

# Workers power

**INSIDE:**

**Election fall-out:  
Ireland, the left, the  
unions, the Tories**

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 211 MAY 1997 ★ 50p

**The real fight has just begun...**

# NOW RIP-UP

# THE TORY

# LAWS!



**Force Labour to  
meet our needs**



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- ★ **Scrap anti-union laws**
- ★ **Scrap the JSA**
- ★ **Scrap NHS Trusts**
- ★ **Scrap all racist laws**
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## LABOUR'S OIL MAN: BP funds Colombian death squads

# Oil baron's dirty war

**W**ITHIN A day of arriving at Number Ten, Tony Blair offered Sir David Simon, Chairman of British Petroleum (BP), the cabinet post of Minister for Europe and a seat in the House of Lords.

BP has de-recognised trade unions in its North Sea oil fields. It has sacked thousands of workers across Europe. It is currently collaborating with Colombian military intelligence and its dirty war against oil workers, trade unionists, peasants and environmental campaigners.

Perhaps Blair doesn't know about BP's activities in Colombia? It is unlikely. Last year a report leaked to Richard Howitt – a Labour member of the European Parliament – showed evidence of widespread collaboration. The report was commissioned by the Colombian government under pressure from the United Nations. It was released last July but was immediately suppressed. For blowing BP's cover Howitt was reprimanded by the Labour HQ.

BP's operations in the Colombian region of Casanare have caused wanton destruction of the environment. When peasant farmers in the Andean foothills protested against BP's environmental damage by blocking a jungle road to prevent equipment reach-

ing exploration sites, six local campaigners were abducted by the military and later found murdered.

The leaked report showed that BP

handed photographs and videos of environmental campaigners, trade unionists and peasant activists to the Colombian military. Many have since been

murdered, tortured or subjected to systematic intimidation.

BP has also used the military to break strikes by workers in the indus-

try. In Barrancabermeja, BP has driven the union in the local refinery underground. Thirty members of the Union Sindical Obrero (USO) have been assassinated and 200 forced into exile.

BP claims that it is "required by law" to fund the Colombian military. Yet, last year the company signed an agreement to provide £39 million more than what is required by law to establish a new 650-strong crack military unit to defend its interests.

BP has also paid £375,000 specifically to the Colombian 16th Brigade. This special squad is accused of massacring civilians, execution without trial, kidnap, torture and rape. It was responsible for the assassination of local leader Carlos Mesias Arrigui in 1995.

## Coalition challenges BP lies

**I**N RESPONSE TO the revelations about BP Workers Power and the youth group Revolution formed the Coalition against BP in Colombia. The aim was to unite in action. Activists from Reclaim the Streets, the anti-oil company group 90% Crude, and exiles from the Accion por Colombia umbrella group held a successful protest in December outside BP's central London headquarters.

Further activities have targeted institutions sponsored by BP. On 8 March, Coalition supporters descended on the Tate Gallery in London where BP are sponsoring new displays of art. Taking staff and the police totally by surprise, protesters occupied the entire entrance to the gallery, unfolding banners above the main doorway while Colombian supporters kept up loud chants and activists handed out leaflets exposing BP's other "spon-

sorship deal".

On 18 March, BP boss David Simon got the treatment. His visit to Highbury Grove school to hand out National Records of Achievement was disrupted by Coalition supporters who drew the attention of parents, students and teachers to the Casanare case. Teachers and parents expressed real concern about the Colombian situation.

At another BP-sponsored school, St Paul's Way in East London, teachers supporting the Coalition have persuaded NUT members to vote to reject BP sponsorship, even if this were to put jobs at risk. Bravely, they have put international solidarity above accepting private finance for a state school.

The Coalition also joined in protests at the BP AGM on 10 April.

The Coalition has the backing of the oil workers' union, the Offshore

Industry Liaison Committee, which has agreed to fund a visit to Britain from a leading member of the Colombian oil workers' union, the Union Sindical Obrero.

The Coalition is calling on the government to force BP to cut its ties to the death squads, guarantee union rights to workers in the Casanare oil field and compensate the Colombian people for repression and environmental devastation.

In addition, Labour and trade union activists should call on the Labour government to withdraw its offer to David Simon. We should build trade union links and active solidarity with the Colombian workers and peasants who are the victims of BP.

We need your help. Write to the Coalition against BP in Colombia at BCM 7750, WC1N 3XX or ring 0171 357 0588.

### WHAT WE THINK

Instead of letting BP off the windfall tax and giving its chairman a peerage, Labour should nationalise BP without compensation and place it under workers' control. It should launch a public enquiry into BP's activities in Colombia, promising to bring to justice anyone found guilty of collaboration with the military.

## WOMEN MPs: Record number of women in Westminster

# Will they fight for women's rights?

**T**HE NEW parliament will include 118 women MPs. Almost double the number in the previous parliament. The Labour landslide led to this sharp increase; 101 of the 118 women are Labour MPs. A record five members of the new Cabinet are women.

Many benefited from the system of women only short lists, before the courts banned them. More women than ever before were able to stand in safe Labour seats.

What will the impact of these new women MPs be? Many believe that they will challenge the "laddish" atmosphere of the House of Commons. They may insist on more sensible working hours, more women's toilets and even a crèche.

Labour's Harriet Harman promised that women would push forward on policies concerning childcare and women at work.

But what can working class women really expect from Harriet and her sis-

BY KATE FOSTER

ters? In many respects the new intake of Labour women MPs are the concentrated essence of New Labour's careerist, middle class, anti-working class culture.

Ruth Kelly was a journalist on the *Guardian*, who then moved to work for the Bank of England. Patricia Hewitt is a management consultant. Angela Smith is a political researcher. Lorna Fitzsimmons, who won in Rochdale, was credited with transforming the National Union of Students into a Blairite union. Margaret Moran, now MP for Luton South, was the arch Blairite leader of Lewisham Council. Barbara Follett is a leading member of the champagne socialist set.

More women MPs may be a sign of changing times. They are signs that Blair is being used to modernise the "establishment" that runs British capitalism –



Labour's new women MPs epitomise New Labour's middle class priorities

not dismantle it.

But if more women in parliament is to be a signal for real change, we need to demand they fight for free 24-hour childcare, decent schools, free abortion on demand, full rights for part time

workers, a £6 an hour minimum wage, and massive state funding for the NHS.

Blair's new women MPs will not fight for these demands. The system that ensures a few well-educated women can fight their way up to the boardroom and

to parliament is the same system that relies on millions of part-time women workers staffing the supermarket check-outs and scrubbing office floors for less than £3 an hour.

Women of the Waterfront was set up to support the Liverpool Dockers. These women have won respect for their determination to continue the fight and admiration for their courage in risking all to defend jobs.

The Hillingdon strikers, mainly low paid Asian women, have also stood up for their rights in the face of tremendous odds.

When working class women get organised we can be a powerful fighting force.

We need a working class women's movement, linking up struggles and forging unity between women in work and those who aren't. Such an organisation, not the power-dressing Blairite women, is what we need. ■

## NORTHERN IRELAND: Sinn Fein wins two seats

# Huge vote says Troops Out!

**"A** VOTE for Sinn Fein is a vote for terrorism" – that was the message hammered home by politicians of all sides during the election campaign. Yet Sinn Fein won two out of its three target seats and now challenges the "moderate" Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) as the leading representatives of the anti-unionist population.

Why? Because a vote for Sinn Fein was, in reality, a vote against British occupation, against police bigotry and British military oppression and Tory machinations. And Sinn Fein won with the odds stacked against them. In both constituencies, boundaries were drawn to make it easy for nationalist majorities to be outvoted by Loyalist minorities. This was what happened in Sinn Fein's third target seat, West Tyrone, where the Ulster Unionists won the seat with 16,000 votes against a National-

ist vote of 28,000 divided almost equally between Sinn Fein and the SDLP.

Across the whole of Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein won 16.5% of the vote. That is just a shade less than the Liberal Democrats' 17% in Britain which was hailed as a record-making breakthrough for a minority party.

Sinn Fein increased its share of the vote compared to the "Northern Ireland Assembly" elections a year ago, despite a concerted campaign of media hostility and despite the IRA's ending of their ceasefire. It now has as many seats as Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party which only won 14% of the total vote.

Workers' Power, in this parliamentary election as in previous ones, supported Sinn Fein. We supported them despite their politics, which are a dead-end mixture of reformist socialist phraseology and utopian middle class nationalism. We supported Sinn Fein

because every parliamentary election in Northern Ireland is, in the last analysis, a referendum on its inclusion within the United Kingdom.

This is why Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness will refuse to take their seats in Westminster. The boundaries of the whole province were drawn to guarantee a Loyalist majority and to prevent independence – the express wish of the Irish people as a whole. That is why workers in Britain should side with those who are committed to removing British domination and reuniting Ireland.

In the aftermath of the election, the immediate issue in Northern Ireland is likely to be participation in the "peace talks" scheduled to begin on 3 June. Sinn Fein's believes that such talks can "resolve the Northern Ireland conflict". They are wrong. The talks are based on the idea that any result has to

be accepted by the artificially created "majority" in the artificially created state called Northern Ireland. This is the same as recognising a Loyalist right to veto reunification.

However, what is at stake at present is the British government's refusal to recognise Sinn Fein as participants. Mo Mowlam, the new Northern Ireland Secretary, repeated the Tories' position word for word even before she was formally appointed to the job:

"None of my colleagues will have any contact with Sinn Fein while the IRA makes that impossible. They know the preconditions."

As before, the British government will try to hold "peace talks" without inviting those who are fighting the war!

The attempt to exclude Sinn Fein is a scandalous refusal to recognise the rights of the Nationalist population. By what right does an English minister

decide who can take part in talks?

The leader of the Ulster Unionists, David Trimble, openly colluded with the Loyalist paramilitaries at Drumcree last summer. That was shown by a taped mobile phone conversation which Sinn Fein tried to use in its election broadcast. The election broadcast was censored.

Meanwhile, Trimble is not excluded from the talks. The Loyalist gangs burning down churches and schools and terrorising Nationalists out of their homes have not led to the exclusion of any Loyalist paramilitary representatives. All preconditions to Sinn Fein participation should be dropped. All political prisoners should be released. All British troops are should be pulled out of Ireland now, with no conditions, so that the whole Irish people have a chance to determine the future of their country, free of foreign interference. ■

# EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 211 MAY 1997

## After Blair's landslide

# Force Labour to meet our needs!

**T**HIS IS not a landslide country," Tony Blair insisted two days before the election. He was expressing a hope, not an opinion.

At a stroke the landslide has blown away the possibility of Tory government for ten years at least. And with it has gone the fear that was Blair's key weapon as he drove the Labour Party rightwards, unopposed.

Fear of the Tory tabloids. Fear of the Tory traders on the stock exchange. Most of all, fear of the Tory voters: the millions of workers supposedly hooked forever on a lifestyle of shares, Sierras and the Sun.

That fear stalked the trade union HQs, driving the bureaucrats to new depths of spinelessness and betrayal. It also haunted thousands of Labour and trade union activists - prompting many to back the compromise with Blair at union conferences.

Fear was Blair's weapon. That is why he wanted a modest victory. He wanted enough Tories left to frighten us some more. He wanted the excuse of a tight majority in parliament to put what was left of Labour's promises to the working class on the back-burner.

### Expectations

Now the fear has gone, the Tories have gone and so have Blair's excuses.

With a 179-seat majority fear is being replaced by hope and rising expectations. You could feel it in the pubs and clubs, on the estates, and most of all in the workplaces, as millions of bleary-eyed people began to take in the size of Labour's landslide on 2 May.

Even the generally pro-Blair *Guardian* noted that the result "has given rise to massive hopes and dreams, far exceeding what Blair promised". These hopes in Labour represent a real desire for change, among millions of people, for a dramatic shift away from the rancid values of selfish greed that the Tories promoted for so long.

So what will Blair do for the millions who have put their trust in him?

What he could do was illustrated by the last three days of Major's rule: more than a hundred laws were rushed through parliament as Labour made a deal with the Tories to rescue the remains of the unfinished Tory programme.

When parliament meets on 14 May there is nothing to stop Blair keeping up that impressive tempo of parliamentary efficiency. He can pass any law he wants, as quickly as he wants. The Tories will be too busy fighting each other; the unelected Lords too stunned to offer much resistance.

Will Blair rush through the key measures even of his own meagre programme? All the signs are that he will not. Devolution reportedly heads the list of new laws: complex plans for the Scottish and Welsh assemblies and multi-layered referendums will be Blair's excuse to stall on other reforms. Constitutional "radicalism" will be used to conceal social and economic conservatism.

Predictably "crime" comes next on

Blair's list. Slamming a curfew on 10-year old kids and sending young offenders on a fast track to prison is deemed an urgent task by the new Home Secretary, Jack Straw. Getting tough on the causes of crime: poverty, unemployment and blighted communities will have to wait, it seems.

Health service reform and the abolition of nursery vouchers and assisted places are also reportedly planned for the 14 May Queen's Speech. But what about the minimum wage? What about compulsory union recognition? The signs are that these small promises will be sidelined into a system of reports, commissions and enquiries while Blair, Brown, Straw and Mandelson chill out in Tuscany.

As for the real measures that could begin to meet our needs - massive job creation; renationalisation of the railways, the utilities and the mines; taxing the rich to pay for living pensions and decent benefits - if Blair gets his way you can forget it. The same goes for getting rid of the Tory shackles on trade unionism and for giving employment rights to all. Blair said, as he entered Number 10, that he had "fought as New Labour and would govern as New Labour".

It was a pledge to do what Labour has always done: govern in the interests of the ruling class. Blair's description of New Labour "practical measures in pursuit of noble causes" contains the same classic deception practised on the working class by every former Labour leader: vicious capitalist politics clothed in the rhetoric of compassion and humanity.

### Landslide

In office Labour always betrays the workers whose votes secured its parliamentary victory. After the landslide in 1945 the Labour government's reforms were paid for by an extended austerity drive against the working class, while the capitalists whose industries were nationalised received lucrative compensation payments that carried on for a generation.

Harold Wilson's 1966 landslide was followed by years of wage freeze and a failed attempt to push through a set of vicious anti-union laws. His 1974 government carried on where he had left off, managing to cut real wages and commencing the attack on the welfare state that has been relentlessly continued ever since.

There is a yawning chasm between the hopes and illusions of workers in



Labour and the reality of the party's loyalty to capitalism, its readiness to attack its supporters on behalf of the ruling class. This is why, while Workers Power called for a Labour vote, we also said organise to fight.

By this we meant organise to fight Blair: to fight to impose our demands on his government and to do battle with it when he refuses to meet those demands. We meant that from the very first day of the Labour government we are fighting to organise the working class against every pro-capitalist move Labour makes.

Only in this way can we stop the illusions that workers have in Labour turning into demoralisation in the face of its betrayals. If the label New Labour means anything substantial it means that under Blair those betrayals will come thicker and faster than ever before.

As the euphoria of election night wore off, millions started to ask: what will Labour do? The real question is what shall we, the millions who put them there, do? The answer is to start the fightback from below.

The only improvements we can expect from Blair are those we fight for. We must force Labour to honour its few progressive pledges now.

We must fight to push Labour much, much further to begin to meet the needs of those whose votes gave Blair his landslide on 1 May.

The key is organisation from below and a conscious strategy to force the union leaders to get off their knees.

The bureaucrats have it all mapped

out: a string of seaside conferences to celebrate the triumph, followed by a summer of indolence and an autumn of rearguard battles to preserve the union link at the next Labour conference. We must spoil their party.

As the union conference season starts we need a united front of all those in the labour movement who want a minimum wage that means something, who want union rights back now, who want compulsory recognition not in two years time but next week.

The Labour leaders will not listen if we sit back and wait. They will be too busy entertaining their new found friends in business, like BP boss Sir David Simon. Too busy cavorting with right wingers like education guru Chris Woodhead, who hates teachers and hates comprehensive schools. Only one thing will make the Labour leaders listen: mass action from below combined with pressure in the labour movement for a radical change in policies and priorities.

The action needs to start when parliament reconvenes. The TUC should call a mass lobby of parliament to coincide with the Queen's Speech on 14 May to demand:

- a minimum wage of £6 an hour now
- full employment rights from day one now
- compulsory union recognition now
- an immediate rise in pensions and benefits to bring them into line with wage rises now
- a crash programme of education spending so that no child goes back to school in September in a class of more than 30 and
- an end to the internal market in the NHS, to fundholding and for a massive injection of new funds to avert the crisis engulfing the service now.

### Budget

The next landmark will be Gordon Brown's mini-budget, scheduled for June or July. Brown has the power, and the mandate, to hit the privatised utilities hard. He could take £5, £10 or £15 billion out of the pockets of the utility fat cats.

Under business pressure he is likely to settle for £3 billion. Every pound the bosses defend is a pound taken out of Labour's job creation programme, nursery scheme or health spending.

We should start the fight now for a radical break with Labour's pre-election plans: we need a budget that will tax the rich, reverse the cuts in spend-

ing on fire services, health and schools, and immediately release the £5 billion frozen capital receipts to fund a massive new public house-building programme. Another £15 billion could be recouped by forcing Labour to scrap the new Eurofighter and billions more by forcing them to scrap Trident nuclear missiles.

To get all this we need another landslide: a unionisation landslide.

Already the TGWU is planning a high profile recruitment campaign in fashionable retail chains and restaurants. The T&G's hit list notably excludes Virgin, coincidentally owned by millionaire Blair convert Richard Branson. We must be clear - none of Labour's millionaire friends' companies should be excluded from the unionisation drive.

Even before the election there were signs of a spontaneous upturn in union membership (see "Whistleblower", page 11). Now we must go all out to unionise across the public and private sectors.

### Workplace

There are relatively few workers whose unions have been overtly derecognised under the Tories - mainly in the print and transport industries. But that makes it all the more important that we seize the chance of a relatively easy victory. In nearly every workplace where unions have been derecognised, unofficial ballots have averaged between 70 and 80 per cent in support of the return of union rights.

Union recognition, Blair's last sop to the union leaders, must be the chisel we drive into the Tory armour of anti-union laws. We can build a newly confident, young trade union movement that can make Blair eat his promise to keep the anti-union laws by organising mass defiance of them when Labour tries to impose them.

Blair's victory is our victory: a victory for millions of working class people. You cannot win a landslide unless millions of working class people vote for you. You cannot devastate the historic party of the bosses without raising the hopes and confidence of the working class.

But from the minute he became prime minister, Blair and his New Labour regime started to try and turn that victory against us, to again dampen the hopes and expectations and to begin the business of managing Britain on behalf of the bosses.

We can stop him. We can press home the advantage by raising the stakes, by turning hopes into demands and expectations into organised action. The more we do, the more we will come into conflict with Blair.

In that conflict it will become ever more possible to break workers from their illusions in Labour and win them to a mass alternative to it - a revolutionary party that will lead the working class towards the destruction of the capitalist system not its "modernisation"; a party that says the "social justice" that Blair talks about is impossible without socialism. ■

## New Labour: old battles

# Breaking the union link?

**L**ABOUR IN office will be a capitalist government. It always has been and New Labour will fulfil this role with a vengeance.

