clashed sporadically with the Interahamwe in defence of the Rwandan population against the genocidal raiding parties, revolutionaries would again have supported the RPF forces. This conditions our attitude to the Rwandan army intervention in support of the ADFLCZ. Marxists' attitude towards just wars of self defence do not rely either on "who fired the first shot?" or on "who crossed whose border?"

Thus, despite the bourgeois nature of the Rwandan regime, and its backing by Uganda and ultimately the USA, this does not remove the progressive character of Rwanda's war against the Interahamwe.

Behind this localised conflict, however, stand far greater forces and greater dangers. The balance of imperialist power is shifting in central Africa, with an emerging rivalry between African states allied to French imperialism against those allied with the USA and Britain (see separate article, left). This shaped the recent conflict, but did not give it the predominant character of an inter-imperialist "proxy war". Nevertheless the prospect of such a war looms.

A war of annexation between the Francophone and Anglophone blocs would have just the same character as other wars between rival semi-colonial bourgeoisies. It would be reactionary on all sides, and revolutionaries would fight to turn the conflict into a war against the rulers of all the participating countries.

At the same time, throughout the crisis, we have to fight for the withdrawal of all imperialist troops. Even now it is not ruled out that France will intervene unilaterally. If so revolutionaries would side with Rwandan forces and their allies against the French invasion.

Imperialism plays nothing but a reactionary role in Africa. The Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which called for imperialist intervention revealed the utter bankruptcy of imperialist policy towards Africa.

Imperialism cannot develop Africa. It can only - inadequately and grudgingly - feed the victims of underdevelopment. Its troops can only impose order at the expense of strengthening local dictators. Faced with the overhead cost of military casualties it will always pull out, leaving the innocent to starve.

The Kivu crisis has exposed not just the imperialist states but also the NGO



1994 - Interahamwe retreats into Zaire

Zambia. The political centre, Kinshasa, is isolated. Structural adjustment programmes have worsened living conditions and education has suffered.

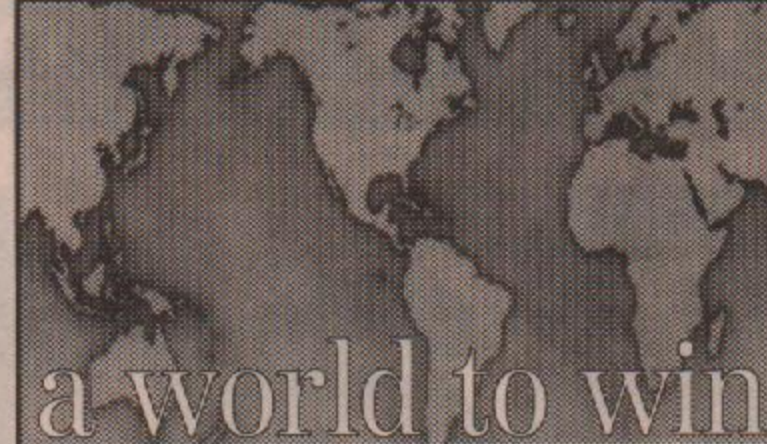
In Shaba, a central government attempt to rob the local ruling class by introducing a new national currency was resisted, leading to the existence of two different currency zones in the country.

The ability for Zaire to be held together

by force is weakening with the recent defeats of the Zairean army.

Given the mineral wealth of Zaire it unlikely that the imperialist powers will allow further ruin to come to Zaire without some form of intervention.

With Anglophone imperialism concentrating elsewhere it may well be France and Belgium who step in to shore up Mobutu. ■



### Zimbabwe

**T**HE MASSES of the capital city of Harare have just about had enough of the jet-setting lifestyle of President Robert Mugabe. In November, Mugabe spent a week wining and dining in Rome at the United Nations Food and Agriculture summit, stopping for a bit of Christmas shopping in London. He travelled on an Air Zimbabwe jet, press-ganged by the President, thus cancelling regularly scheduled flights.

Thirty-five airline workers face disciplinary charges as a result of their refusal to service Mugabe's commandeered plane. Meanwhile, thousands of workers and professionals took to the streets in mid-November in solidarity with striking nurses, doctors and other hospital workers, only to meet with brutal attacks by riot police.

The healthworkers' strike began in mid-October when it became obvious that the government had reneged on a previous agreement to boost their pay. The Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions issued a token call for a general strike in response to the police attack on the Harare demonstration, but made no serious effort to build it.

Even so, the healthworkers' action remains solid and could still prove to be the catalyst to the overthrow of a regime which has degenerated into one of the most arrogant and corrupt in Africa.

### France

A LOCAL judge in the Front National stronghold of Toulon has tried to strike a major blow against civil liberties. He sentenced two hardcore rap performers, Kool Shen and Joey Starr of the group Nique Ta Mere (Fuck Your Mother), to three-month jail terms.

Magistrate Claude Boulanger meted out the sentences, which included a six-month ban on public performance, for their anti-police song, Sacrifice des poulets (Sacrifice of the Cops). The lyrics contain the line: "I piss on your mindless police machine." Boulanger is himself an ex-special branch cop.

The band members, who come from predominantly black working class suburbs of Paris, are still free, pending the outcome of an appeal. The group has very publicly identified itself with opposition to the Front National.

Demonstrations were due to take place in several French cities as we went to press. Not surprisingly, sales of the record have also skyrocketed since the judge's ruling. ■

aid organisations. Though often staffed by selfless individuals, the organisations themselves cannot avoid becoming enmeshed in the class and national liberation struggles of the semi-colonies.

The roots of Africa's problems - the ethnic rivalries, the break up of multi-ethnic states, poverty and disease - do not emanate from Africa itself. They grow in Washington, Brussels, Paris and London. The real solution is to rid Africa of imperialism: imperialist troops and imperialist economic strangulation.

Concretely that means:

- Cancel the debts to the IMF/World Bank;
- Abolish the "Structural Adjustment Programmes" which have removed state subsidies on essential goods and opened up African industry and agriculture to the western profiteers;
- Nationalise the land, the essential industries; seize the wealth of the military elites;
- Launch a socialist plan to rebuild the African economy, backed by billions in compensation for four centuries of imperialist exploitation. ■

## SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY: Cliff launches new "mass turn"

# Back to the future?

BY COLIN LLOYD

"OUR HISTORIC opportunity" ran the headline over the recent Socialist Workers Party (SWP) conference report in their paper *Socialist Worker*. The November conference was once again debating how quickly the party can grow and how large it can get.

Tony Cliff, as usual, is leading the charge. Fearing the "conservatism" of his own organisation, he began campaigning for a new turn to mass recruitment in the pages of *Socialist Review* before the conference. This is the second "mass turn" that the SWP has launched in the 1990s. Its first mass recruitment drive was made during the political crisis of 1992-93. The experience of that should be instructive for SWP members today.

In September 1992, only months after the Tories election victory, a combination of the pit closure crisis and the collapse of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) produced a mass revolt against the Tories. While this was never fully translated into mass strike action it did force the Labour and trade union leaders to mobilise hundreds of thousands on the streets, most notably the mass demonstration/strike of 25 October 1992.

The SWP leadership saw this as a major opportunity to grow. The mass mood of discontent prompted Tony Cliff to swing the SWP into a campaign for a General Strike.

The attempt to recruit the new layers of workers brought into struggle by this crisis was not wrong. Nor was the call for a General Strike. What was wrong, from the very beginning, was the SWP's total abandonment of the fight to convince workers of the need for a revolutionary break with Labour.

As a result party cards were given away like dance-club flyers. "Hate the Tories? Unhappy with John Smith? Join the Socialists" was the mantra. But what kind of socialists? The criteria for membership was reduced in order to achieve the membership targets. Instead of the traditional Leninist view, that party members must work under the discipline of the party and agree with its programme, the SWP now said:

"Today a member of the party is someone who sells *Socialist Worker* and is prepared to defend the politics it contains."