But it is different to a Tory government in one important respect. Because the Labour Party remains a party based on the organised working class, the trade unions, Labour governments are vulnerable to working class pressure. That is why workers place demands on Labour that they wouldn't dream of placing on the Tories.

It is also why the bosses have looked favourably on Labour governments at times of working class upsurge or the threat of such upsurge – 1945 and 1974 in particular. These were times when only a government linked to the working class could successfully demobilise working class militancy, channel it away from anti-capitalism and offload the costs of economic crisis onto the workers.

To get Labour elected after Thatcherism's triumphs in the 1980s, Tony Blair has gone a long way towards convincing the bosses and the middle classes that his "new" party is no longer in the pocket of the unions. He has proved this by far-reaching policy changes that have all but eradicated the old Labourite traditions of welfarism and state intervention. His appointment of arch right winger Frank Field as a Social Security minister signals his determination to dismantle what remains of the welfare state.

But to consolidate New Labour as a party that is truly safe from the bosses' point of view Blair needs to break its organisational and financial dependence on the trade unions once and for all.

Only such a break could win the support of really significant sections of the bosses – and their money – to Labour's ranks. Only this could enable New Labour to become an open bosses' party, like the US Democrats.

Blair has signalled that this is his goal. He told the *Financial Times*, a few months before the elec-

tion:

"I want a situation more like the Democrats and the Republicans in the US. People don't even question for a single moment that the Democrats are a pro-business party. They should not be asking that question about New Labour."

This theme continued throughout the election campaign itself. When asked if New Labour was pro-trade union Blair replied that he thought "the best trade unions at the moment are working in partnership with their employers", a deceitful answer but one suited to his message.

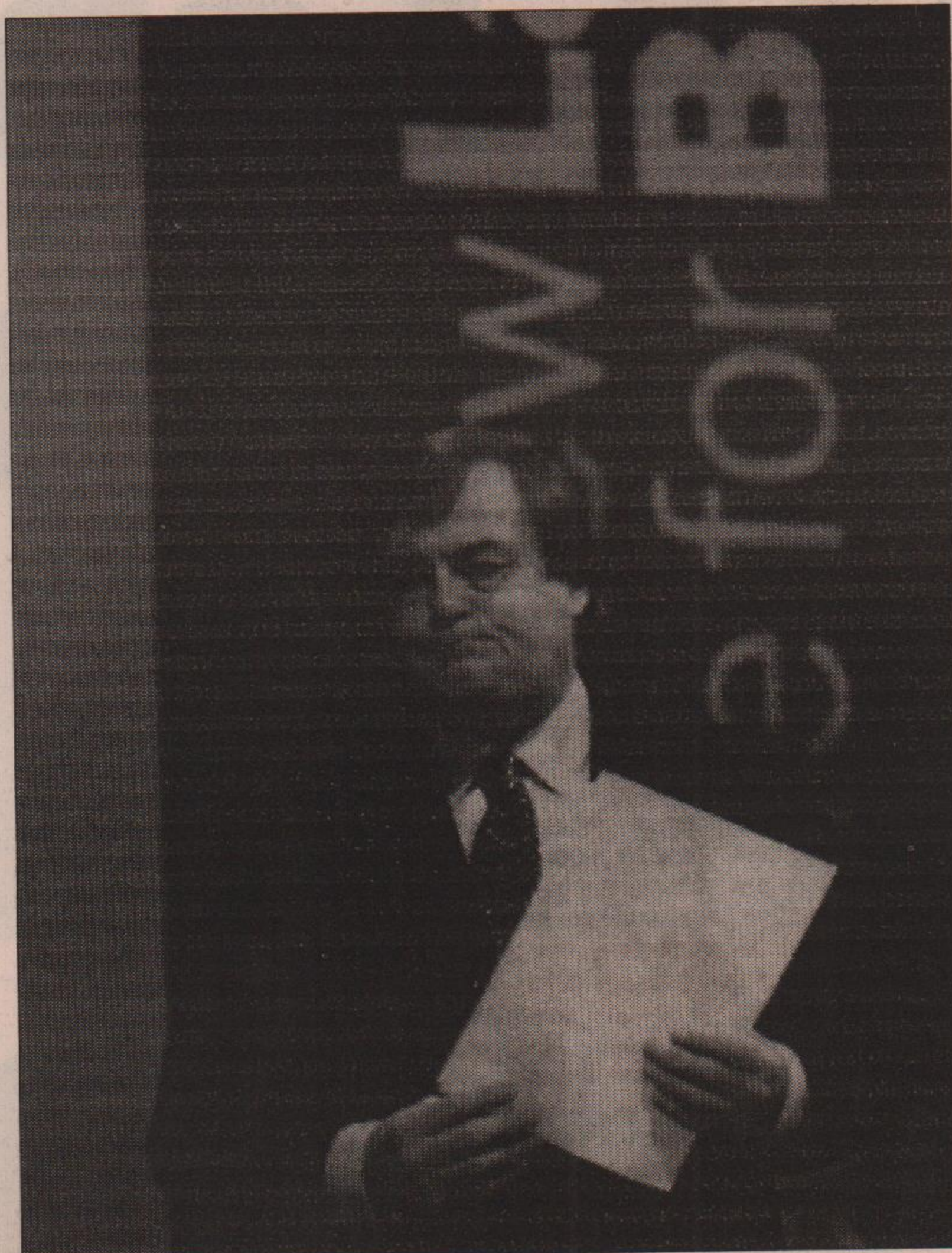
Compare this to the high profile in Labour's election campaign of bosses like Conrai – who refused union recognition to workers at his Design Museum despite a majority voting in favour of a union – and the oily Anita Roddick of Body Shop fame, who keeps her chain non-union.

All of this points towards a Blair/Mandelson strategy of radically reshaping the labour movement itself.

The transformation Blair aims at is clear from the organisational reforms that he will probably push at next October's Labour conference: the end of a conference, dominated by the unions, that has any policy making powers; the end of local organisational links between the unions and constituency parties; the election of party leaders to be returned to MPs alone; the neutering of the NEC, which still has union representatives.

These measures would not destroy the trade union link but they would severely weaken it. And they would make it easier to destroy at a moment of Blair's choosing – when the Labour government is faced with a major national dispute with the unions.

But Blair hasn't won this battle yet – and with his current majority he may choose to delay this showdown until much later. One reason for this is that it is far from certain that he could get a smooth passage for severing the union link.



John Prescott, closet friend of the union leaders

The union leaders now have the Labour government they have been desperate for. Their excuse for not checking Blair's rampage – fear that it would damage Labour's chances of winning an election – has now gone. It is highly unlikely that the union leaders would accept the severing of the link without a fight. Jimmy Knapp, leader of the Rail Maritime and Transport union, has already warned:

"The links between the unions and the party have their roots in the need to advance the aspirations of working people. Should those links be broken it will be a considerable setback – we are prepared to fight to maintain those links.

At the same time, the factions within the Parliamentary Labour Party itself will have more opportunity to reveal themselves and push their own partic-

ular agendas. For while the Bennite, "hard" left is a weak, demoralised shadow with little active base, there remains a powerful faction of MPs, including John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, and Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, who do not share Blair's desire to cut the union link.

Just days before the election Cook was publicly associated with a group called "New Left for New Labour". While its declarations were ever so moderate, when asked about breaking the union link, one of its MPs firmly stated "we would never accept that". Not surprising, since a key player in this new faction is Unison leader Rodney Bickerstaffe.

Of course, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that a split in the Tories, a powerful Liberal Democrat parliamentary group and a bust-up between the Blairites and the Prescott wing of the Labour Party could all contribute towards a dramatic realignment of British politics over the next few years. But at the moment Blair is more likely to – as his cabinet appointments suggest – maintain a bloc with Prescott and Cook's "New Left" supporters, continue to marginalise the old left – as highlighted by the exclusion of Michael Meacher from the Cabinet – and work away at weakening the link with the unions rather than dramatically ending it.

This is no excuse for complacency, however. Every step Blair takes towards weakening Labour's links with the organised working class – without there being a mass revolutionary alternative to replace those links with a real, politically independent working class party – will benefit the right and the bosses.

For this reason fighting Blair's reforms, for example at the forthcoming TGWU Biennial Delegate Conference which will be discussing political funding, should be part of the rank and file of the labour movement's campaign to stop Blair finishing off Thatcher's project of destroying the political influence of the trade unions. ■

## SP/SLP: don't mention the revolution

**W**ORKERS POWER recognised that the key question preoccupying millions of workers in the election was getting the Tories out. Voting for Labour – a party based on the organised working class, although led by pro-capitalist politicians – was the best way to intersect with these workers and take forward the struggle to build a real revolutionary party.

Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) stood 65 candidates, the Socialist Party (SP), the former Militant, fielded 19 in England and Wales. In Scotland its sister organisation stood as part of the Scottish Socialist Alliance, with 16 candidates. These parties are tiny and did not represent any mass break of workers from Labour. They could only be judged and endorsed on the basis of their programmes. Both the SLP and SP advanced left reformist programmes, which is why we did not call for a vote for them.

The SLP's leadership and membership are largely made up of ex-Labour Party members who wanted to put forward "old Labour" policies or Stalinists, wedded to the reformism of the old Communist Party's "British Road to Socialism".

There was one exception in the SLP, where the Cardiff Central branch stood on a revolutionary platform and gained

over 5% of the vote. Workers Power gave it political and practical support in the campaign.

The Socialist Party on the other hand claims to be revolutionary. Nevertheless, it stood before the working class on a manifesto that never mentioned the continuing presence of British troops in Ireland and never hinted at the need to smash the capitalist state to achieve its "socialist" objectives.

Both parties did abysmally on 1 May. Only two SP candidates, Dave Nellist, the former Labour MP in Coventry, and Tommy Sheridan, who last stood in Glasgow while jailed for leading the anti-poll tax struggle, saved their deposits. Both gained more than 3,000 votes, but this was way down on their previous performance. Other SP candidates averaged 369 votes, often below 1% of the poll.

The SLP with a higher media profile did just a bit better. Only three candidates saved their deposits. Many gained only a few hundred votes. The results proved that neither represented serious forces breaking to the left from New Labour.

Despite the fact that between them they were only contesting 15% of the seats, these parties refused to call for a Labour vote in the other 85%. Both had decided that Labour was simply a bourgeois party, really no different from

the Liberal Democrats or Tories. The SP found this ultra-left position difficult to argue on the ground. Its paper campaigned to drive the Tories out on 1 May, yet was unable to call for a vote for the only party able to do so!

The Socialist maintained:

"Labour's policies are now as anti-working class as the Tories. That is why we don't endorse Labour in this election. Vote for Socialist Party candidates where you can. Wherever you are campaign to get the Tories out and help us build a fighting force for socialism and real change."

Get the Tories out, but don't vote Labour, and certainly don't fight around a revolutionary manifesto? This muddled, abstentionist message clearly didn't fool working class voters who knew better than these "socialists" how to get rid of the Tories". Nor will it help organise a mass break from Labour towards revolution.

Terry Burns' vote in Cardiff proved that a revolutionary programme is certainly no disadvantage in an election and can have powerful, if limited, propaganda value in the fight for socialist ideas. Everywhere else they stood the SP and SLP proved that presenting a reformist programme and pretending to be "real" Labour has no value whatsoever and certainly doesn't win you extra votes. ■

## The Socialist Workers Party

THE SOCIALIST Workers Party (SWP) decided to "vote for Labour, except where genuine socialists are standing".

Local SWP branches were left to their own devices to identify such socialists, with some hilarious results. In Cardiff Central, the SWP refused to support the SLP's Terry Burns, standing on a revolutionary platform, who gained over two thousand votes, but supported the neighbouring SP candidate in Cardiff South who managed all of 344 votes!

Socialist Worker's election coverage exposed the SWP's centrism – its vacillation between reformist and revolutionary politics. The SWP denies the need for a programme. In particular, it rejects a transitional action programme which maps out the key demands in the every day workers' struggles and links these to the fight for socialism.

But, of course, every party has to have a programme to argue its way forward, especially at elections when

even the "yogic fliers" of the Natural Law Party put forward a programme for government.

In the end, the SWP was no exception. It published "a manifesto for real change" comprising a series of justified reformist demands but ones not linked to revolutionary goals. Taken together the demands would have certainly benefited the working class. But on their own would not have advanced it towards the goal of socialism. Missing was a series of practical, transitional measures, such as workers' control over production, or organised defence of workers' picket lines.

The SWP never made the link between their minimum, reformist programme and their maximum socialist demands for revolution, tucked away in the "Where We Stand" column of their paper. Their "programme" was just a series of good ideas dreamed up in the editorial office of Socialist Worker and binned after the election. ■

## Socialist Labour: Vauxhall SLP closed down

# Fighting Scargill's witch-hunt

**Kirstie Paton** is a supporter of Socialist Labour Action, a bulletin produced inside the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), and a member of the suspended Vauxhall constituency of the SLP. She is highly critical of the Scargill leadership of the SLP. We interviewed her shortly after the election.

**How do you think the SLP fared in the election?**

I think our vote was disappointing. Out of the 65 seats where we stood, the SLP only saved its deposit in three constituencies; East Ham (Imran Khan), Cardiff Central (Terry Burns) and Newport East (Arthur Scargill). There are two reasons for this.

First, despite Blair's policies, the vast majority of workers still have illusions in Labour and the landslide victory has confirmed that. Secondly, the SLP entered the election in a very weak state. With an active membership of no more than 400 nationally, the SLP was in no position to fight a serious campaign in 65 seats. Nevertheless, Scargill pushed very weak branches into standing what were effectively "paper" candidates.

Worse still, Scargill launched a witch-hunt of the left, expelling comrades and shutting down whole branches like Vauxhall. This led to demoralisation and resignations in some areas. Meanwhile Scargill endorsed numerous rabidly Stalinist candidates: members of the openly homophobic "Economic and Philosophic Science Review group", the Stalin Society etc. These are hardly people who will attract young working class militants to the banner of the SLP.

**Were you surprised by the result in Cardiff Central?**

I was very pleased with the result. Terry Burns received 2,230 votes, 5.28 per cent of the vote. Terry even surpassed Scargill's vote of 1,951 in Newport East and achieved the second best vote for the SLP nationally. What was unique about the campaign in Cardiff was the fact that the comrades adopted a version of an SLA initiated manifesto - in effect a revolutionary programme for the election.

Despite Scargill's demand that they stop selling their local manifesto, the Cardiff Central branch continued to fight the election on this programme. This result is excellent news for the revolutionary left in the SLP. It takes the message into the party that socialists can go out to working class people, put forward the arguments for revolution

and gain a hearing.

**Can you bring us up to date on Scargill's witch-hunt of the left in the SLP?**

After our suspension for refusing to recognise the expulsion of one of our members, Vauxhall constituency went on the offensive and called a national meeting on 13 April to launch a campaign to defend voided SLP members and branches.

Over 40 members attended. We passed a resolution proposed by me which committed the meeting to fight Scargill's witch-hunt. (See box)

**Was the meeting united on this course?**

No. Some comrades argued that it would be wrong to conduct the struggle against the expulsions publicly outside the party. Comrades who support the *Marxist Bulletin* [largely former supporters of the so-called International Bolshevik Tendency - WP] argued this would damage the election campaign. I was criticised for raising my branch's suspension at the SLP election press launch.

What these comrades refuse to accept is that it is Scargill who is discrediting the party by treating it as his own property and expelling/voiding members and branches he disagrees with. If we don't make Scargill and his supporters on the NEC pay for every expulsion and suspension they will just come back for more. This "keep your heads down" policy is what the Militant did when it was in the Labour Party and it just made the Labour bureaucrats even more confident. Ian Driver, our candidate, has written a very good open letter to the party exposing what is going on. We need more of this not less.

The comrades who argue that we should simply campaign for the right to appeal against our expulsions are sowing a dangerous illusion that we can get back into the party by using the structures of democracy within the party. But there is no democracy within this party! The NEC has never acted on a single resolution passed by branches condemning the expulsions. We will not be granted an appeal by the NEC, the very same body that has expelled us.

If we refuse to be silenced, Scargill has to explain his actions not just to party members, but to the labour movement as a whole. That is why the Campaign for Democracy should publicly attack Scargill for his bureaucratic expulsions in the party and force the issue out into the open.

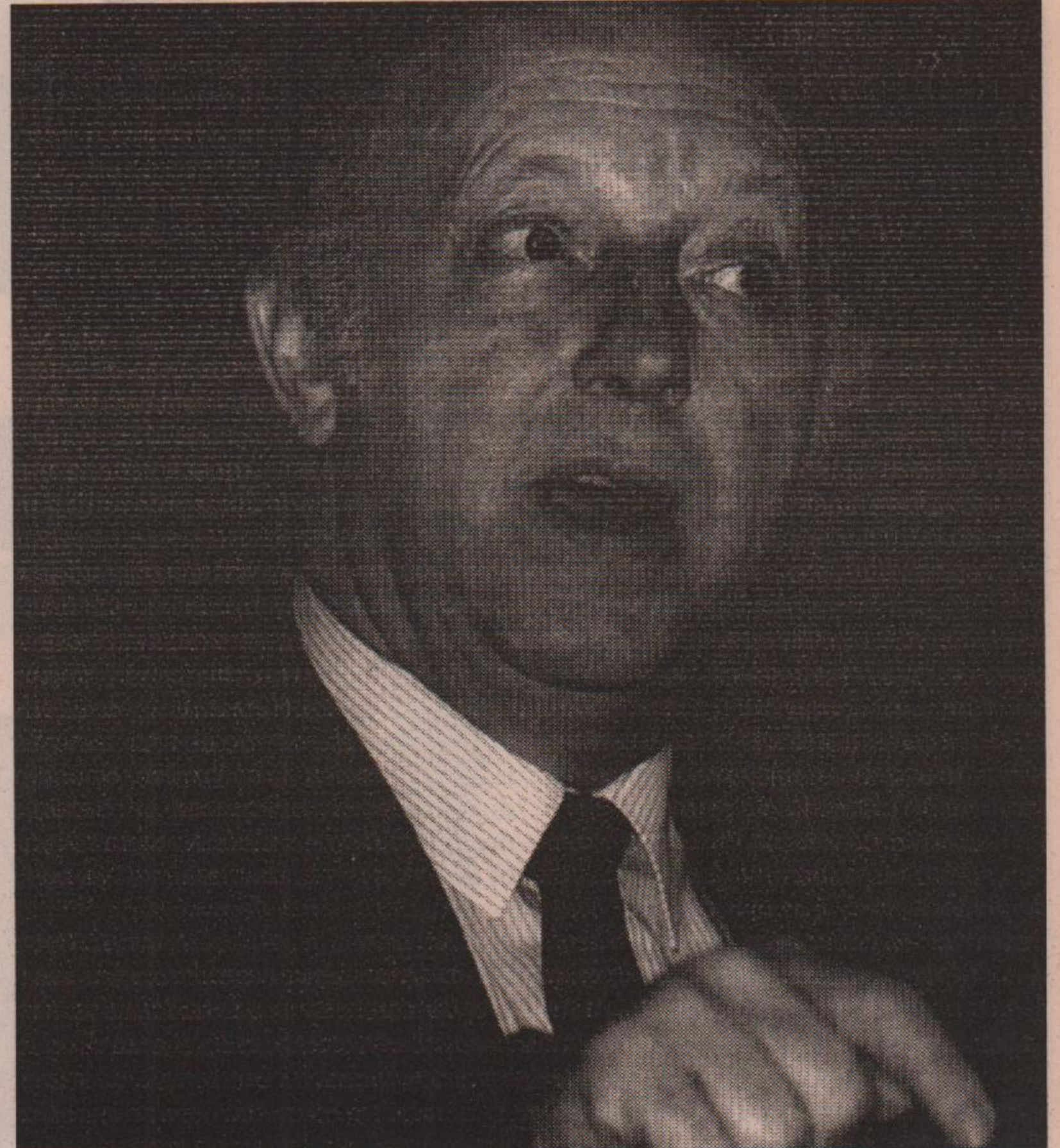
Scargill wants trade union branches to affiliate to the party. We should be explaining to trade unionists that if Scargill continues to purge the party of good socialists it won't be a party worth joining - it will be a Stalinist rump. **After the elections, what future do you see in the SLP?**

I think the comrades who produced SLA have been proved absolutely right. We warned that if Scargill continued to purge the party of real socialists, then the opportunity to build the SLP into a revolutionary alternative to Labour and reformism would be lost. Many comrades have already left in disgust at the methods of Scargill and the NEC. At the same time, comrades who were given the fairy tale perspective that the SLP was "the fourth largest party in Britain... and a significant break from Labour", will now be extremely demoralised and disoriented by the election results.