Once the initial phase of growth slowed down (the SWP recruited over 2,000 members in the last three months of 1992) the Cliff leadership looked for scapegoats. It was decided that big branches were hindering growth, that some of the leaders of these branches were "conservative", out of touch with the mass turn and an obstacle. They were quickly pushed aside or even expelled on trumped-up charges.

Town-based branches were broken down into tiny locally-based branches, often of only five members, forcing them either to grow or collapse. Since these branches could only sustain a sporadic internal life, the membership was effectively reduced to low level, door-to-door work which produced rapidly diminishing returns once the political crisis abated.

Some of the more experienced members recognised that small branches needed the support of stronger district organisations. But the Cliff leadership was never fond of elected district organisations since, in the past, they tended to become centres of opposition to the latest leadership turn. Instead they were abolished altogether and replaced with centrally appointed paper organisers.

By 1994 this method had increased the official membership of the SWP to over 10,000. But it also produced a growing tide of discontent amongst the experienced militants themselves. The influx of new members brought with them a series of reformist ideas, incidents of sexism and problems of homo-



SWP sees a "vacuum" on the left. In fact the dockers are led by left reformists in the Labour and Socialist Labour parties

phobia, which were challenged in only the vaguest of terms, if at all.

It also brought activists from the anti-fascist and anti-Criminal Justice Act milieu who brought their own, often liberal individualist, methods of activity into the party. Despite having been handed a party card with no questions asked, those who attempted to go beyond paper selling and door knocking, who had minor differences on united front work, quickly found themselves on the receiving end of Tony Cliff's bureaucratic expulsion machine, as did any of the middle cadre who dared to question the results of the turn.

The "mass turn" of 1992-94 accentuated many of the worst features of the

become either simply by breaking with Blair's New Labour and signing an SWP party card.

To be a revolutionary means more than just wanting a revolution. It means being able to actively work for one, by transforming today's struggles into a struggle for power. It means standing against the stream of reformist and reactionary ideas - not just sexism and racism - but also chauvinist pro-imperialism.

A revolutionary is not just a "socialist to the left of Blair". A revolutionary must have a clear knowledge of the difference between reform and revolution and put that knowledge into practice in the class struggle and in the labour movement. They must be able to use this

difficulties of breaking the working class from reformism flows, in turn, from its economic view of the development of class consciousness. That is, it believes that the day-to-day economic struggle of the working class can itself produce, spontaneously, a revolutionary consciousness. At its crudest, the logic of this view is that wage struggles, if fought for hard enough, will break workers from reformism.

Consequently, the SWP steadfastly refuses to raise demands "too far ahead" of the masses, or to make propaganda for parts of the revolutionary programme which the masses "will not understand".

During the last "turn" SWP leaders added a dose of Gerry Healy-style catastrophism as a tonic for the flagging troops. After the big workers' demo against pit closures, which coincided with a parliamentary vote, Cliff told the SWP:

"If we had 15,000 members in the SWP and 30,000 supporters the 21 October miners' demonstration could have been different. Instead of marching round Hyde Park socialists could have taken 40 or 50,000 people to parliament. If that had happened the Tory MPs wouldn't have dared to vote with Michael Heseltine. The government would have collapsed." (*The SWP and the Crisis of British Capitalism* 1992)

This was backed up with catastrophism about the "crisis of European capitalism" with Britain as its weakest link. SWP leader Lindsay German even insisted that "many of the negative features which mark the beginning of the path towards revolution... are in place" ("Can there be a revolution in Britain?", *International Socialism* No 57)

This whole recipe is about to be re-run by the SWP in its current turn. This time the basis for mass recruitment is the "crisis of Labour" combined with a "mood of anger".

SWP leader Chris Bambery told SWP Conference delegates:

"There are tens of thousands of work-

ers questioning their allegiance to the Labour Party. Tony Blair is depriving them of their natural political home. This presents a historic opportunity for socialists in Britain we have a chance of growing considerably."