I think Scargill will continue to expel the left. Scargill wants a left reformist party and he is happy to build it with his Stalinist allies. It can't be ruled out that as workers move into struggle against Blair and look for left answers the SLP may benefit. But the crisis in the SLP suggests that it is just as likely that it will remain a Stalinist sect on the fringes of the labour movement.

**Where next for the left in the SLP?**

The SLA has been to the fore in the fight against the witch-hunt. Along with other comrades we have defied the NEC's expulsions and put ourselves in the firing line. We have fought and won the left of the party to an open struggle for democracy in the party. A national conference of the Campaign for Democracy is scheduled to take place on 7 June. We have been the only tendency to fight openly in the party for a revolutionary action programme.



Scargill is building a Stalinist sect

Scargill has denied many of us the right to fight within the party for our policies. He uses a constitution that has never been voted on by party members to gag, intimidate and expel opposition. Well, this opposition will not be silenced. That is why we have declared ourselves a public faction of the SLP

and one in political sympathy with *Workers Power*.

We intend to continue our struggle in the SLP and in the labour movement for the building of a genuine revolutionary movement.

We call on members of the SLP to join us in this struggle. ■

## THE RESOLUTION AGAINST THE WITCH-HUNT

**This conference:**

1. Opposes the witch-hunt the NEC and the General Secretary, Arthur Scargill, have launched against socialists in the party through bureaucratic expulsions of members and closing of branches.
2. Will defy these expulsions by recognising all comrades expelled/voided by the NEC and all branches dissolved by the NEC.
3. Recognises the Vauxhall and Brent CSLPs.
4. Recognises the candidacies of

Brent East and Cardiff Central.

5. Declares that Arthur Scargill and the NEC are in breach of working class democracy in the SLP.
  6. Demands the party organises an emergency SLP congress to discuss the attacks on democracy and the constitution.
  7. Will issue a public statement exposing the NEC witch hunt of socialists in the party and support the Campaign for Democracy launched by party members.
- 13 April 1997

# Standing for revolution in Cardiff

**What did you find were the most important issues in the Cardiff Central campaign?**

Well the first thing I noticed was the apathy towards the Labour Party's programme - or rather the lack of it. There was no enthusiasm amongst people to vote for the Labour Party, it was more a case of voting against the Tories. There was a genuine welcome on the doorstep for us with an alternative to Blair's programme.

**You adopted a revolutionary manifesto to stand on here in Cardiff Central. Did that make a difference?**

I think because we discussed the election politics in the branch and came up with a statement that we all broadly agreed on, it meant we were galvanised and could go out with enthusiasm. We were enthusiastic about pushing the ideas of socialism and the need for socialist change.

The fact that the ideas in the pro-

**Terry Burns was the SLP candidate for Cardiff Central. Terry stood on a revolutionary programme, quite different to the official SLP manifesto and one we fully supported in the election. He spoke to *Workers Power* after the results had come in.**

gramme were revolutionary was important: they were important to those who came out and supported us, like members of *Workers Power*, or individuals who did work behind the scenes. Whether they were important to the electorate I don't know.

**Were there any issue that were key to gaining votes on the day?**

I think what was important was that we produced a number of leaflets aimed specifically at students and youth, lesbians and gay men, women etc. I think people appreciated that we were the

only party in Cardiff that openly campaigned around social issues and equal rights.

**Were there any weaknesses in your campaign?**

We did make mistakes. I think it took us quite a while to get focused on the work. But we had two very successful meetings in the campaign. Both meetings were relatively full and what was good was that they attracted local working class people from the constituency. The second mistake was to stand at all!

But right from the start we openly proclaimed what we were doing and we openly sold our material and shouted over our megaphone for taxing the rich until they bled.

We were the loudest most active group in the election! **What are the tasks of the SLP now? How are you going to build on the 2,230 votes you got?**

We have not met as a branch yet to discuss this, but there is the possibility of standing in a local by-election. We are also looking to build a number of campaigns around local issues such as hospital closures.

The elections are important but we are back to building a democratic party and to building socialism. We need to build the party locally, we have a long list of names to follow up.

We have made the point to the local Labour Party that we're here and here to stay. We are not going to pretend that

two thousand votes is the revolution but it represents 8% to 10% of Labour's vote and that should be a significant threat to the Labour Party. **What about the SLP nationally? Scargill accused you of breaking the constitution by putting out your manifesto.**

What we say is that the Socialist Labour Party should be a party of genuine socialists.

There should be open discussion and a democratic party. We have a part in shaping the democracy in the party, shaping its policy.

So we intend to play a role in the struggle for the democratisation of the structures of the party and we will be looking forward to making changes in the constitution.

**Have you received any word yet from Arthur to congratulate you on gaining the second highest vote for the SLP?**

Not yet. ■

## DEVOLUTION: Tory wipe-out

# Workers reject the nationalist solution

## SCOTLAND

**N**OWHERE WAS the Tory wipe-out more complete than in Scotland and Wales. Both countries are now "Tory-free zones" in parliamentary terms. Welsh voters booted out the remaining eight Tory MPs, while in Scotland all 11 Conservatives lost their seats.

This represents a massive shift to the left, particularly in Scotland. While it certainly indicates deep-seated support for a Scottish Assembly, it would be wrong to reduce the election results north of the border to just that.

The fact that Labour, and not the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), were the biggest winners shows that Scottish workers see devolution as a way of meeting their class needs, not as a "highway to independence" as the SNP's Alex Salmond would have us believe.

### Casualties

For example, the historically safe seat of Eastwood – regarded as a bit of "middle England" on the edge of Glasgow – fell to Labour on a massive swing. Big name casualties included Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind and Board of Trade President Ian Lang. Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth, once a Thatcher pet, was also unable to repeat his Houdini act of the last two elections.

The magnitude of the Tory defeat in Scotland becomes more apparent when

seen against election results in the mid-1950s when the Conservative and Unionist Party controlled 36 seats and 50% of the popular vote. The Tories' share of the Scottish vote now is barely one sixth. A beleaguered and disorientated party is even considering dropping its opposition to any measure of devolution.

Labour captured 56 of 72 Scottish seats. The SNP had high hopes of a breakthrough on 1 May. These "Tartan Tories" postured as a radical alternative well to the left of New Labour in the inner cities. But their three new seats all came from the Tories. While their share of the ballot barely went up, they took votes from Labour in only two constituencies.

Those sections of the Scottish left who had accommodated to the SNP's call for an independent Scotland had a dismal May Day. The Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) contested 16 seats and lost 15 deposits with often derisory votes.

The notable exception was long-time Militant supporter Tommy Sheridan, who gained just over 11% of the vote in Glasgow Pollok. This was due to his high profile in the recent battles against Glasgow City Council's Labour-imposed cuts and his past militant record.

But Scottish voters, in their overwhelming majority, wanted rid of the

Tories, however dissatisfied many of them were with the New Labour leadership. Certainly the Scots voted in favour of Labour's promise of a referendum on a Scottish Assembly with tax-raising powers.

When, in early April, Blair made a demeaning comparison between a Scottish parliament and an "English parish council", it provoked a fierce media reaction but it did not cost him many votes.

The reason for this is that Scottish workers, like their English brothers and sisters, supported Labour for class reasons. They wanted "their" party in government to undo the Tories' damage to employment rights, jobs and the welfare state. Already, we have seen signs of Scottish workers organising to fight.

### Contained

In March, tens of thousands rallied to the struggle against Labour council cuts in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Although the initial strike wave in defence of jobs and services was subdued by union leaders eager not to rock Blair's boat, future battles will not be so easily contained.

The annual conference of the Scottish TUC, which took place less than a fortnight before the election, featured a number of demands on Labour: for renationalisation of the railways, a minimum wage linked to male median earn-

ings and to break the Tories' spending limits.

Blair has no intention of meeting any of these. David Blunkett even tried to claim the STUC would exercise no influence over the party's policy because it was not affiliated to the Labour Party.

### Powers

But Labour know that they will come under real pressure both to deliver a Scottish Assembly with real powers to tax and spend, and to meet working class needs.

If they fail to deliver, many Scottish Labour activists fear the SNP could

grow. Blair's appointment of Donald Dewar, an ex-chief whip, as Scottish Secretary suggests that the new prime minister intends to maintain tight control over a Scottish Labour Party that he neither knows nor trusts.

In the meantime, Scottish workers should follow their own class instincts and organise to fight for their demands now. It was the Scottish working class that turned the tide against Thatcher with their magnificent anti-poll tax rebellion. Today, the Scots are again in pole position to kick-start a fightback against New Labour's prime minister. We say, "Go for it!" ■

## WALES

**T**HE WELSH nationalists of Plaid Cymru also tried to cloak themselves as "socialists" in working class areas. At a CPSA/PTC organised meeting in Cardiff, Plaid candidate, Colin Palfrey, went so far as to tell the trade union audience that his party favoured the right to strike, employment rights for all from day one and renationalisation of the utilities.

But, like the SNP, Plaid failed to make any real dent in Labour's strongholds. Overall their vote rose only to 10% and won them no new seats. If anything, there was a swing from Plaid to Labour in Plaid's rural strongholds. In contrast to Plaid's mixed results, Labour secured an absolute majority of the popular vote and a record 34 of

the 40 Welsh seats!

This reflects the fact that Welsh nationalism has far weaker roots in society, particularly in the working class, than its Scottish equivalent. Does this mean that the question of a Welsh Assembly is irrelevant?

No. But it does mean that socialists should recognise that we must not simply transfer slogans from one country to the other.

There should be an immediate referendum on a Welsh Assembly. But it is far from clear that the Welsh working class want such an assembly. As long as this remains the case, socialists should not advocate an unnecessary detour on the road to class unity against the bosses. ■

## TORIES: After election massacre

# Sleazy, split and sinking fast

**F**RIDAY 2 May 1997, 2.50am. A defining moment in British politics. It will live long in the memory of many. It was the moment when Michael Denzil Xavier Portillo lost the election in his supposedly "safe" Tory seat of Enfield Southgate.

The scale of the Tory defeat is staggering. One third of the cabinet, seven ministers, lost their seats. There are no Tory MPs in Scotland or Wales. There are only 165 Tories left in parliament. Fewer Tories than the number of new Labour MPs, 182; fewer than the Labour majority, 179.

It was better than most people dared hope. It was a Tory wipeout.

So what is the future for the Tories? The Conservative Party in parliament is confined to England. The only areas that voted for them were rural constituencies. It now represents few suburbs, let alone the cities. Even in their heartlands they came under pressure. They lost 90 out of their 145 seats in South East England. They even lost Thatcher's old seat in Finchley.

It did not take long for the recriminations to begin. The knives came out straight away. The Eurosceptics blamed the Europhiles, the party workers blamed the parliamentary party. Former party treasurer and prominent

defector to the Referendum Party, Lord McAlpine said, "as for John Major, he won't even be history."

For more than a century the Tory party has been the chosen instrument through which the British ruling class governs. But recently the party has not been playing that role effectively.

A majority of British capitalists look to Europe for markets and profits. They have been concerned at the power of the anti-Europeans within the party and the influence that they seemed able to exert over the Major administration. The whole issue of Europe seemed to hypnotise the Tory party, threatening to prevent them focusing on any other issue.

### Resolve

Europe also led to a feeling of weakness at the very heart of the state. The endless squabbles and backbiting, which no one, least of all Major, seemed able to resolve.

Others in the ruling class have warned of the increasing complacency and outright corruption of Tories, like Neil Hamilton, who lined their own pockets and openly fiddled their taxes. Such behaviour was challenging the legitimacy of the ruling party, and Parliament itself, in the eyes of the entire population.

Hamilton's defeat in the fifth safest Tory seat, by journalist Martin Bell, was powerful testimony to the disgust felt among wide layers of the population at Tory corruption.

The Tory decline began way back in 1991. It was begun not by the treachery of Heseltine who stood against Thatcher, but by the masses of working class people who, when faced with the poll tax, said enough is enough. Thatcher's defeat demoralised and disorientated both her faction and the party faithful. While they were able to scrape together an election victory in 1992, the economic fiasco of the pull out from the ERM, the pit closure programme and the tax rises, all ensured the collapse of Tory support.

The contradictions in the party run deep. The Tories have always prided themselves on their centuries old ability to adapt the party to the needs of the ruling class.

The last real "turn" was that led by Thatcher: from "one nation" social partnership to smashing the post-war consensus and making the working class pay for the crisis of British capitalism.

To effect that turn Thatcher had to mobilise the middle class base of the party against the Tory grandees. She did it by pandering to their nationalism, xenophobia and racism, and by filling

their pockets with money through share issues and tax cuts. When the Tories could no longer deliver year on year handouts to the middle classes they began to desert.

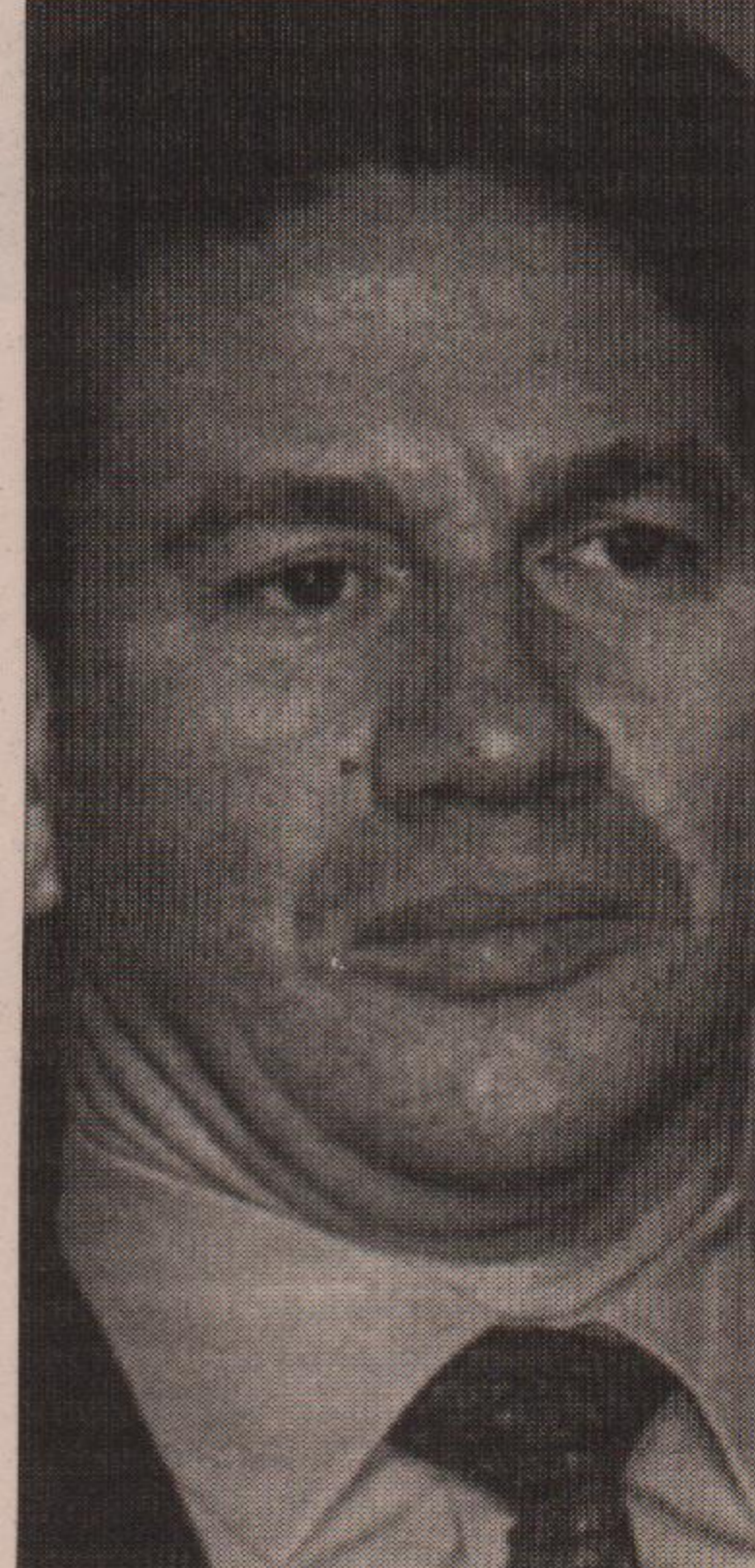
### Bleak

The future of the Tories looks cheerfully bleak. They have no agreement over Europe and no one faction commands a majority for a new agreed policy.

The leadership battle will be their first problem. Heseltine who could have been a stop gap candidate preventing civil war breaking out has been ruled out on health grounds.

At least half the elected Tory MPs are definite Euro-skeptics. Yet most Tories know that a party led by John Redwood would be driven increasingly into isolation and Europhobia. It would be of no use to the major sections of British capital and would probably split in the short term. A pro-European leader like Clarke would be blocked or would provoke a similar split. A compromise candidate would preside over paralysis and faction fighting in the same way Major did.

This defeat means that the Tories' fate, as a unified party, hangs in the balance. We wish them a speedy disintegration. ■



High profile Tory casualty, Michael Portillo contemplates his future after a crushing defeat at the polls.