Blair's turn to the right, and the disillusionment it has caused in the working class, means for the SWP that workers are already beginning to break with reformism. Crucial to this overestimation of the scale of disillusionment is the idea of the "vacuum of leadership" promoted by Cliff. With Labour moving to the right, and the union leaders refusing to fight, there is a "hole" that the SWP can fill.

This ignores the fact that the working class - even left wing workers who hate Blair - has an existing leadership, with reformist ideas and strategies that have to be consciously challenged. There is no "vacuum" in the heads of workers breaking with Blair as the emergence of the Socialist Labour Party shows. The SWP maintains a studious silence about the SLP in its current schema.

The weakness of the "vacuum on the left" concept is revealed by Cliff's use of it as justification for why the SWP has to grow before the election:

"The vacuum of the left will not continue forever. We have to try to fill it now."

What this means is that, when workers go into struggle against the Labour government they will do so under the leadership of left and not-so left reformist leaders. If active illusions in these leaders are bound to reappear within months of a Labour victory then simply "getting in first" is clearly not the answer.

The answer is to challenge left reformism politically, which the whole "mass growth" turn will not do. It has to ignore the SLP and skate over the differences between joining a "socialist" party and a revolutionary socialist party.

Even some who were loyal to the old mass growth perspective are obviously worried about a return to it. Because, despite the recovery in trade union activity, and whatever the discontent with Blair, there has been no mass struggle and revolt comparable to the 1992-93 period. The leadership's answer is to cite the "mood of anger":

"You don't need strikes and struggles in order to build the SWP. The anger is very deep. There is a very political mood."

But the anger against the Tories, and even the anger against Blair within the workers' movement, is not yet a revolutionary mood. Unless we consciously address the reformist ideas and politics of workers and youth, "mass recruitment" will only further dilute the politics of the party and prepare the way for splits, desertions and crisis once real revolutionary questions are posed.

It is a desperate argument for the SWP, which constantly stresses that workers only learn through struggle, that it has to envisage a mass growth of a revolutionary party "without strikes and struggles" to bolster its mass recruitment turn.

The SWP's politics and methods can never build the mass revolutionary opposition to Labourism that we need. Revolutionary politics are sacrificed for the short-term task of winning a few thousand raw recruits who will inevitably pass through the revolving door of the SWP's membership drives.

For those who do want to build a party that can offer a revolutionary alternative to the working class, a programme to combat reformism and to chart a path from today's struggles to the struggle for power, the alternative is clear - join Workers Power. ■

**The SWP has always underestimated the strength of reformism among the activists as well as the mass of workers in Britain.**

SWP's internal life, which remains a caricature of the Leninist principle of democratic centralism. The leadership tolerates little or no organised opposition.

Meanwhile a politically passive and poorly educated membership, fragmented in tiny branches, waits for the latest political line to be handed down from the leadership. With little internal democracy and a conference which performs the function of a rally to drive home the latest line of the leadership, the SWP shows all the hallmarks of bureaucratic centralism.

But it would be wrong to think these were just organisational mistakes caused by an enthusiasm for growth at all costs. They flowed - just as the SWP's current turn flows - from a fundamental misunderstanding and underestimation of the strength of reformism in the working class.

To build a party we have to win workers to be both dedicated activists and revolutionary socialists. They do not

knowledge to resist adaptations to the spontaneous, often reformist, pressures that are brought to bear inside the labour movement.

Outside of a revolutionary situation it is the vanguard of the working class - the most committed and organised activists - who will be won to a consistent revolutionary position. And a vanguard party is what the SWP, despite its spurts of growth, has singularly failed to build in the British working class.

The SWP has always underestimated the strength of reformism among the activists as well as the mass of workers in Britain. In the 1970s, when workers' rising militancy brought down a Tory government, the SWP expected a mass break from reformism. Instead, Labour in power put a brake on the workers' militancy itself, demobilising the struggle. There was no mass break from Labour then and the SWP was plunged into crisis.

The SWP's underestimation of the

**Read: *The Politics of the SWP - a Trotskyist Critique.*  
£1 from Workers Power  
(address on page 3)**

# London "cool" shock

Dear Comrades

In late October, I emerged from Gatwick Airport and stopped at a newsagent's and saw the front cover of Newsweek proclaiming "London: the coolest city in the world". At first I laughed, then wondered if a miraculous change had happened during my fortnight's holiday.

Or was it a clever ploy by Tory Central Office, or even Labour's Millbank Tendency, to plant stories to make us proud to be British and completely blind to the realities of crumbling infrastructure, authoritarian censorship and abject poverty.

A survey of corporate executives rated London's public transport system as the best in Europe. I found time to read this as I waited nearly half an hour for a privatised 253 bus that is supposed

to come every four minutes.

On 20 November, I shared the misery of 20,000 tube passengers trapped in tunnels by a total power failure at London Underground's main generating station.

Above the streets was chaos as too many people scrambled to get on too few buses.

As for London's claims to be cool, chic and fashionable, try going to see the film *Crash*.

A Tory councillor in Westminster, named John Bull, has deprived me of the right to see this film, even as mainstream film critics howled for the banning of Michael Collins.

Somehow, I don't think that a movie about sex and car accidents is about to turn me into an autoerotic maniac. But antiquated pub licensing laws do

lead to people knocking back their last orders, only to spew them up on the packed tube or bus.

The self-appointed guardians of public morals brand cultural products as unfit for our consumption, yet the real obscenity is right under their noses outside the theatres, cinemas and clubs of the West End: desperate young people reduced to begging on the streets, day and night, regardless of the weather.

If London in 1996 is the best and coolest that capitalism has to offer in its heartlands then that just shows how important it is that we overthrow it quickly. Maybe then London can become cool!

Communist greetings  
George Baxter  
London N16.

# Enter the dragon: exit the WRP...

Dear Comrades,

We should not let this month's death of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) go unremarked. This group traces its origins right back to the 1950s and in the early 1970s it was one of the largest of the centrist fragments of the post-war Trotskyist movement. Under Gerry Healy it was not averse to reinforcing its claims to represent revolutionary continuity with Trotsky with physical attacks, slander and intimidation.

In 1985 the WRP imploded as the year long British miners' strike forced many WRP members to come to terms with the fact that the party's role in the working class vanguard was not all that was cracked up to be.

Workers Press emerged as the largest of the post-split groups claiming to be the WRP. After a year or so of discussion and debate about where it all went wrong the Workers Press concluded

that despite some mistakes the post-war Trotskyist movement had done all that it could have been expected to have done given the circumstances it faced. It then settled back into a familiar routine of 1950s and early 1960s-style right centrist accommodation to the left-wing of the British trade union bureaucracy, especially around Arthur Scargill.

But alas and alack, this failed to rejuvenate an ageing WRP. In July this year a demoralised membership decided that they were more a victim of the crisis of leadership of the British labour movement than part of its solution. It decided to set up a "transitional Marxist organisation". By Marxist it meant not specifically Trotskyist (too narrow!) and by "transitional" it meant on the road to something else, preferably a mass socialist party.

This party will not be a party "in the usual sense of that word". Its

aim will not be to teach but to listen and learn. In other words the WRP have nothing left to say.

Now we have the new paper to go with the initiative - *Reclaim the Future*. As expected it is little more than a passive mirror held up to reflect the myriad of campaigns and united fronts going on around the country.

The crisis of working class leadership will not be solved by *Reclaim the Future*; it is rather a symptom of that crisis, further dissolving the specific working class demands and needs into an amorphous coalition of forces, some of whom have aspirations that are far from the needs of the working class.

Those youth in the campaigns that the WRP are wooing should beware. The WRP are a relic of the past not a force for reclaiming the future for the working class.