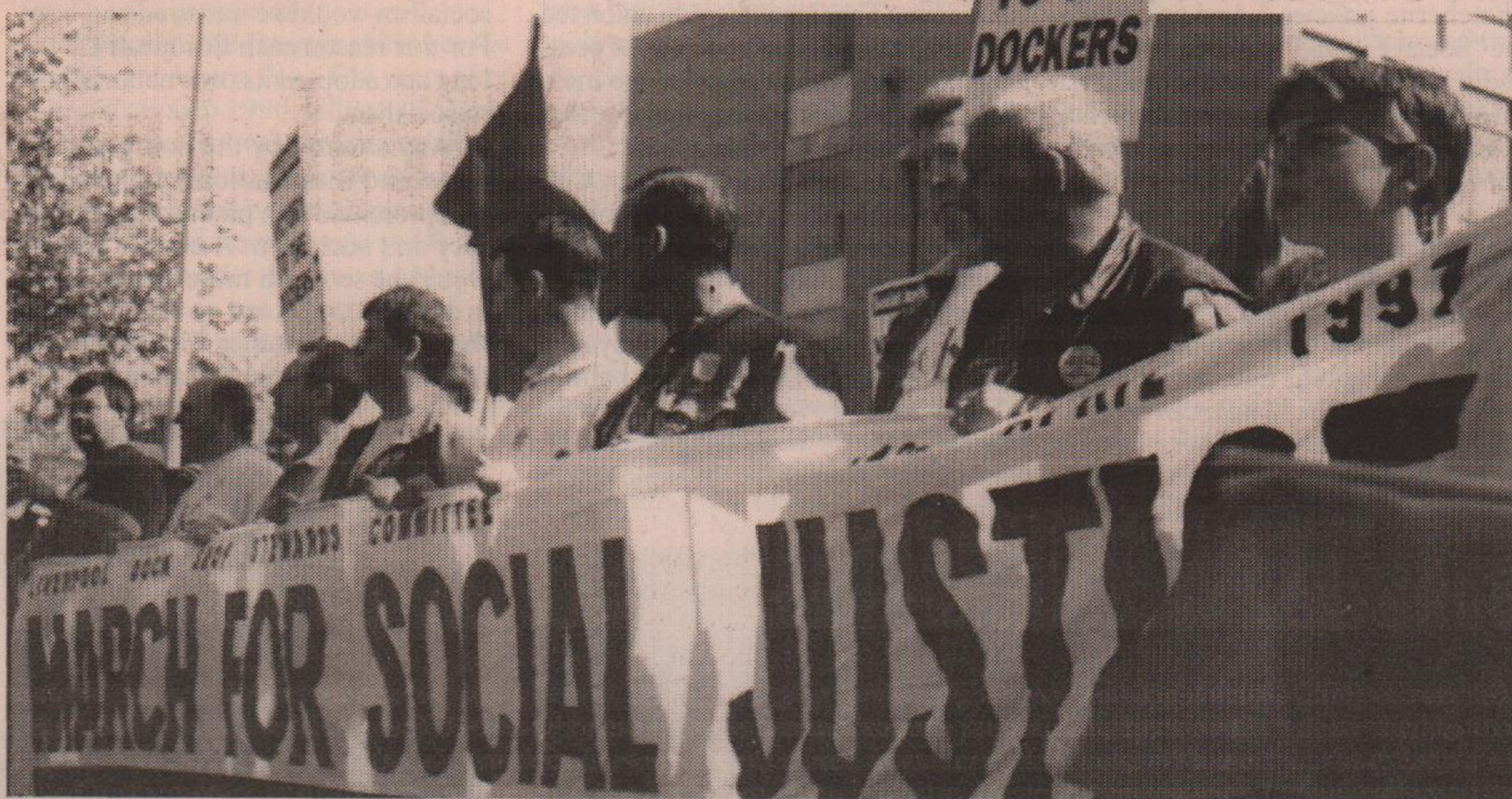
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# BUILD A UNITED SOCIALIST EUROPE!

## workers power



**I**N EUROPE or out of Europe? That is the question preoccupying the politicians, the bosses and the media. But it's the wrong question. The real issue, as the EU leaders gather in Amsterdam and as the Euromarch arrives to demonstrate against them, is whose Europe?

Shall Europe be ruled by a rich elite, presiding over mass unemployment, poverty and racism. Or shall we meet the basic needs of millions for a job, a home and a living wage?

That is a question nobody is allowed to ask in the corridors of Euro-power: as long as capitalism exists the answer is a foregone conclusion. Capitalism cannot meet the needs of millions because it is dedicated to boosting the profits of the banks and the multinationals.

Europe's rulers are using the criteria laid down in the Maastricht Treaty to enforce even deeper poverty, even more unemployment and even bigger cuts in services. They must be stopped. But how?

Lined up against the architects of the Single Currency are some of the most vicious right wing nationalists in Europe. In Britain millionaires, like Goldsmith and Sykes, are pouring money into a xenophobic campaign against Europe. They are supported by right wing Tories like Portillo and Redwood and by fascists like the BNP. In France the FN adds its voice to the nationalist clamour against European unity.

A working class fight against Euro-austerity can have nothing to do with this rabble. It must not join with their call to "get out of Europe". After all, they are just as determined to make workers suffer so that capitalism can survive as the Euro-fat cats in Brussels are. But they want us to forget all that in the name of defending national sovereignty.

Sovereignty is a sham. Euro-capitalism is ruled by the international banks and multinationals, whether we're in or out of the EU, the Single Currency or a federal Europe. The international currency markets can make or break a government in a day's trading. The big multinationals move their capital around the globe in pursuit of the fastest buck. National governments - including Britain's - do whatever they are told to by these big capitalists.

And what does sovereignty mean for the working class? The right to strike? The right to a decent wage? The right to a future free of war, persecution, racism and oppression? A "sovereign" Britain ruled by Portillo would not deliver this.

The way to fight the Euro-austerity drive, as it gets into top gear, is to reject any alliance with "anti-European" bosses and to link up with the millions of workers throughout Europe to fight for a socialist alternative to the Maastricht Treaty. This does not mean supporting the EU, the European bosses' club. It means fighting back against the attacks it is launching.

The austerity drive has provoked mass resistance across Europe. Strikes and marches by rail workers and truck drivers in France and miners and engineers in Germany have blocked Chirac's and Kohl's attempts to offload the cost of Maastricht onto the working class. In Italy and Greece there have been mass strikes too.

### You ain't seen nothing yet!

The crunch is coming in the next two years, as the Euro-bosses have to turn the screw ever tighter if even a few of them are to meet the economic rules - the "convergence criteria" - for launching the Single Currency. As they pile on the pain and misery millions will fight back. But divided we can be defeated and the Euro-bosses will be only too keen to divide us. They will be aided and abetted by a treacherous and inept

trade union bureaucracy that thinks international solidarity begins and ends with free lunches and plush hotels in Brussels. It is a bureaucracy so used to covering and retreating that it clings desperately to the pathetic European Social Charter as the only hope for working class advance.

We need real international co-ordination of our struggles now. Across the multinationals, workers at a rank and file level need to make contact, link up their base organisations and spread the news and the lessons of the struggles that take place against the bosses' Euro-offensive.

In the next 12 months, as workers

go into struggle in country after country, we must fight to get the unions to name the day for a Europe-wide general strike against all the privations and austerity measures demanded in the name of Maastricht.

Against the capitalist united Europe of Kohl and Chirac, and against the anti-European xenophobes, we have to fight for our own Europe: a workers' socialist united states of Europe.

Such a Europe would be run by the workers in the interest of all. It would seize the assets of the multinationals and the banks and use them to feed, house, educate and improve the lives of the millions who now live in poverty,

excluded from society.

If we don't fight for this, the alternative is stark. Because the Maastricht experiment will fail and economic crisis will follow.

In that climate right wing nationalism and fascism will grow. The war clouds, at present gathered only on Europe's fringes, will move towards the heart of the continent.

So we say to the politicians gathered at the Amsterdam Inter Governmental Conference:

- Single Currency? Not at our expense!
- Down with the bosses' Europe!
- Forward to a United Socialist States of Europe! ■

## Euromarch on the road

THE EUROMARCH for jobs and welfare is on its way!

Already marches have set off from Finland, the south of Spain, France and even further afield. The destination is Amsterdam on 14 June to converge on the European Union's Inter Governmental Conference.

The importance of an internationalist struggle that not only unites European workers but also our brothers and sisters from around the world was demonstrated by the racist treatment of Moroccan workers marching to Amsterdam.

Following a meeting of 200 trade unionists in Tangiers it was decided to join the Euromarch.

Many of these marchers have been blocked from entering Europe by the immigration police at the border of "Fortress Europe". The racist treatment meted out to these workers is typical of the daily harassment and persecution that immigrant and black workers face throughout Europe. And the Euromarch is challenging it.

In war-weary Bosnia, against the odds, demonstrations have been held around Sarajevo and Tuzla, uniting Serb, Croatian and Muslim workers. These marchers will now move on to join the Austrian and German sections of the Euromarch.

In Spain, one of the legs has already been on a picket of 32 sacked food-processing workers and then invaded the local supermarkets to organise a boycott of the company.

From France, the Grenoble leg has marched to Geneva, Switzerland. A demonstration outside the International Labour Organisation ended with the marchers occupying the offices. The next day a picket against unemployment was held of the World Trade Organisation and later some 2,000 teachers joined the marchers.

Now it is vital to build the march in Britain, inspired by the actions across Europe.

**For more information contact:**  
European Marches,  
c/o Glenn Voris,  
St Helens TUC Resource Centre,  
21-31 Barrow Street,  
St Helens, WA10 1RX.  
Tel: 01744 755889

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The League For a Revolutionary Communist International is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. We have groups around the world. If you agree with what you read in this paper and if you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us! ★

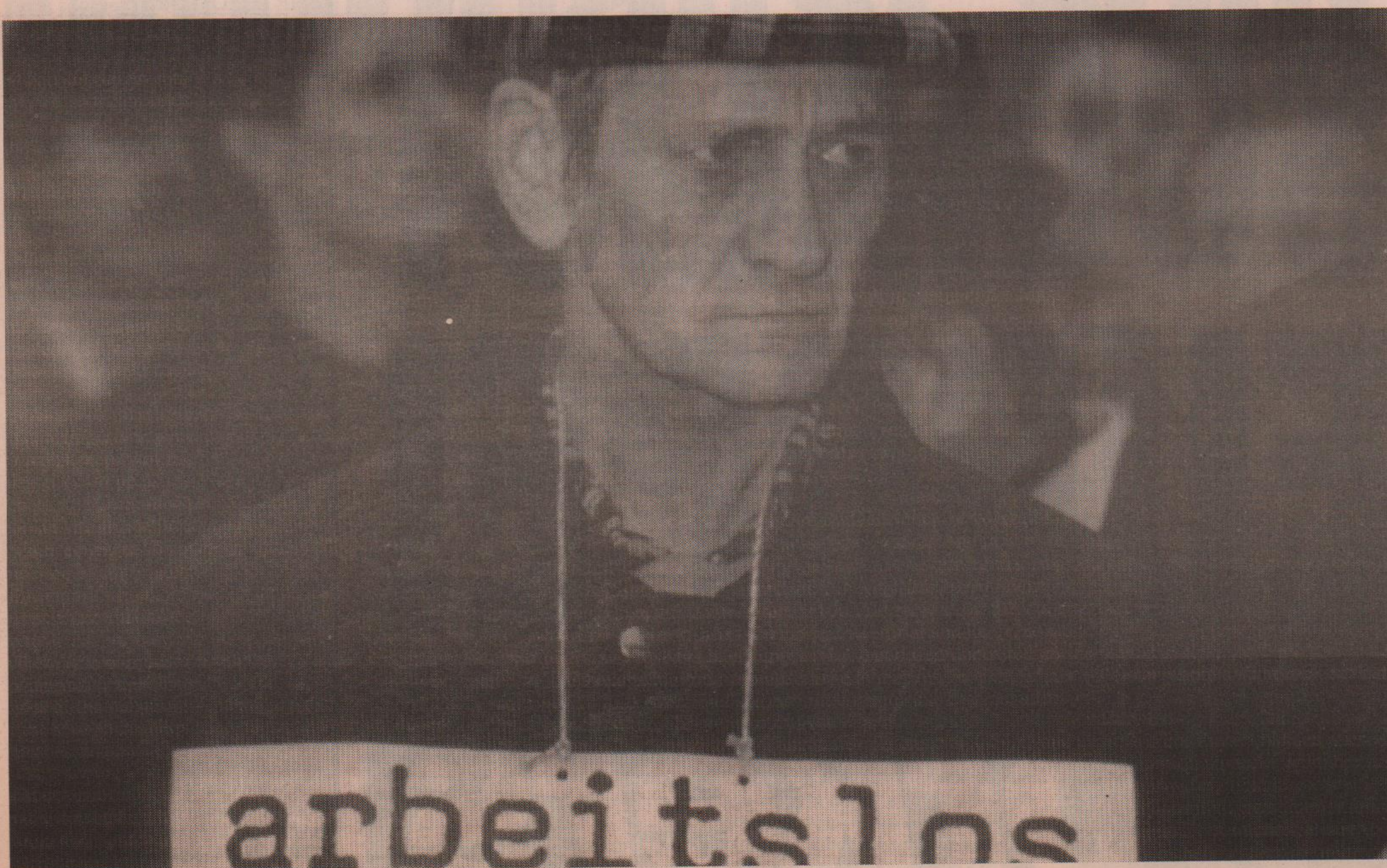
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INSIDE: Workers fightback against austerity ● The struggle against fascism and racism plus ● working class womens' movement (pg 4)

## Europe on the dole -



Unification and capitalist restoration have thrown one in four East German workers on to the dole.

**S**ETTING UP the single currency on the bosses' terms will do nothing to tackle the problems Europe's workers face. It will just make those problems worse.

Today Europe is an ever growing dole queue. In Germany 4.5 million are unemployed, the highest official rates since just before Hitler took power. In Spain one in five workers are jobless, with the youth being hit hardest - 50% of all workers under 24 are unemployed.

In France three million are out of work and while Britain claims its unemployment levels are falling this is simply because the government fiddles the figures. Real unemployment in Britain remains over three million.

The bosses' Single Currency will mean more sackings and more closures. The convergence criteria dictate that every state will have to savagely cut state spending. Italy would need to make cuts amounting to 30% of its total public spending. If the bosses got away with cuts of this scale it would mean astronomical levels of unemployment.

And while Italy faces acute problems, every other EU country faces major ones. The European Labour Forum calculated that cuts needed to meet the Maastricht criteria would eradicate 10 million jobs across the continent. Official unemployment already stands at 18 million without such cuts.

While this or that government may hold back on such savage attacks now, time is running out. The determination of the Euro bosses to meet their Single Currency target date can only mean that big attacks are on the way. They will come in the form of austerity packages that cut welfare provision, privatise state industries, destroy employment rights in order to get a flexible labour force and destroy job security.

Renault's closure of its Vilvoorde plant in Belgium - with no prior consultation with the workforce despite the social charter's provision for this - is the shape of things to come. It is not a

departure from the rules of the EU, as the Belgian government claimed. It is a perfect example of what a capitalist EU will mean for millions of workers.

The former Thatcherite minister, now a European Commissioner, Leon Brittan, responded to the Renault closure with glee, accurately pointing out that "European Monetary Union is forcing European countries to adopt Thatcherite policies." And as they do, the "Social Europe" that the reformists and trade union bureaucrats wax lyrical about will offer the same protection it did to Renault's Belgian workers - none.

### Reformism sounds the retreat

How have the national labour movements of the continent responded to the increased tempo of European integration outlined in the Maastricht project? Their reformist leaders, Social Democratic and Stalinist, both made their peace with capitalism long ago.

Provided the ruling class allows Social Democracy to play the role of intermediary between the bosses and the workers' movement, keeping the negotiations over social reforms within the limits which capitalism can afford, it rarely disagrees with its master on any fundamental question.

The Socialist, Social Democratic and Labour parties of Europe obediently support the projects of a united capitalist Europe dominated by the major imperialist powers. The British Labour Party and TUC were late converts to Europe, mainly because the British ruling class has long been split down the middle on the whole issue. On the European mainland the French Socialist Party and the German Social Democracy have long parroted the enthusiasm of their ruling classes for a capitalist united Europe.

But as the social effects of meeting the Maastricht criteria have become more painful they have begun to raise timid criticisms of it. They complain about the absence of a sufficient "social"

dimension to the plans for greater EU integration. The French Socialist Party supports the project of monetary union (EMU) but demands that there be political supervision of the proposed Central Bank, promotion of growth and jobs and the abandonment of the 3% limit on budget deficits.

The trade union federations dominated by Social Democracy follow this basic line. The German trade union federation, the DGB, is in favour of pressing on to EMU but calls for the inclusion of "a policy to promote full employment".

The European Trades Union Confederation (ETUC) has likewise lobbied for the inclusion of a chapter in the draft treaties on monetary union committing the member states to maintaining "high" (but unspecified) levels of employment. This is about as effective as the national TUCs have proved in turning similar pious words by their own governments into actual jobs for the unemployed, i.e. not at all.

### Stalinists cling to nationalism

The Communist Parties of Western Europe have, until recently, maintained a much more hostile attitude to the European Union - not in the name of working class internationalism but under the national flags of their respective countries. The British party was at the forefront of the sickening Union Jack waving campaign to stop Britain's entry into the old European Economic Community in 1975.

Until the collapse of the Eastern European and Russian states in 1989-91 all the Communist Parties, with the exception of the Italian party (then PCI), were resolutely opposed to any further integration of the EU. Indeed the Communist-led CGT trade union federation in France remains barred from membership of ETUC because of its "hostile attitude" towards European integration.

This did not reflect a sturdy class independence from their own bosses but rather a slavish subordination to the

ruling bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Led by the French party (PCF) they adopted an ultra-patriotic stand in support of the "national independence" of their own imperialist fatherlands.

They argued that the French Republic or British Parliamentary Democracy had been specifically blessed by history with being the wombs within which socialism would be nurtured and born. For this reason each European CP had long ago adopted its own national road to socialism.

Any attempt by the bourgeoisie to transcend these national frameworks was presented as a plot against democracy and socialism. A bosses' Europe would be so much more strong, undemocratic and hard to handle than their own bourgeoisies. The idea of uniting Europe's workers ahead of this

development seemed utterly beyond them.

The Communist Party of Britain continues to denounce EMU on the grounds that:

"Our jobs, NHS, welfare state are too precious to be sacrificed on the altar of EU centralised, undemocratic monetarist dogma" (*Morning Star* April 23 1997).

As if these attacks owed their origin to the European Union! Thatcher and Major were the pioneers of "monetarist dogma". The complaint of the anti-EU Tories is that "Euro-federalism" means socialism (i.e. social welfare) by the back door.

Wrapping themselves in their national flags, and courting a bloc with the most vile nationalist sectors of the national bourgeoisie dressed up as the "patriotic" bourgeoisie, the Communist parties, from the 1970s to the 1990s, set about saving their countries from the "European Superstate". In France, in Britain, in Scandinavia, the Communist Parties used their influence among the more militant vanguard workers to poison them with patriotism, sharing platforms with such figures. This isolated the struggles of the most militant sectors from those of their fellow workers across Europe.

### Wrong solution

Halting the plans for EMU, let alone forcing national states out of the EU, is no solution to the attacks facing Europe's workers. Nor will it aid the immigrant workers or the refugees excluded from citizenship or kept out of fortress Europe.

The national states would carry out equally anti-working class policies whether they were in the EU or out of it. To the extent that they would be thrown back upon smaller markets and face sharper competition, their capitalists would have to launch redoubled attacks.

The working class would be thrown back into national isolation, confused for a whole period that "they" had won some sort of independence struggle and had to shoulder the costs.