Yours in comradeship  
Jasmine Khan

# Real problems with CFE

Dear Comrades,

Steve Conway's letter (Workers Power 205) about the Campaign for Free Education (CFE) made some important points. Unfortunately, it also exaggerated the significance of the CFE's decision to allow the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) a platform speech at its last conference.

Certainly, the RCN is a yellow union. Any nurses who want to fight for action in defence of their pay and conditions and for the NHS should leave it and join UNISON. As an active campaign, the CFE should not have invited them to speak. So far, so good.

Where I disagree with the Steve is that this raises concerns about the "popular frontist nature of the campaign". A "popular front" is an alliance between working class parties and a section of the capitalist class in which the workers' parties agree to limit their demands to those acceptable to their capitalist allies. On the successful CFE student march on 20 November, which was as big as 1995's official NUS demonstration, there was no sign that CFE was building a popular front.

Capitalist forces were conspicuous by their absence: hardly surprising when the campaign is calling for free education and taxing the rich! The platform speakers were left-wing student activists, a representative of the lecturers' union and Tony Benn MP.

I think revolutionary students should concentrate on criticising the CFE's fore-

most representatives (mainly supporters of Workers Liberty magazine) for their real mistakes. Their speakers at the demo correctly stressed the need to fight Blair and kick out the right wing in NUS. But they said nothing about how to transform NUS by making all officials directly recallable and paying them the average income of the students they represent, and nothing about the need for joint com-

mittees of student and trade union delegates in the colleges.

These are the crucial arguments because they relate to the real state of the movement and its tasks in the coming period. Dire warnings about "popular frontism" will only confuse the matter.

In comradeship,  
Richard Brenner  
South London

# Building Fund: £4,098

The capitalists are talking about another property boom. Whether it takes off or not one thing is for sure, office premises are expensive and prices are rising fast, so we urgently need to meet our Building Fund target of £20,000 by May 1997.

Last month the total raised stood at £2,930. This month the grand total is £4,098.50. Our readers and supporters have worked very hard to raise £1,168.50 in November.

Sponsored bike rides in Wales, sandwich making and raffles in London, collections in Manchester and a big collection at the Workers Power conference all contributed to this total, as did generous contributions from many individual readers and supporters.

This is the sort of effort that must be maintained and improved on

between now and May. If it is, we can definitely reach our target.

Send money, cheques, POs etc (made payable to Workers Power and marked Building Fund on the back) to the postal address below.

## WORKERS POWER

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# 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 restoration of imperialist 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.



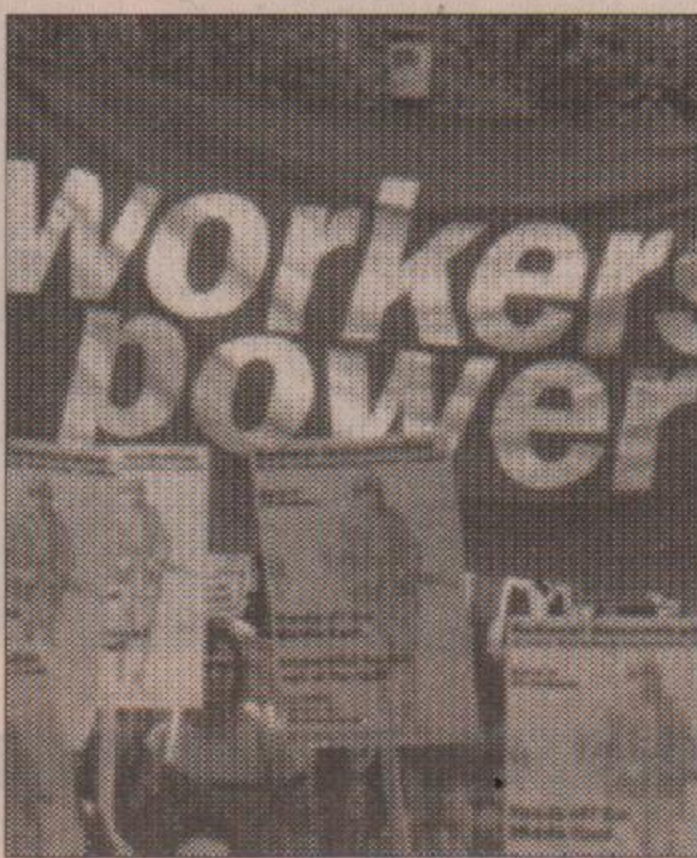
## Social Oppression

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!★

# Workers power

## INSIDE:

- Sweatshop Britain
- Michael Collins
- Don't blame youth!
- Scottish Assembly
- Tax the Rich!