Stalinism and Social Democracy offer no solution to Europe's workers. And the European trade unions, grouped in ETUC are no better. Tied to a comfortable strategy of lobbying the bosses in a world of "lunch time" meetings and expense account enter-



Chirac & Kohl: The determination of the Euro bosses to meet their Single Currency target date can only mean that big attacks are on the way.



# workers fight back

taining, these bureaucrats are sold on the capitalist integration of Europe. They will do nothing to lead a fight against the brutal effects of such a project.

The workers of Europe, however, will have no choice but to resist. And building on that resistance is the key to defeating the bosses' plans.

## European workers fight back

The triumph of a privatising, welfare slashing policy, first in Britain and then across Europe, began to create a common experience of class struggle even before the Maastricht criteria were agreed and the national states began to implement them in austerity budgets. Maastricht has synchronised these attacks and created the basis, indeed the urgent need for a synchronised fight-back.

## Italy

The Italian workers led the way in mounting a fightback against the European bourgeois offensive. This coincided with a massive structural crisis of the entire post-war Italian state, based as it was on excluding the Italian Communist Party from power and dividing the spoils of office amongst the Christian Democrats and their Liberal and Socialist coalition partners.

The collapse of Stalinism transformed Italian politics, shattering the Christian Democracy in a huge corruption scandal (Tangentopoli) and splitting the PCI into a right-wing Social Democratic party, the PDS, and a "refounded" Communist Party, Rifondazione Comunista.

A new bourgeois party sprang into existence, run by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, and won the elections in combination with the Northern League and the National Alliance (former fascists). But this hard-line anti-working class government met a premature end in October and December 1994 when its attempt to savage the welfare state, particularly pensions, was answered with the greatest trade union-led mass movement seen in Italy for decades.

## France

One year later in France November/December 1995, a similarly huge strike wave erupted. Newly elected president Chirac and his prime minister Alain Juppé were attempting to push through "reforms" to social security and to launch a privatisation programme, starting with the railways, measures aimed at meeting the 3% budget criteria.

The response of French public sector workers, led by the railworkers, was magnificent. Huge weekly demonstrations took place in every major city and many provincial towns. The Paris public transport system and the national and international rail network was paralysed. Six million working days were lost in strikes. This was the largest social movement seen since 1968.

It forced the partial curtailment of the Plan Juppé, aimed at meeting the Maastricht criteria and starting the radical reduction of the welfare system, and it aborted the rail privatisation moves. It was only the political failure of the official leadership, the union bureaucracies of the CGT, FO and the CFDT to actively spread the struggle to the private sector and to politicise it that allowed Juppé and Chirac to hold on to power.

But French workers did not give up the struggle for long. Whereas the movement of 1995 in France was primarily a public sector struggle only one year

later 80,000 lorry drivers once again paralysed the country and disrupted not only trade but also production across the EU. Their struggle inspired copycat strikes from Finland to Greece. Even the doctors in France have taken to the streets and done battle with the riot cops fighting the effects of the Maastricht criteria on the health service.

## Greece

In Greece the centre-left Pasok government, struggling to meet the Maastricht criteria, launched austerity measures which provoked three million workers to take part in a one day general strike. Inspired by the French truck drivers Greek farmers blockaded the ports and main roads and brought the entire country to a halt.

## Spain

In Spain on December 11 two million workers struck against the new right-wing government's austerity programmes. In Madrid 210,000 demonstrated, 100,000 took to the streets in Catalonia. In Asturias and León 26,000 miners struck and demonstrated and secured the amendment of the plans to cut state subsidies to the coal industry.

The major unions, the CCOO and the UGT, launched a campaign to raise the wages of temporary and part time workers who earn only 19-43% of the wages of full-time workers.

## Germany

In Germany, the last year has seen the biggest upturn in class struggle in decades. Both the bosses and the Christian Democrat government of Helmut Kohl have tried to claw back gains made by the workers during the boom years.

Last September, the engineering firms, led by Mercedes Benz, tried to take away workers' rights to 100% sick pay and annual bonuses but were beaten back by the scale and militancy of the strikes this provoked.

In March, the struggle shifted to the building industry. For a few years after reunification in 1990, billions of Marks flowed into the industry, especially in the East, as speculators tried to take advantage of the new situation. Cheap labour from Eastern Europe and Britain was used to undercut agreed pay rates. Now workers are fighting back. In March strikers occupied sites in central Berlin, demanding a minimum wage of DM18 per hour and a campaign against the cowboy companies on the sites.

The most dramatic events, however, were during the miners' campaign against cuts in government subsidies to their industry. In the Ruhr and Saar regions, hundreds of thousands demonstrated, blocking city centres and blockading the motorways. For three days strikers occupied the centre of Bonn and finally forced the government to back down.

In the steel industry the fight was against 8,000 potential redundancies resulting from the planned merger of Krupp and Thyssen, Germany's biggest steel firms. The merger itself is just the kind of "rationalisation" to increase profits that the EU wants to encourage through monetary union.

Krupp was backed by the big banks, Dresdner and Deutsche Bank. Workers from both firms organised to oppose any redundancies, culminating in a 30,000 strong demo in the heart of Frankfurt's financial district, Germany's equivalent to the City of London. The campaign was enough to force the bosses to agree to drop the redundancy plans.



German workers fight back against cuts to sick pay

## Britain

In Britain, there has been a revival of trade union struggles from the historically low levels of the early 1990s, though on nothing like the mass scale of the strikes in Italy, France, Germany or Spain. But what they have lacked in size they have gained in tenacity. One in particular, the epic struggle of the Liverpool Dockworkers has provided a beacon of what international solidarity can mean.

On 21 January 1997 an international day of solidarity saw 27 countries and 105 ports involved in action, including Japan and the west coast of the USA, and militant strike action in ports like Montreal and Los Angeles.

On April 12 the largest trade union and political demonstration since the poll tax uprising of 1990—the march for Social Justice—took place in London. The march was supported by environmental activists in Reclaim the Streets (RTS) which mobilised thousands on the day.

The result was a massive display of strength by radical youth and militant trade unionists, including not only the dockers but other strikers from Hillingdon Hospital, Magnet Kitchen furniture factory and Project Aerospace who are locked in protracted battles with their bosses. It also exposed the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracies who

have done nothing to support these struggles and who were conspicuous by their absence from the demo.

The most encouraging aspect of the revival of class struggle over the last two years has been the spontaneous tendency of the various struggles to reach out to or copy the struggles in other states of the EU. This owes little or nothing to any real internationalism of the reformist leaders and union bureaucrats.

## A workers' answer to the EU

Instinctively rank and file workers are groping their way towards a Europe wide resistance to the bosses' Europe. This tendency can only become powerful and effective if it consciously sets itself the goal of a workers', a socialist Europe.

This means strengthening and transforming the ongoing but nationally separate defensive struggles against the Maastricht criteria into one against the bosses' attacks on social welfare and into an offensive against the Europe-wide blight of mass unemployment.

It means an offensive against all closures across Europe. Workers in each country must pledge themselves to take solidarity actions against branches of multinationals shedding labour or against the suppliers or customers of national firms declaring redundancies.

To develop such an offensive the

bureaucratic institutions of the ETUC are useless. We need to build fighting workers' unity if we are to get Europe-wide strike action that stops the bosses from dividing us along national lines.

In every multinational we need European combines made up of elected rank and file delegates. In every industry we need to develop trade union links so that struggles in one country are supported by workers in like industries in other countries. We need to transform the existing international institutions of the trade unions, like the ICFTU, into an international federation of class struggle unions.

We can only do this by organising anti-bureaucratic rank and file movements in every country, movements capable of defeating and replacing the treacherous officials with class fighters and turning the unions into organisations controlled by their members and committed to fighting for their members' interests against capitalism.

On the basis of such international workers' unity the fight against the attacks that will come from the Single Currency can triumph. But to turn such triumphs into an advance towards a Socialist United States of Europe, we must also build a new political leadership of the workers' movement, a revolutionary, internationalist leadership: a revolutionary international party. ■



Spanish workers on strike against austerity measures

## Fight racism in fortress Europe

**T**HE COUNCIL of Europe declared 1997 to be the European Year Against Racism in the European Union (EU). It called for "tolerance, respect and understanding".

But behind such sugary declarations the EU is a bastion of racism. The immigration policies of the EU and its member states strengthen racial prejudice and scapegoat immigrants and "ethnic minorities" for the economic and social ills of capitalism in Europe.

Governments have erected new barriers to people from the so-called Third World and the former Stalinist states of Eastern Europe, who are seeking refuge from war or political persecution, or simply hoping to escape grinding poverty in their homelands.

The Schengen and Trevi immigration agreements between the ministers of the EU states have laid the foundation for a "Fortress Europe" which brutally excludes people on the basis of their skin colour and country of origin.

Last year, the Tory government in Britain played the race card with the introduction of yet another Asylum and Immigration Act. It stripped refugees of benefit rights and encouraged racist discrimination by bosses through mandating checks on the immigration status of job applicants.

So far in 1997, the French government has introduced the Debre law which attacks all non-European immigrants, who now face fingerprinting on arrival in France.

The legislation gives still more powers to the police to hunt for "illegal immigrants". New German legislation has imposed a special residence requirement on the children of immigrants, even though they were born in Germany.

Two cases of large-scale death at sea highlight the murderous impact of Europe's official attitude to immigration. In March an Italian naval vessel sank a makeshift boat, killing 87 Albanians who were fleeing the conflict in the south of their country.

At the end of December 1996 nearly 300 immigrants from the Indian sub-continent died when a crazed captain rammed the crowded launch he had forced them onto. The European media all but ignored this case of mass murder and the cynical trade in human

life which lay behind it.

Immigrants seeking entry into "Fortress Europe" are left to the mercy of racketeers who rip off their life savings. But those who survive, and find their way into Western Europe, face police harassment, racist violence and discrimination in the job and housing markets.

In 1996 thugs from far right organisations across the EU killed at least 20 immigrants and first generation Europeans. Another nine were killed by racist attackers, while 11 died in police custody. In Italy, the murders of undocumented immigrants with no identification papers have frequently gone unrecorded.

Immigrant workers and youth have not been passive victims in the face of state racism and street violence. The "sans papiers" movement which emerged from the occupation of a Paris church last summer sparked a wave of protest in several French cities, involving thousands of white trade unionists as well as intellectuals and immi-

grant workers.

Still more resistance arose in February in response to the Debre legislation, despite the failure of the main parties of the left, the Socialists and Communists, to mount any serious opposition to the bill in the National Assembly.

The Euromarch must build on such resistance to ensure that the fight against racism is taken up by the organised labour movement across Europe.

The capitalist system breeds racism. To root it out for good requires the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a United Socialist Federation of European states as a step towards a socialist world. Only such a society can guarantee "tolerance, respect and understanding", regardless of colour or birthplace.

### We must fight for

- For organised black/immigrant self defence against racist thugs and racist police
- Stop all deportations
- Full citizenship rights for all immigrant workers
- Scrap the Schengen and Trevi agreements
- Abolish all immigration controls



Recently in Leipzig, a mobilisation of 30,000 stopped a fascist march. The mobilised strength of the youth, the immigrant communities, the working class estates and the trade unions can and must smash the fascists

## Smash Euro-fascism!

**P**ARTIES WITH fascist leaders at their core have made huge gains in several European countries against the background of austerity programmes and mass unemployment.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National (FN) now controls four local councils in France and commands a consistent 15% in national opinion polls. In Belgium's second biggest city, Antwerp, the Vlaams Blok is now the single biggest party, while in Austria the far right racists of Haider's "Freedom" Party could well be part of the next government.

The extreme right has successfully peddled the poisonous lie that immigration is responsible for unemployment, poor housing and declining welfare provision. It has also exploited widespread disillusionment with the corruption of mainstream politicians.

In France, the FN has begun a turn from being principally an electoral party that relies on racism to win votes towards becoming an organisation that openly seeks to build a fascist move-

ment capable of controlling the streets.

The bosses in Europe, including France, have little interest at the moment in backing disciples of Hitler and Mussolini. The crisis facing capitalism is not yet so severe, nor the threat from the organised working class so strong that major companies are about to abandon the traditional mainstream parties.

But Le Pen has now set about building the kind of party that could seize power and abolish all semblance of democracy at a later date should a more desperate capitalism require it.

The Front National claims an "honour guard" of 10,000 goons. It has set up its own "unions" in the police force, sections of public transport and the post office. It has visited workers' picket lines and begun recruiting among white workers and the unemployed on council estates.

The leaders of the mainstream parties may not like the extreme right, but they've been only too happy to bring in still more racist legislation against

immigrants to woo the voters of fascist front organisations. We cannot rely on bans by their state to halt the growth of today's fascists. We must mobilise the strength of the youth, the immigrant communities, the working class estates and the trade unions.

In France it is urgent that the organised working class forges a united front against the FN with the objective of physically confronting and smashing it before it gets any bigger. Supporters of all the workers' parties must take to the streets to ensure it cannot stage marches and rallies.

At the same time a socialist answer to the crisis wracked capitalist system that breeds fascism must be fought for in the workers' organisations. A revolutionary party of hope must be built in order to crush counter revolutionary parties of despair, like the FN.

This is the surest way of derailing Le Pen, and similar would-be fascist dictators across the continent, and preventing any return to fascist barbarism in Europe. ■

## For a working class women's movement

**W**OMEN WORKERS should be at the forefront of the Euromarch. Europe's bosses treat women workers as a "flexible" labour force. Low wages, little or no employment rights, hours of work determined by the bosses: these are the conditions that profit hungry employers love and women bear the brunt of them.

Women used to be a "reserve army of labour", drawn into the workforce when the bosses faced labour shortages and thrown out when the need passed.

The last 25 years have seen a major change. Women are now a permanent and growing part of the labour force. But the vast majority are consigned to low paid, part time work.

In the major industrial countries, the OECD, over 75% of part time workers are female. The UK has led

the way, using women workers as part of a cheap and insecure labour force. Almost half of the British labour force are women. Nearly 50% of them, more than five million, work part time.

Part time women workers earn an average of £5.35 an hour. Full time male workers earn an average of £9.00 an hour. Over 1.5 million part time women workers earn less than £3.50 an hour. So much for equal pay for equal work!

Part time workers are denied holiday rights, parental leave and a host of other employment rights won by full time workers. Less than a fifth of part time women workers are covered by job pension schemes. The vast majority will be condemned to exist on pitiful and declining state pensions.

Britain shows other European women workers what the future holds for them. Women Labour leaders, like

Harriet Harman, have the nerve to claim that the "flexible labour force" is a triumph for women's rights, a "feminisation" of work. This is nonsense.

Women should have the right to go out to work at hours that suit their needs. Three quarters of French women workers and over 80% of German women who work, also look after dependents. Yet in Britain the drive to

attack the welfare state has eroded the already inadequate child care facilities as well as social services for the elderly. Unemployment, job insecurity and wage cuts have slashed the "family wage" and forced increasing numbers of women to take any jobs

on offer.

The result is that women's double burden - looking after dependents and running the home and working at the same time - has increased. There is nothing "feminist" about this. It is the super exploitation of women workers.

### Women should have the right to go out to work at hours that suit their needs

The trade union leaders say they want more women in the unions. But the number of women trade unionists in Britain has declined by over 8% in the last ten years while the number of women workers has increased dramatically. The way to win women workers to the trade unions is to turn them into organisations that really fight for the urgent needs of all working class women.

We need working class women's

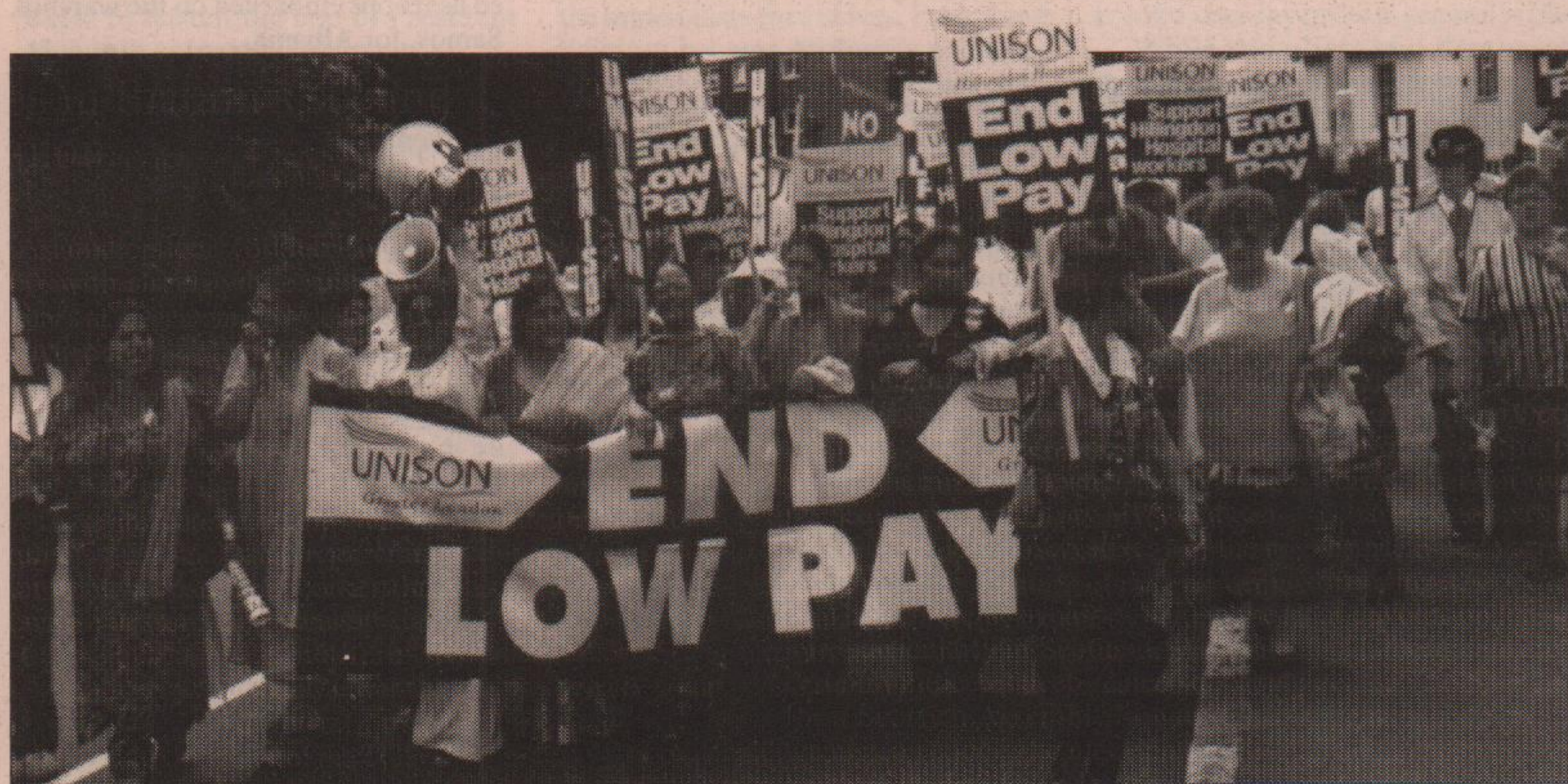
movements, right across Europe. Such organisations would struggle for full rights for part time workers, for a decent minimum wage and for state provision of free child care on a 24 hour basis. They would campaign to make the trade unions take up these issues and organise the great mass of women workers. And they would fight for a socialist answer to women's oppression.