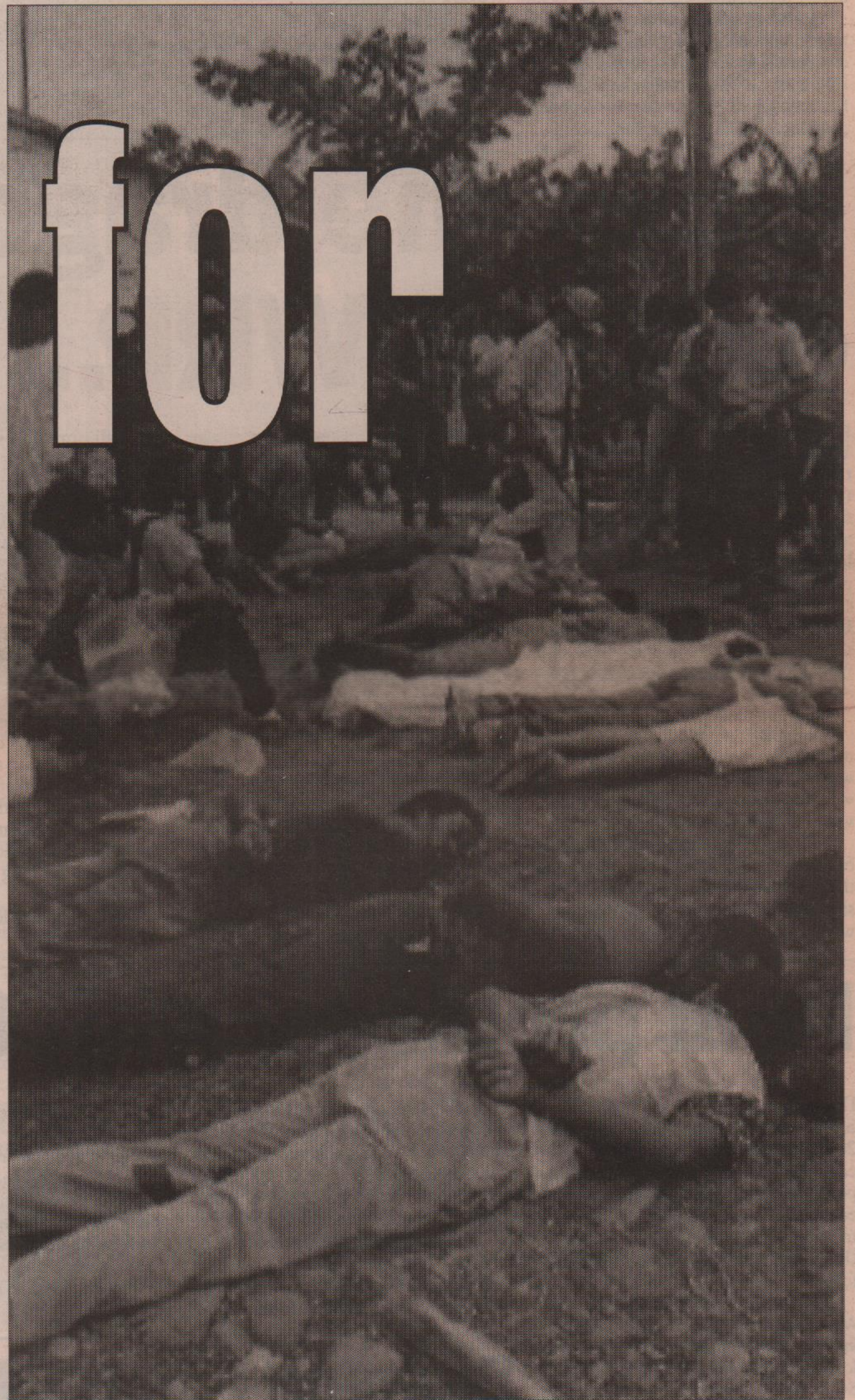
Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 206 DECEMBER 1996 ★ 50p