As long as capitalism exists it will seek to super exploit women workers and perpetuate women's oppression within and outside the home. To really liberate women we need a revolutionary party and a revolutionary International that can destroy the capitalist system and with it the root cause of women's oppression.

A socialist society can then set about freeing women from centuries of oppression and exploitation.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Single status deal

# Will it unite the workers?



Hillingdon strikers fighting the privateers

**A** "LANDMARK AGREEMENT", an "historic deal" - these were among the phrases pouring out of the head offices of Unison, the GMB and the TGWU to describe the new "Single Status" deal with local authority bosses.

"Single Status" will scrap the distinction between manual and APT&C (white collar) workers in local government. This should end discrimination against manual workers over pay, terms and conditions. Part-timers, both manual and APT&C, most of them women, have always come off worse.

This artificial divide has also undermined union activity and joint action against local authority cuts and attacks on conditions, with each group looking out for their own short-term, sectional interests.

## Earnings

In Derbyshire, for example, manual workers felt let down by APT&C workers in the fight against Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) which has cut more manual jobs and wages. On the other hand, when APT&C grades wanted to fight around protection of earnings, manual workers accepted the employers' lousy deal.

Socialists have long fought to end this divide but the union bureaucracies have controlled the negotiations with the employers. Inevitably, they have sold their members way short and heightened divisions.

The question is whether or not the new proposed deal will help get rid of those divisions?

Rank and file members will soon have the opportunity to vote on the "Single Status" deal after a special Unison delegate conference on 20 May. Given the gushing rhetoric from the leaders, you might think the floodgates had been prised open for trade union rights. Wrong. The deal does not end the anti-union laws or CCT.

## Rejection

This agreement is getting the "hard-sell" for a reason. It is designed to persuade us that "Single Status" is the best thing since the eight-hour day, when in fact every trade union militant should be working overtime to ensure its rejection.

The main union leaderships are keen to get this deal through as soon as possible and have linked its ratification to the national pay rise. Both the union heads and local government bosses are hoping that a single status deal will dampen down the prospect for any major struggles by council workers

## BY A UNISON SHOP STEWARD

under a new Labour government.

The Single Status Agreement is divided into four sections: part one covers principles and constitution, including equal opportunities and trade union recognition; part two covers national conditions of service applying to all local government workers; part three covers "other conditions of service which will apply unless changed locally"; part four consists of guidelines.

The erosion of nationally negotiated agreements is the most obvious flaw in the draft deal. Part three allows for local bargaining on such issues as unsocial hours' payments, evening working, standby duty and car allowances. The negotiators are happy to junk a victory over car allowances, won by industrial action in 1993, thus encouraging individual councils to attack other hard-won gains.

Central to the deal is a common pay spine. Union leaders are trumpeting its benefits in terms of career development and upward mobility, but the differences in the current systems of incremental scales for APT&C and fixed points for manual jobs mean a huge job evaluation exercise will have to assess where all the different jobs go on the scale.

## Evaluation

The job evaluation scheme currently under discussion will not bind the employers, and the evaluations are to be agreed locally so there will be variations between local authorities for the same job. Likewise, the appeals system and whether authorities go for incremental scales or fixed points will be decided locally. This could be the start of a series of long and divisive battles around grading similar to those fought by nurses in the late 1980s.

A standard working week of 37 hours for all workers (36 in London) is another hollow victory. This won't come in until April 1999 (up to two years later if you work for a contracted-out service).

Worse, the trade union negotiators have agreed to the commitment that "existing employees will maintain existing output levels when the standard week is reduced". So we've got to do the same work in less time! Some authorities are already hinting that there will be no 1999 pay rise to cover the alleged costs of a shortened working week.

The new deal also marks a climb-down in the fight for a minimum wage. The common pay spine is to start at £4.00 an hour - not the £4.26 overwhelmingly agreed at the 1996 Unison annual conference. With inflation, that

figure has now risen to £4.41. They must think our memories are very short.

The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU) is seeking to spearhead opposition to the deal and has published a useful briefing. It rightly criticises the abandonment of £4.26, but neglects to mention the CFDU's own position of a £6 an hour minimum wage.

## Transparent

There are, of course, some real improvements in the draft agreement, such as equal pay for work of equal value, a requirement for employers to be "transparent" in their pay policies; equal access to training - and an end to discrimination against part-time and temporary workers who will receive the same pay and conditions as their full-time or permanent equivalents. But with the bosses loudly cheering the new agreement it is clear that for them the gains far outweigh any concessions, which barely go beyond their legal requirements.

This deal is also linked to a pay offer of a 2.5% increase. In effect, this is a real pay cut, the third year in a row that the "rise" lags behind inflation. The employers obviously think they have won a great deal with so much of the national framework reverting to local bargaining. They are more than happy to introduce the shorter working week through increased productivity. Many authorities are also prepared to cut still more jobs.

## Consultation

Workers Power agrees with the CFDU in calling for a "nationally binding and nationally funded agreement", a rejection of the draft deal and the democratisation of the consultation process and the negotiations. The campaign for a "no" vote must be linked to a fight for national industrial action to defend national bargaining and win our agreed demands for a minimum wage.

And it must be linked to the fight for a regime of workers' control of hiring, firing, hours and conditions.

By establishing such control the workers themselves can create the best and most permanent conditions for establishing a real and permanent single status between all workers without conceding a single demand to the bosses.

Meanwhile, militants need to get to the Unison Special Conference on 20 May in London and make sure the bureaucrats can't get away with presenting themselves and their deal as the great hope for local government workers going into the 21st century. ■

# WHISTLEBLOWER

## VOICES FROM THE WORKPLACE

## Getting organised

The Transport and General Workers Union is about to launch a big recruitment drive. *Workers Power* spoke to a TGWU organiser in London about the changes in Britain's second biggest union.

“THE TUC under John Monks has been using the rhetoric of “new unionism”. In some respects, this is a big step away from the brand of “service unionism” - credit cards, financial services and what have you - on offer in the previous decade. There is widespread recognition that something has to be done to stop the decline in membership in several of the big unions, and that this means a new attitude to recruitment was required.

The union bureaucracy has been looking to Australia and, strangely enough, the United States for models of how things might be turned around.

In particular, they've focused on the example of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has bucked the trend in the States over the past 15 years. While membership continued to decline in almost all of the other AFL-CIO unions, the SEIU grew by 400,000 between 1982 and 1992, to a membership of over a million.

The TGWU, GMB and Unison hosted a conference recently with Andy Stern, the SEIU's president, as the keynote speaker. I'm at odds with what he's saying politically, but his union is aiming to allocate something like 45% of its total revenue to recruitment. We're not even sure how large a percentage of members' subs goes towards recruitment in the TGWU, but it's definitely less than 3%.

The TGWU has, of course, lost more members than most unions under the Tories - down from something like 2.5 million to 900,000. The union has, however, taken to heart a lot of the message from the SEIU.

Looking at the agenda for this July's Biennial Delegate Conference (BDC), we're starting to talk about more serious spending on organising and recruitment, implementing the strategy agreed two years ago.

Since our 1995 BDC, which adopted a resolution earmarking resources and personnel to launch recruitment drives in each of the union's regions, the TGWU has seen at least the beginning of a cultural change. My previous experience in trade unionism as a shop steward, organising and recruiting, was suddenly relevant.

In London and the South East, we've seen the launch of an Organising Support Unit. It's early days yet and it's quite a modest operation in terms of personnel and equipment.

What's been remarkable and really encouraging, though, is the extent to which workers are contacting us, having already taken important steps towards establishing a viable organisation in their own workplaces.

Sometimes these are people who have put up with wage cuts and worsening conditions for several years.

One example of the sort of situation we come across is a plastics factory in north west London. It's a main-

ly Asian shopfloor workforce of about 400, with largely white supervisors. There's also segregation by department between men and women. The management imposed 12-hour, four days on, four days off shifts and scrapped overtime pay at the beginning of this year.

There are loads of other “bread and butter” issues, including refrigerators that don't work so the workers have nowhere to store their meals.

So far, there are probably fewer than 50 actual “members” of the TGWU, but there are organisers elected from each shift within the workforce, which makes a big difference. In one part of the manufacturing process the workers are mainly Gujarati-speaking women. We're just starting to explore the possibility of making

links across a number of different workplaces in that area because of the shared language and culture.

At another electronics factory we're working with on the edge of Surrey, there are about 100 manual workers. We've seen 35 or so coming to meetings after a Saturday shift. It's really impressive because they're largely doing it all by themselves.

The immediate worry isn't to get in the subs or win recognition off the employer. If the organisation is there within the workplace, I'm convinced the membership will almost certainly follow.

One of the big pushes in the coming weeks and months is likely to be around the Warner Brothers Cinemas, starting with the Harrow location which opened in April 1996.

The average wage is only £2.80 an hour, with no overtime pay for Sunday working or most of the Bank Holidays. People are doing 12-hour shifts and are really knackered, and there is little or no training about fires and other safety issues.

In circumstances like those it's hardly surprising that people should see the need for a collective organisation. A number of Warner Brothers staff have joined the union, but they're up against a hard, anti-union management.

There's been serious intimidation: threats of physical assault, constant verbal abuse and a series of disciplinaries. Some workers couldn't cope with the stress and left the job. TGWU support has made some difference and the management have backed off a bit, but there's still a long way to go.

Of course, there's a real need for a discussion of the politics of all this. As important as the development of an organising culture is within a workplace, there are still very important questions about the relationship between the new organisers and members within the workplace and the TGWU's existing structures.

I'd like to see organised socialists both inside and outside the TGWU looking seriously at what has been going on and how it can be pushed further. ■

**We've seen 35 or so coming to meetings after a Saturday shift. It's really impressive because they're largely doing it all by themselves.**

## ALBANIA: Revolution under threat

## Imperialist troops out!

**T**HE MILITARY force, sponsored by the UN, that has arrived in Albania, comprises 6,000 troops from eight European Union countries. Italy is responsible for overall leadership with large contingents coming from France (1,000), Greece (1,000) and Turkey (700). Spain, Romania, Austria and Denmark make up the rest.

According to the *Herald Tribune*, on 21 April, "heavily armed Greek and Italian troops swept into the southern port city of Vlore... securing a key bridgehead into Albania in a co-ordinated show of force."

Vlore was the centre of the spontaneous revolutionary upheaval against the corrupt and dictatorial regime of President Sali Berisha. It has the most powerful of the popular committees, the bodies created by the insurgents to replace the central government's secret police dictatorship.

Albert Shyti, a leader of the Committee for the Salvation of Vlore, commented:

"While foreign troops are welcome, they cannot disarm the insurgents who have taken up arms in self-defence and who will not surrender them unless President Berisha resigns."

The excuse for this imperialist military intervention is a United Nations mandate to provide security for the delivery of "food and humanitarian aid." This is a brazen lie.

## Swept

The only Albanians who asked for the troops were the members of Sali Berisha's regime and the coalition government led by Bashkim Fino. They want imperialist help to shore up their resistance against the revolution which swept southern Albania and resulted in the arming of the population there.

The media hacks, who quaked in their international hotels at the gunfire of the celebrating armed population, filed stories saying Albania had been taken over by lawless gangsters. We were told that everyone was living in fear of their lives and property, people were starving and that aid workers were being robbed and murdered.

These stories of chaos and mayhem were pure propaganda designed to justify intervention. The SAS, together with German and French paratroopers, swooped in and "rescued" aid workers. The agencies actually delivering food and medical aid in the country had neither asked for this protection nor welcomed it.

A Red Cross spokeswoman, Nina Winquist-Galbe, said that after over a month distributing 40 tons of food and 15 tons of medical supplies right across the country, "we've not had a single incident. There is nowhere we have not been able to go."

Albania is not suffering a famine. Jean-Marie Boucher of the World Food Programme commented:

"Despite the chaos in the government, the markets are open, food is being imported through regular commercial channels."

## Hunger

Indeed, the hunger that exists is entirely the result of the economic ruin wrought by the collapse of the pyramid schemes actively fostered by Berisha's government. If you want to find "bandits" who have looted the property of the people then the place to start looking is in the presidential palace in Tirana.

Berisha's government was actively and vocally supported by the European Union, the IMF, the World Bank and the British Tory Party. According to them Berisha's regime was a paragon of democracy and the president was a modern, forward-looking promoter of "market values".

From the moment of the uprisings

ON 15 April one thousand Italian troops, with their armoured personnel carriers and tanks, landed at Durres, the largest port in Albania, and began to take up positions across the country. **Dave Stockton** looks at the threat this imperialist invasion poses to the revolution sweeping the south of the country.



Italian tanks arrive in Albania

in southern Albania Berisha had been shrieking for his imperialist masters to come and save him. Naturally enough, facing a fully armed and militant population, the European Union was not at all keen to invade Albania.

Thus, the deceitful pretext that they are only there to guard aid convoys, and will not intervene to disarm the population, was invented.

The Italian commander, General Girolano Giglio, pretended to be "horrified" when Berisha suggested the Italians should go on joint patrols with the police on their missions to disarm the population:

"I have explained we don't have any police mission. It is not my job to control the people and to take arms."

In reality this is exactly the job he has been given. The Italian government does not want a revolution on its doorstep. The occupation force is there to prevent Albanian refugees leaving ports for Italy. Since the revolution

began 13,000 Albanians have attempted to get into Italy. It is also there to ensure the eventual disarming of the revolution. The Italian president, Oscar Scafaro, was clear about the real nature of the intervention:

"It is an indispensable mission because this is a country 70 kilometres or just two steps away where the state is falling apart. It is a world where people are taking justice into their own hands, where there is a multiplication of weapons and every boy carries guns, Kalashnikovs, on his back as if they were nothing."

## Armed

In the entire south of the country the population remains armed and refuses to accept the authority of Berisha or the government of national reconciliation, made up of Berisha's Democratic Party and the opposition Socialist Party.

This government, led by Socialist

Party leader Bashkim Fino, treacherously called in the imperialist intervention force.

Not surprisingly the population is deeply suspicious of the force's intentions. Albania was occupied by Italian imperialism during the first and second world wars.

"The Italians have found a reason for coming here since they were Romans", said a docker in Durres as the troops landed.

A worker with a Kalashnikov rifle guarding the headquarters of the Committee of National Salvation in Vlore told the *Financial Times*, "the Italians have robbed us for centuries."

Greek troops have crossed the undefended southern borders of the country under the pretext of protecting the Greek-speaking population of the far south. The Greek government has scarcely concealed annexationist appetites for the southern regions of the country, ones which are strongly disapproved of by the major powers, France and Italy. Athens has proposed "an ad hoc political committee be formed by France, Greece, and Italy to oversee preparations for elections in Albania, and the disarming of the rebels."

On 20 April, Greek defence minister, Akis Tsochadjopoulos, stated that because deployment was moving too slowly, Athens would, "on its own initiative", begin the distribution of food to the areas of the south, where the Greek minority lives, in time for the Greek Orthodox Easter.

## Minority

The Greek government uses this minority as a pretext for interference. Having forcibly culturally assimilated the large Albanian population in northern Greece in the period since the second world war, it has long cast covetous eyes on the Albanian Greek speakers.

Meanwhile, the US Sixth Fleet of NATO's Southern Command is already in the Adriatic because of the Bosnian operation.

Bashkim Fino's provisional government has agreed to hold elections on 29 June. Franz Vranitsky, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) consul in Albania, has been drawing up a new election law for Albania. It changes the system of proportional representation used in the elections to one that weights the election results in favour of those who get the highest votes, enabling the formation of a "strong" government.

The European Union representatives have failed to persuade or coerce the southern region committees to give up their arms and now hope that the legitimacy of an elected government will give them the cover for doing this.

Helweg Petersen, president of the OSCE, said that the "re-establishment of trust toward the authorities is a precondition for disarming the people." Berisha, however, realises that an election outside of the control of his secret police will sweep him from power. His Democratic Party is opposed to holding elections on 29 June.

It said the "dissolution of the committees of the rebels is a precondition for holding elections." But divisions do exist and twelve Democratic Party MPs have called for Berisha's resignation. Undoubtedly this is what Vranitsky is trying to engineer.

The imperialist intervention has provoked opposition in Italy and Greece.

In Italy the Rifondazione Comunista deputies voted against the sending of the force and in Greece the Greek Communist party (KKE) has supported demonstrations against the intervention. In Thessaloniki hundreds protested as troops embarked on the warship, Samos, for Albania.

As long as Berisha is in power it is likely that these parties will oppose the intervention. But if the ex-Stalinists of the Socialist Party in Albania take over from Berisha after the June elections, these still Stalinist parties may drop their opposition.

The problem facing the armed workers and peasants of Albania is not only the imperialist powers' determination to "restore order" and continue the process of restoring capitalism in Albania. It is also the lack of a revolutionary leadership that can give a clear and conscious goal to the masses. Already the popular committees are weakening as mass bodies.

## Alternative

They have not developed into elected and recallable instruments of the mass assemblies, administering the towns and cities and providing an armed alternative to bourgeois parliamentarianism and municipal councils.

This is because there is no force, no party based on the working class, within them arguing for this, fighting for an end to the privatisation and destruction of the country's industry and infrastructure.

Only such a revolutionary party could lead the continuation of the revolution by the armed masses themselves and take it forward to the creation of a republic of workers' and peasants' councils.

Instead of this, the main political force in the south remains the Socialist Party which, while having suffered Berisha's repression, is committed to fundamentally the same programme of capitalist restoration as he is.

Unless new forces emerge, either from within the Socialist Party or outside it, which oppose this course there is a real danger that the June elections will lead eventually to the disarming of the people, the resolution of the situation of dual power and the resumption of the process of restoring capitalism.

This would be a terrible betrayal of the first partially successful uprising against a restorationist regime in Eastern Europe. It would confirm the Marxist warning about the dangers of making "half a revolution", for it would lead to a counter-revolution.

## Logic

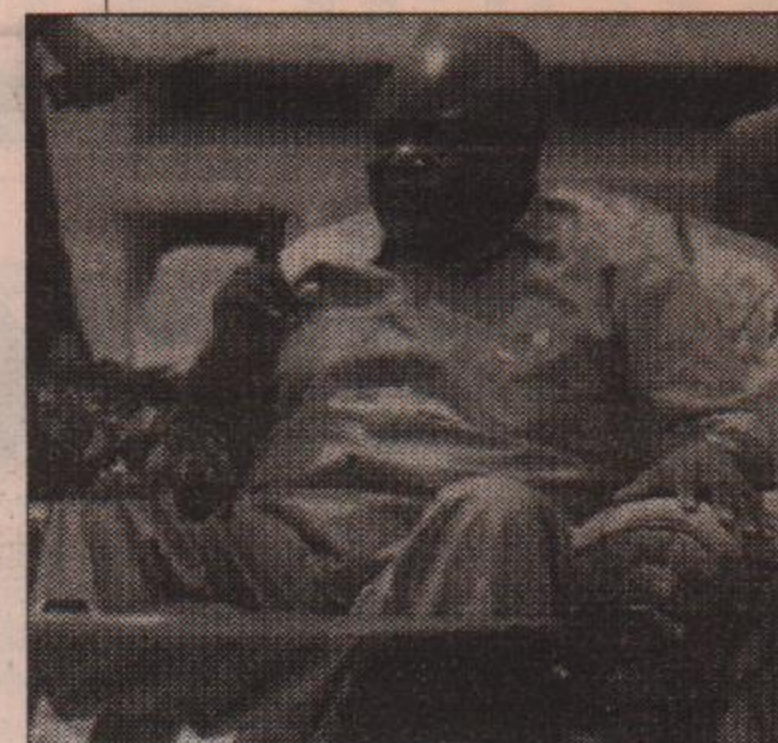
The spontaneous logic of the masses' actions in March and April was to seize power for themselves and punish their exploiters and tormentors. That is why these events were not an uprising of bandits, as the western media (and some so-called socialists) claimed, but a real mass popular revolution.