## BP in Colombian death squad scandal

# BP Blood for Profit



Victims of the death squads

**D**O YOU know what a major British company is doing in your name?

British Petroleum Plc, one of the world's biggest oil companies, has been handing over photographs and videos of trade unionists and peasant campaigners to the Colombian army. Hundreds have been killed in cold blood, locked up or intimidated by official death squads. This deliberate policy of murder and harassment has only one aim: to ensure BP makes billions from a new Colombian oil field.

Richard Howitt, a Labour member of the European Parliament, got hold of a copy of a secret human rights report and spoke out. He revealed that six local campaigners against BP's role in the Colombian region of Casanare were kidnapped by the military. Each one was later found murdered. He exposed how BP has been singling out activists and sending their photos to army death squads.

The oil fields in Casanare are enormous: they contain oil worth £23 billion. In their mad rush for profit, BP have been ruining the environment which local people depend on for their

livelihoods. Even BP officials have admitted weekly oil spills, chemical overflows, invasion of protected forests and contamination of water supplies. Local activists have reported livestock blinded from grazing on poisoned pastures and fish floating dead in polluted rivers.

No wonder local people have been campaigning against this destruction. The response of the Colombian military has been brutal.

When peasant farmers in the Andean foothills protested against environmental damage by blocking a jungle road to stop equipment reaching oil exploration sites, the military replied with assassinations and death threats.

The army have smashed the oil workers' union, driving the union in the town of Barrancabermeja underground. Thirty members of the union Sindical Obrera have been shot dead and 200 forced into exile.

BP pays for this army. Despite the fact that Human Rights Watch report that Colombia has the worst human rights record in the western hemisphere, despite a report to the Colombian government that

"the military and security forces are operating outside the law", BP funds them to the tune of millions.

BP claim they are obliged to pay the army under Colombian law. But they freely offered an extra £39 million to set up a new crack military unit. This will work alongside the notorious 16th Brigade, who are accused of massacring civilians, execution without trial, murder, kidnap and rape.

BP has paid £375,000 specifically to the 16th Brigade. BP's "security officer", Steve Devine, is a former member of the British Army's sinister Special Forces. He has falsely identified environmental activist Humberto Castaneda as a terrorist to get him locked up in prison.

BP's appalling actions show the real face of imperialism. Multinational companies and huge monopolies scour the surface of the earth for cheap resources, labour and markets. They ride roughshod over the bodies and the bones of anyone or anything that stands in their way. They pull the strings of puppet military dictatorships that defend their profiteering above all else. British workers,

trade unionists, environmental campaigners and youth can help to stop this barbarism. At the initiative of REVOLUTION, the socialist youth group, a coalition of activists has come together to make sure BP's crime is not forgotten or covered up.

Supporters of REVOLU-

TION and Workers Power, Colombian exiles from Acción por Colombia, trade unionists from the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, environmental campaigners from Reclaim the Streets, activists against the oil barons from the 90% Crude movement: all these will be

demonstrating against BP in London on 10 December.

If you want to stand up for democracy, human rights, trade union rights, the environment and the right of the Colombian people to a future free from the terror and destruction of multinational capital: BE THERE!

### BP: Blood on their hands!

12 noon Tuesday 10 December Britannic House Finsbury Circus London, EC2  
Bring banners, placards, drums, whistles and bags of energy!  
Nearest tube: Moorgate

## Nationalise the oil companies—See page 2