But unless such mass spontaneity is transformed into a conscious struggle for power, for a state of workers' and peasants' councils, unless it expands to cover the northern half of the country, it will be doomed to succumb to, at best, a "democratic" (that is, parliamentary) counter-revolution. At worst it could lead to the bloody disarmament and suppression of the committees at the hands of the Tirana government and its imperialist backers.

In the rest of Europe it is the duty of workers, as well as arguing against counter-revolution, to give practical solidarity and help to their Albanian brothers and sisters, to demand the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Albania and for food and medical aid to be transmitted to the popular committees. ■

## ZAIRE: Kabila marches on Kinshasa

# Mobutu's final days



Kabila

**E**ARLY MAY saw the Mobutu regime in Zaire enter its death throes. The rebel forces of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo Zaire (ADFL) continued to close in on the capital Kinshasa.

In town after town, the conquering rebels have been met by jubilant crowds eager to hasten the end of President Mobutu's corrupt dictatorship.

Mobutu, Africa's longest surviving dictator, came to power in 1966 after the CIA had engineered the overthrow of the "African Socialist" regime of Patrice Lumumba. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Mobutu remained a reliable ally of imperialism, especially favoured by the USA. During the "new cold war" it played an invaluable role in destabilising the Angolan regime, operating as a base for the CIA's military operations in support of UNITA in Angola.

For over a quarter of a century the Mobutu dictatorship provided a stable regime for the super-exploitation of the Zairean masses as French, US, Belgian and South African multinationals looted the enormous mineral wealth of the country. In the process Mobutu and his cronies took billions of dollars in bribes and profits and stashed them away in private bank accounts throughout Europe. After the collapse of Stalinism Mobutu's increasingly corrupt and unstable dictatorship not only lost its former importance but became a positive embarrassment for US imperialism.

### Collapse

The looting of the state treasury had taken on such gigantic proportions that the regime was becoming dysfunctional, even for the multinationals. By the 1990s the country's economic infrastructure, especially its road and rail transport, was on the verge of collapse. Civil servants were left unpaid, soldiers took to extortion to replace unpaid salaries.

Regionalism grew as the central state institutions began to weaken. Today in Zaire there are three separate curren-

BY JEREMY DEWAR

cies which cannot be used outside their own region.

In 1990, under US pressure, Mobutu cynically agreed to a transition to democracy which was no nearer to completion seven years later. Mobutu's prevarication opened up divisions between the imperialists themselves. France and Belgium became Mobutu's principal backers in the 1990s, their own capitalists being rewarded with the usual lucrative contracts. This backing was vital to the Mobutu regime's survival.

Given the chaotic state of the country and the unpopularity of the dictatorship it is little wonder that Laurent Kabila's rebels have been welcomed in each town they have conquered in their 1,000 mile trek across Zaire.

The civil war started in October 1996, when exiled Rwandan Hutu militia in camps near Goma attacked local Zairean Tutsis with the backing of Mobutu's regime. Backed by the Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian armies, Kabila's hastily formed ADFL fought back in defence of the Tutsis and against the Zairean army.

The collapse of Mobutu's armed forces in the face of a well-armed and highly motivated rebel force, which

grew in numbers with every victory, mobilised the opposition to Mobutu. General strikes rocked Kinshasa and forced Mobutu to try and incorporate opposition politicians. Etienne Tshisekedi was appointed prime minister but lasted less than a week in the job! His crime was to offer the ADFL six cabinet seats. His sacking sparked another solid one-day protest general strike.

While socialists and democrats should fight for the downfall of the corrupt Mobutu regime we must give not one iota of political support to Laurent Kabila or his allies. Kabila leads the "People's Revolutionary Party" (PRP) the major force in the rebel coalition. This organisation came out of the guerrillaist movements of the late 1960s, influenced by Maoism and Guevarism. Like other "Marxist-Leninists" of the Robert Mugabe type, Kabila has moved rapidly to the right and now happily cuts deals with the imperialists.

When Mbuji-Mayi, the city at the centre of the diamond-rich region of East Kasai, was captured on 6 April, the ADFL wasted no time in signing a series of deals guaranteeing multinational corporations, like RTZ and De Beers, exploitation rights on hugely profitable terms. Kabila even found himself entangled in a corporate battle

when the Anglo-American Corporation complained that American Mineral Fields Inc. had been awarded a \$540 million contract before the tendering process had even been completed!

Kabila is no friend of democracy. While the PRP have spent 13 years recruiting and training a guerrilla army they have, like many movements built on guerrillaism, remained cut off from the Zairean masses and their struggles. This explains why, while they are extremely popular for getting rid of Mobutu, they do not have wide political support amongst the population in the towns.

The PRP have responded by setting up "party cells" in the "liberated areas" where workers and peasants are encouraged to attend 10-day political education programmes. At the same time they have imposed a ban on the activity of all other political parties.

This ban was intended to last at least a year, while the ADFL ruled and built up a party of cadres. As Mwama Mawampanga, a party official, tried to explain:

"But that doesn't make it a dictatorship. During that time, [other parties] should go to the library and polish up their political programmes - and then if they beat us in an election, we

**T**HE WORKERS and poor peasants of Zaire need to reject both the imperialists' "negotiated settlement", and any attempts by Kabila to impose a one-party "transitional" government which will continue to sign away Zaire's rich resources to the multinationals.

The workers in Kinshasa can take the lead in breaking these reactionary plans by building on their general strikes. If they build new organisations, their own workers' councils, they can move on to seize control of Kinshasa. Against the imperialist plans for a government over which they will have no control, the masses must fight for the immediate convening of a revolutionary constituent assembly elected by all over 16 years.

Such an assembly could only begin to address the burning needs of the masses if it was protected by the armed people against Kabila's Stalinist one-party state plans and against the imperialists' manoeuvres. It could only advance towards fulfilling those needs if it went on to recognise a government based on real workers' councils.

The workers and peasants of Zaire can only begin to

repair the damage inflicted on their country if they seize control of the mines, factories and refineries and big farms, and of the assets of the imperialist multinationals. Only by establishing workers' control, and using the enormous mineral wealth of the country to rebuild the roads, railways, schools hospitals and industry through democratic socialist planning, can any real solution be offered to the poverty stricken masses of the city and countryside.

For this to happen the workers need to organise their own party, a revolutionary party which fights for all the toilers in Zaire and presses on towards a socialist revolution.

- Down with the imperialist deal!
- Imperialist troops out of Zaire and the Congo!
- For the immediate expropriation of all the wealth of Mobutu and his collaborators!
- For the expropriation of the imperialist holdings!
- Place Mobutu on trial and demand the imperialist banks immediately send back all looted assets from Zaire!
- For a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly!
- For a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government!

# Land war rages in Brazil



**B**RASIL'S CAPITAL city closed down for a day on 17 April. Over 120,000 people turned out to greet a march demanding land reform. The Movimento Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers' Movement) organised the six week march by over 600 people from Sao Paulo to Brasilia.

Trade unionists came in their thousands to support the march. Civil servants were given the day off and President Fernando Cardoso greeted the march himself. This was a dramatic turn around. When the march set off the President declared the marchers and their movement as "primitive retro-

grades". His change of heart reflects the pressure that Sem Terra has put on the government and the support it is receiving from the people of Brazil.

The movement demands the redistribution of the land and has encouraged mass occupations to get it. Over 518 large ranches have had land invasions by a movement that claims over 220,000 organised members.

Many occupations have ended in violence, despite the fact that Sem Terra, influenced by Catholic radicals, is a largely pacifist movement. The march arrived in Brasilia on the anniversary of one such attack when police,

BY JOHN MCKEE

in the pay of local ranchers, shot 19 squatters.

The strength of the movement reflects both the appalling poverty in Brazil and the determination of the rural workers to hold the government to its promises. Brazil has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the world. While the richest 10% take 50% of all income, the poorest fifth of the population make do with just 2.6%. Thirty two million Brazilians regularly go hungry for lack of the means to buy food.

Sem Terra demands the right to settle and farm unused land. A mere 50,000 people own most of Brazil's arable land. A massive 42% of this land lies idle! The Brazilian constitution has allowed for such land to be taken over and redistributed since the 19th century. However, because the landowners are so powerful - they control nearly a third of the seats in the Congress even today - these provisions remain a dead letter.

President Cardoso came to power promising reform, despite being supported by some of the most right wing parties in the country. Reform so far has

meant changing the constitution to allow the privatisation of state assets and the opening up of the economy to competition from multinationals.

Cardoso promised to resettle 280,000 families by the end of his term of office. Sem Terra has already "resettled" 600,000 through its land occupations. Long may it continue. ■

Sebastio Salgado's photographic exhibition "Terra: Struggle of the Landless" is showing in Glasgow and then going on a tour of universities including Sussex, Cardiff, Warwick, Edinburgh, Oxford, Leeds and Essex.

## FRANCE: election campaign launched

## Chirac goes for a showdown

**THE REASON** for the election in France – a year ahead of schedule – is simple: the crunch time for the implementation of the single European currency will come in 1998. France will need another dose of neo-liberal austerity to slash its budget deficit before it can meet the “convergence criteria” required by the Maastricht treaty.

The 1998 decision on the Euro is going to be a key moment for France. Either the French ruling class succeeds in fusing its currency with the Deutschmark, effectively uniting the economic interests of the two major continental powers, or it risks slipping away from imperialism's top table.

Given that the last time Chirac and his prime minister, Alain Juppé, launched a head-on attack against the workers, they provoked the biggest mass strike movement since May 1968, they want a fresh five year mandate before another confrontation with the working class.

**Veering**

Speculation is rife that the economy is veering away from the convergence criteria. If the right win, Chirac will install a hard line, neo-liberal government seeking to unite all wings of the present majority.

For that reason, he may dump Juppé and even replace him with Thatcherite hit-man (and ex-fascist) Alain Madelin. Victory for the right could well signal an emergency budget in July as the platform for a massive new wave of anti-working class attacks.

At present, however, it is far from clear that Chirac's gamble will pay off. Most opinion polls indicate that the right's majority will fall dramatically and some put the right and left neck and neck, with a large proportion of the population undecided. One thing is certain: since Juppé is the most unpopular prime minister in history, the current government is not an attractive proposition!

On the other hand, the main parties

French President Jacques Chirac's decision to call a snap two-round general election for 25 May and 1 June is a symptom of fear. He's not scared of the official parliamentary opposition. The right's crushing, 480-seat majority in the National Assembly meant the Socialist and Communist parties were unable to affect the government's course. **Emile Gallet** explains that Chirac wants an election in the hope of fending off a wave of workers' protests and strikes.

of the left, Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PCF) have inspired little enthusiasm. Until the mass demonstration against Le Pen and the Front National (FN) in late March, the PS and PCF leaderships had studiously avoided all the key mobilisations of the last few years – from the movement against the Juppé Plan, to the fight for the legalisation of the “sans-papiers” immigrants and the more recent campaigns against the racist Debré laws (see WP 209).

Workers still associate both parties with the attacks of the Mitterrand years (1981-1994). In short, the PS and the PCF have a great deal to do to win.

They have made a hesitant start to the campaign. Although they did get round to making a “common declaration” for the first time since 1978, they were very clear that this was not an electoral programme.

The declaration is purposefully vague, with little substance behind the radical rhetoric. On the key question that pushed millions of French workers onto the streets in November-December 1995 – the Juppé Plan for the health service – the PS and the PCF merely say that they defend the right of all to have access to health care. But they refuse to call for the repeal of the Juppé Plan.

**Repeal**

Likewise, over the question of racist laws their answers are evasive. True, they promise to repeal the hated Pasqua and Debré legislation which denies French-born children of foreign parents an automatic right to French national-

ity. But they put this in the context of a “real immigration policy”.

Coming from the two parties that introduced detention camps and expelled illegal immigrants by the plane-load (PS in 1988-1993) or launched a petition “against all new immigration, wherever it comes from, be it legal or illegal” (PCF in 1991), this looks like another election promise intended to placate racist voters and the French bosses.

Even the two promises that appear to be clear and progressive – the 35-hour week without loss of pay and the creation of 700,000 jobs for youth – turn out to be mirages on closer inspection.

**Framework**

Instead of promising to impose the 35-hour week, the PS and PCF say they will introduce a legal framework that will permit such a reform. And even that framework will only be set up after “consultation” with the “social partners”, i.e. the bosses!

On unemployment, the proposal is deliberately vague. It is unclear what these jobs will be – workfare, low-paid short-term contracts or real jobs with real pay – nor is there any indication of a timescale for fulfilling this promise.

On one question, however, PS leader, Lionel Jospin, has made a very clear pledge. He has said that if the PS wins he will not implement an austerity budget in order to meet the convergence criteria.

This promise – supported by the PCF – represents an important reason for workers to vote for the PS and the PCF. Not because the PS and the PCF will really put the interests of the workers before those of French capitalism, but because they say they will. Crucially, most workers believe they will.

Although neither party has anything like the organisational leadership of the British Labour Party, they nevertheless represent the political leadership of the overwhelming majority of workers. As such they remain the key obstacles to the construction of a revolutionary party in France.

In this context, Pouvoir Ouvrier, Workers Power's sister organisation,

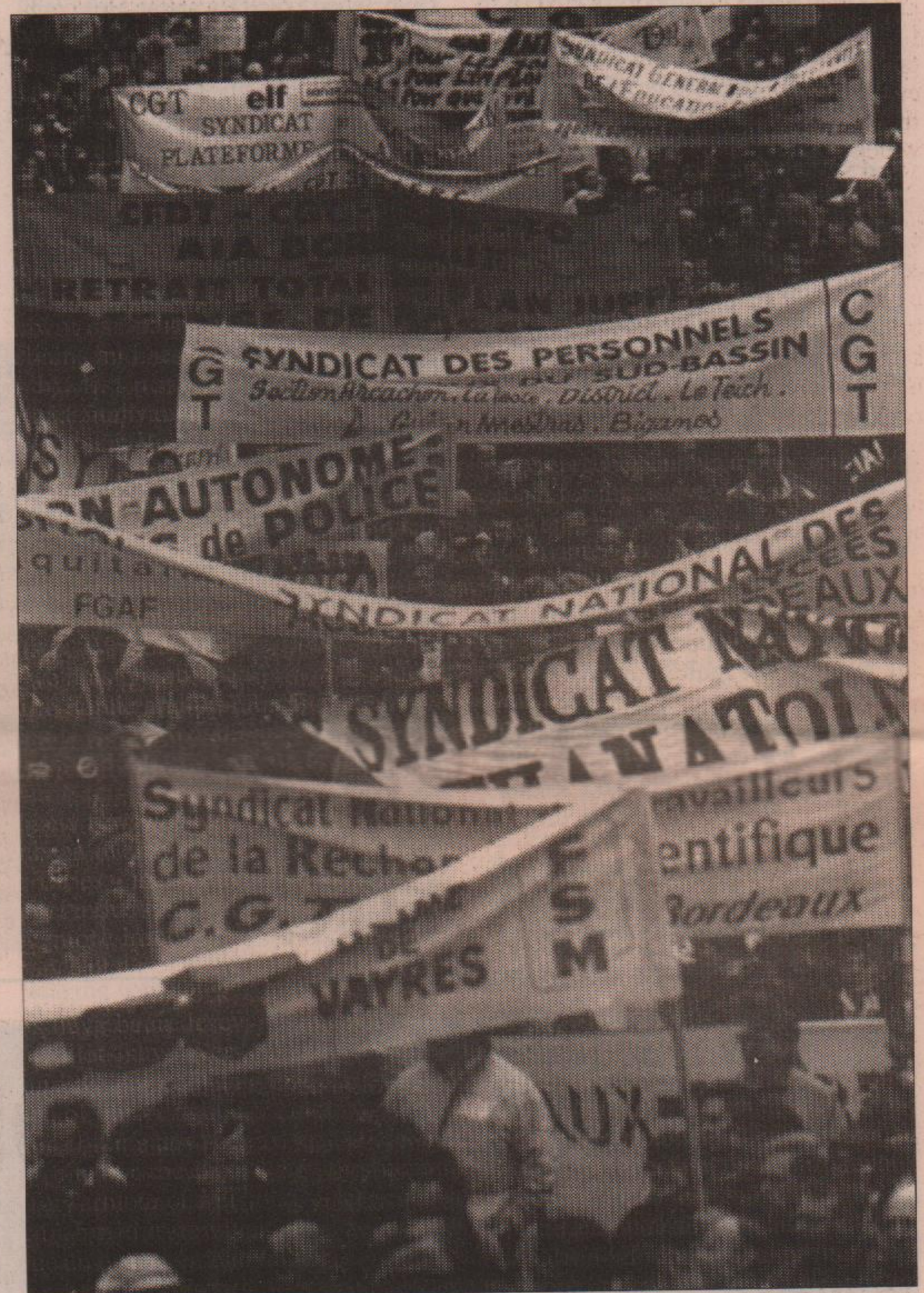
calls for a critical vote for the PS and PCF. At the same time, we emphasise to the working class the need to organise now, both to beat back further attacks and to force a left government to implement a 35-hour week without loss of pay and a mass job creation programme on union rates of pay.

Whatever the political complexion of the government, it will have to deal

with the Euro and the convergence criteria. The PS and the PCF are not going to attack the bosses' profits or the massive defence budget in order to meet the convergence criteria – or, at least, not unless the workers make them.

Over the next few months, French workers will have to draw on all their reserves of determination and courage to beat back the attacks associated with the single currency criteria, whether they come from the right or the left. They will need to renovate the labour movement from top to bottom and break from the stranglehold of both PS and PCF brands of reformism.

This can only be done by uniting the working class around an action programme that both meets its immediate needs and organises it to fight for power under the leadership of a revolutionary party. ■



If French president Jacques Chirac is to push through an austerity package to meet convergence criteria in 1998, he will have to defeat the many French workers who are determined to resist.

## French fascists in retreat

**LURKING IN** the wings at this election is the spectre of Le Pen's Front National (FN). After hitting a new high in February with their capture of their fourth town hall in Vitrolles, the FN's fortunes have gone into reverse.

The shock waves after Vitrolles galvanised mass anger against an organisation which is turning itself ever more openly into a fully fledged fascist outfit. Its public meetings and rallies are now sparking big protests in

many cities and towns.

Opinion polls suggest that the FN will gain around 15% of the popular vote, but very few seats. Le Pen himself is not standing as a candidate for fear of losing. At the same time, however, the organised working class, youth and immigrant workers must press home the advantage by mobilising to physically confront and crush the FN in the weeks and months ahead. ■

## INDONESIA

## Boycott sham elections

**AT THE** end of May, millions of Indonesians may vote in that country's general election. But their votes on 29 May will count for even less than is usual in bourgeois elections.

The ruling Golkar Party is guaranteed a majority and also controls who is permitted to stand in the election. It has ousted Megawati Sakarnoputri from the leadership of the main opposition party, the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), and has jailed dissidents such as Budiman Sudjatmik of the outlawed People's Democratic Party (PRD). In response, a major campaign to organise a boycott of the elections is now underway.

Indonesian workers, peasants and

students have repeatedly mobilised against this lack of democracy. From the July 1996 riots – that left up to 100 people dead – to a series of anti-government protests over recent weeks, the masses have demonstrated in action what they think of the Suharto regime and its fraudulent elections.

**Puppet**

On 3 March, around 10,000 marched in Jakarta in protest against the government's installation of its puppet leadership in the PDI. This was followed by similar demonstrations in Bali and then a march on the government buildings on 17 April which was suppressed with the government's customary savagery.

Members of the ousted central council of the PDI, sections of the Muslim United Development Party (PPP), the underground PRD and radicalised student groups throughout the country are at the forefront of the boycott call. Action committees have sprung up around Indonesia in an effort to build mass actions in support of the boycott.

Socialists should support their stand. The elections are a corrupt sham and there is no principled basis on which socialists could encourage participation in them, let alone call for support for any of the candidates.

But it is a mistake to tie this boycott exclusively to the question of whether or not Megawati Sakarnoputri is allowed to run, as does the PRD.

The slogan, “With Megawati, yes! Without Megawati, no!” is based on this mistake. It is a slogan that expresses illusions in a bourgeois politician with no ties to the Indonesian masses who we would not support even if she could stand.

**Priority**

Although socialists support the demand for all parties, apart from fascists, to be able to organise freely and select their own candidates, our priority must be the creation of a workers' party completely independent of the capitalist and confessional parties.

Socialists should call for a boycott of the elections because there is no way in which to use participation to increase

the working class' political and organisational independence.

This, however, does not mean that socialists should just ignore the elections. Despite their sham character, they will create a greater public interest in political issues and this can be used to popularise socialist solutions to the problems of the workers and poor peasants of Indonesia.

Only by linking the struggle for greater democracy, land reform, independent trade unions, women's rights and national self-determination for East Timor to the struggle for working class power can the workers and poor peasants overthrow Suharto's brutal regime and defy the power of his imperialist backers. ■

# Imperialism out of the Balkans

Dear Comrades,  
We were surprised to see, much to our regret, that in the pages given over to the Balkans in *Workers Power* (WP 208) neither the slogan "NATO troops out!" nor "Down with the Dayton Accords!" appear. The absence of these programmatic demands in this article, for us, constitute a principled problem. We think that the Balkans are, once again, an acid test for revolutionaries in today's situation.

For us, the democratic mobilisations in Serbia took place against a background of great instability in the region. It is because of this that the Serbian opposition was at pains not to question, even minimally, the Dayton Accords or the presence of the imperialist troops which underwrites them.

The opposition drove this point home on the mobilisations, which explains why, despite the persistence and permanence of the demonstrations over 88 days, they did not manage to bring down the Balkan butcher Milosevic. Instead they were diverted into negotiations in which the regime retreated and yielded ground to the opposition, but which saved Milosevic from being overthrown by a revolution. The policy of imperialism also acted as a pressure in this direction.

Faced with this situation and taking into account the fact that the programmatic demands mentioned above were absent in the WP article, we asked ourselves: how can one consistently fight against Milosevic's Greater Serbian bureaucracy without attacking the two central pillars that underpin this bureaucracy: imperialist support and the defeat of the Bosnian national movement?

Is not the Dayton agreement and the presence of imperialist troops in the region a threat to all oppressed nation-

alities (Bosnians, Albanians in Kosovo) that want to rid themselves of Great Serbian oppression, as well as every struggle that questions the restorationist course of the bureaucracy? Do the NATO forces based in ex-Yugoslavia not constitute a real threat to every revolutionary process that develops in this small country?

For us they undoubtedly do. For this reason, it is obligatory for every tendency that claims to be Trotskyist to fight in the Balkans, in the first place, for the withdrawal of all imperialist occupation troops. That this is a question of principle for revolutionaries is doubly so given your British section finds itself in an imperialist country whose troops, together with French, Spanish and North Americans, form part of the NATO mission.

There can be no political revolution in the Balkans, nor in any other place in the world where occupying imperialist troops are to be found, that does not involve denouncing them and demanding that they are withdrawn.

In the second place we also think that it is an obligation of every revolutionary in ex-Yugoslavia to denounce and fight against the Dayton Accords. These accords seal an imperialist peace based on the partition of Bosnia along ethnic lines to the advantage of the two strongest bureaucracies in the region (Serbian and Croatian), in turn sustained by the presence of imperialist troops.

Only from this angle is it possible to fight Milosevic consistently, as well as the political opposition, which is just as chauvinist and pro-imperialist as Milosevic. Any other policy turns revolutionaries into tailists of the "democratic" opposition (if one can call people who supported the genocidal murderers such as Mladic and Karad-

ajic a "democratic" opposition) which capitulates to Milosevic, who in turn is supported by Dayton and imperialist troops.

Revolutionary Greetings from the Trotskyist Fraction

Juan Chingo (PTS, Argentina) and Luis Ferrer (LTS, Mexico)

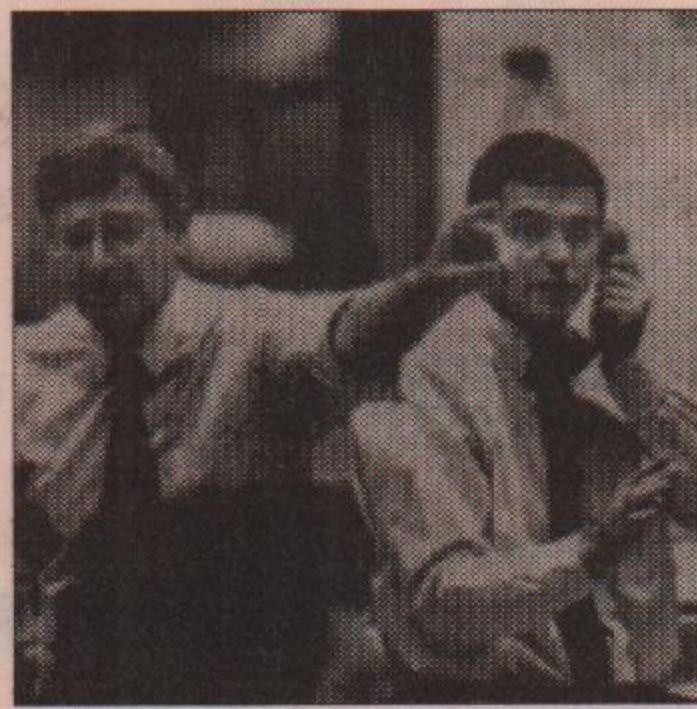
We reply:

We agree that the coverage in the February paper (WP 208) was wrong not to include demands for the removal of imperialist troops and for a renunciation of the Dayton Accords. The LRCI has never changed its position on the nature of this pro-imperialist agreement and the role it plays. Nor do we think that the NATO troops have any role to play, other than a reactionary one, in the region. The absence of the demands referred to by the comrades was in no way meant to signal a change to our programme.

Indeed, in the previous issues of WP (numbers 202 to 205) we focused on these aspects of the Balkan conflict repeatedly; in subsequent issues of the paper in our coverage on Albania we have pointed to the danger posed by the NATO troops in the region and now in Albania itself. They pose a threat to oppressed nationalities and to the entire working class of the region, as the comrades rightly say.

The main propaganda point we wished to make in WP 208, however, was that the "democratic opposition" to Milosevic could not bring Milosevic down, not only because it shared with him support for the Dayton Accords, but also because their programme - of privatisation, the market and unemployment - failed to attract the workers to the side of the students and the other oppositionists during their 88 days of marching.

# WHERE WE STAND



## Capitalism

is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.



## The Labour Party

is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.



## The Trade Unions

must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.



## October 1917

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

recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.



## Social Oppression

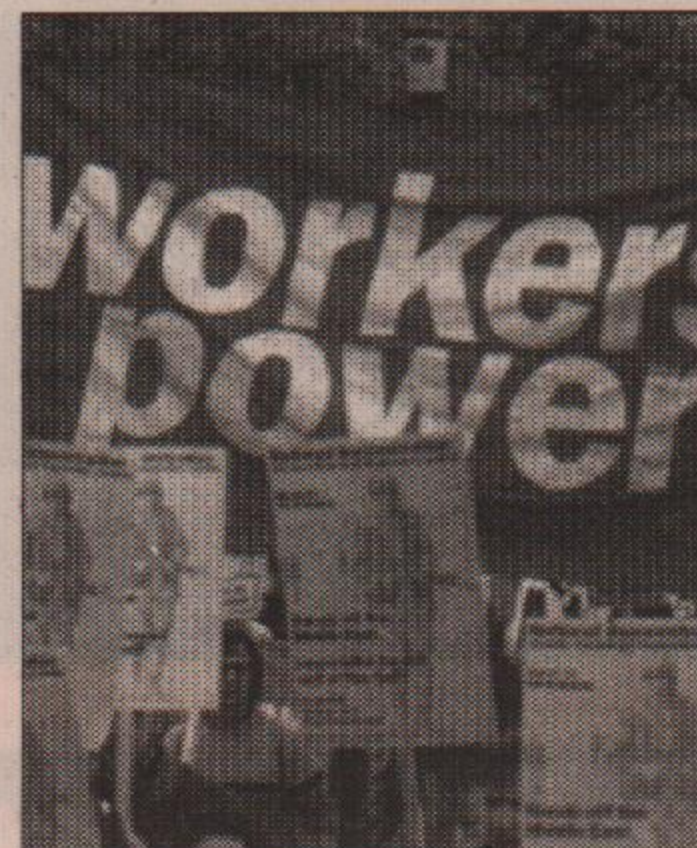
is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.



## Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of 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!★

# A GREAT LEAP FORWARD



**£11,264.14**

WE HAVE reached the May deadline for our building fund. The bitter truth is that we have not reached our £20,000 target.

The good news, however, is that we have had a landslide of cash coming in since we last reported on the fund.

If the current rate of donations is maintained then there is every hope that we will be able to reach our £20,000 target by the summer. And it's better to get the money late than never. We did not report on the fund in last month's election special because space was at a premium. In March our total building fund stood at £7,405. By the end of April it had soared to £11,264.14. In a mere two months we raised £3,859.14.

This is a tremendous achievement and is one that we must try and sustain in the coming months. Our thanks go to the wide range of comrades who have helped raise this money includ-

ing one who netted £253 in sponsorship money for running a half-marathon and others in London who used an election sweepstake and food and drink sales to raise £215. These ideas, plus collections and donations, can take us ever nearer our target. Keep it coming. Make cheques and POs payable to Workers Power, marked "Fund Drive" on the reverse, and send them to the address below.

## WORKERS POWER

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# Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

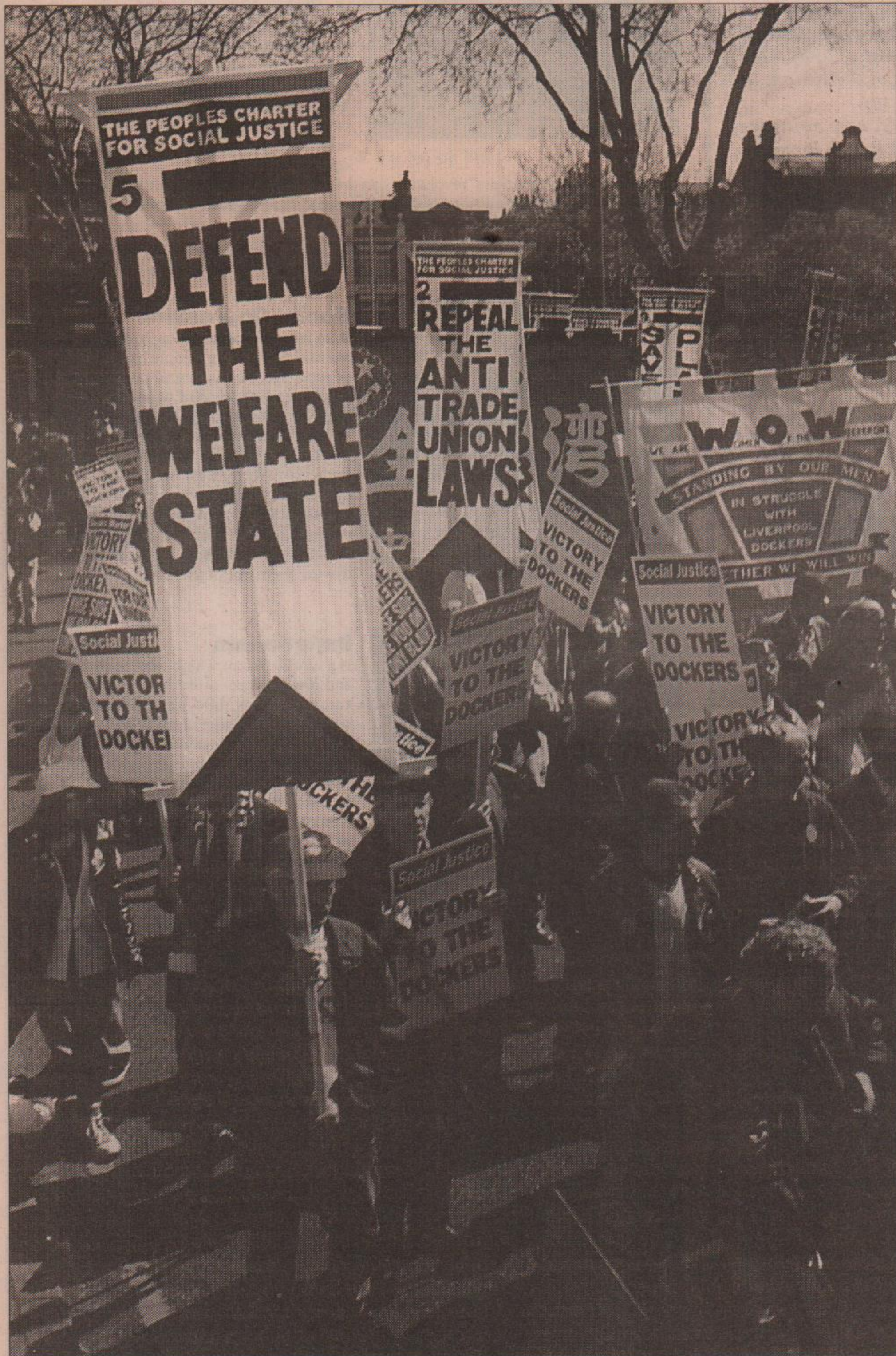
British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 211 MAY 1997 ★ 50p

## Strikes unite workers and youth

# Spread the action Build the fightback

**INSIDE:**  
**EUROMARCH**  
**FOUR PAGE**  
**PULL OUT**



12 April: thousands march for social justice

**T**HE ELECTION campaign revealed two very different faces of the labour movement.

On the one hand the bland and lifeless official campaign; every gesture and word carefully choreographed and scripted from Millbank Tower.

On the other, the struggles of ordinary workers – largely ignored by the media – but full of enthusiasm, colour and vitality.

On 12 April, Liverpool dockers led 20,000 mainly young demonstrators on a lively, noisy march through central London. The impromptu street party that followed gave the lie to those who say that a whole generation has grown up alienated from workers' struggles.

In stark contrast, Labour leaders continued to distance themselves from the dockers' heroic 19-month fight for their jobs. Margaret Beckett, supposedly on the "left" of the new cabinet, said:

"In a case where there has been a dispute and people have lost their employment, it is not our policy to say they must be reinstated."

In other words, new Labour will not lift a finger for the sacked dockers, Hillingdon Hospital women, the Magnet strikers or the workers locked out of Project Aerospace in Coventry!

In Essex, 3,000 firefighters from across Britain marched two days before the election in support of 1,000 Fire Brigade Union members who are fighting against cuts imposed by a Labour-led council.

Council leader, Chris Pearson, gave a glimpse of what workers can expect from a Labour government. After the firefighters' first 24-hour strike, he decreed that those returning to work half-way through a shift should not be paid for the rest of the day! After the fifth strike, he threatened to sack them all, but they are determined to carry on the fight.

On May Day itself, 800 postal workers showed the new govern-

ment what they thought of the anti-union laws that Labour are committed to keeping. They ignored them by walking out of London's Almeida Street sorting office when management tried to bring in casual labour.

Another group of workers are showing how to fight for a minimum wage. Sixty five, mainly immigrant, workers in Amaouti Pitta Bakery, north London, are on strike against poverty wages. They are paid just £3.37 an hour and work a six-day week. They are demanding £4 an hour and £4.50 for night work.

One striker said, "we are voting Labour because we need a minimum wage." Sensibly, the bakers have also voted to strike, since Blair has said he thinks the minimum wage should be at around £3 – £3.50. Exactly the level the Amaouti bakers are strik-

**We need to take control of our struggles and unite them from below.**

ing against!

All these struggles, along with strikes by lecturers at Southwark and Kingsway colleges, show that workers are prepared to take industrial action whatever the colour of the parliamentary majority. As long as capitalism exists, workers will have to fight to defend their rights and win a decent standard of living.

What we urgently need is to unite the various struggles so that we can force Labour to answer our needs or win them in the teeth of Labour opposition if need be – for jobs, a living minimum wage, rights in the workplace and against cuts in services.

This cannot be left to the trade union bureaucrats. They were practically invisible throughout the election.

Their strategy is to try to win

some concessions from Labour by going along with Blair's insistence that the unions should not expect any favours from his government.

Their priority is not to back up workers' struggles but to re-establish an important role for themselves. They see Blair's meagre promises as an opportunity to get on a permanent gravy train of inquiries and commissions which will decide what the bosses can "afford" and what conditions have to be met before unions are recognised.

To get their feet under the table, they will try to prove their own "reliability" by keeping their members firmly under control. They will advise caution; they will insist on compliance with every aspect of the Tory anti-union laws; they will obstruct mobilisations and links between different disputes.

We must not let them get away with this. We need to take control of our struggles and unite them from below.

Strikers should link up to organise common actions, spread the disputes and demand official support. The networks established by the dockers should be activated to build solidarity for every section of workers in struggle. And in the face of the anti-union laws we should take up the proposal by the Liverpool dockers' leader, Jimmy Nolan, to organise cross-union and cross-workplace committees to defy these laws.

Such co-ordination is currently being discussed by the dockers and the Hillingdon, Magnet and Project Aerospace workers. They are considering holding a rank and file conference to unite their struggles. That conference should be called now, opened up to delegates from every union and workplace. It should be the launch pad for an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement throughout the unions, a movement that can rally the forces for the inevitable battles with the Blair government and with the union leaders who will race to defend him. ■

**On the front line of the unionisation drive – page 11**