

# Workers power

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Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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## MINIMUM WAGE SET AT £3.60 AN HOUR

# Labour's insult to low paid workers

THE GOVERNMENT announced its plans for the national minimum wage last month. From April 1999 all workers will be covered by Britain's first ever statutory minimum wage.

But the rate has been set so low that the legislation is hardly a cause for celebration. The hourly rate is £3.60 for those over 22, with a lower rate of £3 an hour for those between the ages of 18 and 21. Young workers aged 16 and 17 are not even included in the legislation.

Labour's minimum wage package is broadly based on the report of the Low Pay Commission. The Commission was full of individuals who had no experience of poverty wages: academics, wealthy capitalists and well-paid trade union bureaucrats. The minimum wage was not decided by workers, according to what workers need to live on, but according to what the bosses claimed they could "afford".

Even then its recommendations were too high for New Labour. Determined to defend their pro-boss credentials, Labour's "Iron Chancellor" Gordon Brown, slashed the lower rate from £3.20 to £3.00 and extended it to include workers up to the age of 21. He was worried that the recommended lower rate, could undermine his welfare to work scheme, even though it would have only increased the employers' total national pay bill by £66 million. The Bank of England is worried it will "fuel inflation".

Still it is a shocking indictment of

poverty pay in Britain that even at Brown's lower rate the minimum wage will still represent a pay rise of around 30% for all those workers affected by its provisions.

The capitalists and a variety of their organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Tories have condemned the very idea of a minimum wage from day one. The mock shrieks of pain are the employers' standard answer to any improvements in workers' pay or conditions. With typical dishonesty they claim that

if wages rise they will be "forced" to make workers redundant, that businesses will close and that they will be unable to compete. But after the Low Pay Commission finally issued its report, the bosses' squeals were very muted. Outgoing CBI chief Adair Turner indicated that the CBI could quite happily live with the £3.60 figure. The reason? Quite simply because the recommended minimum wage is unacceptably low.

The proposed rate is well below the unions' figure of half male median earnings (currently £4.61 an hour) and the European Decency Threshold of £6.00. Why should we be paid this kind of money when exactly the same business leaders who have been complaining about the introduction of a minimum wage are the same ones who are raking in profits hand over fist? These fat cats are getting fatter every day thanks to the low wages they pay us. The majority of capitalists can well afford to meet the rate of £4.61 called for by the trade unions.

If they cannot? Any company which sacks workers or closes down arguing that it cannot afford to pay the minimum wage should be nationalised, without compensation. If the capitalists cannot afford to meet even our most basic needs then we cannot afford the capitalists.

Millions of workers voted Labour in May 1997 with the hope of seeing an improvement in their lives. Many thought that the New Labour manifesto pledge to introduce a minimum wage would mark the start of the reversal of the Tories' poverty pay regime. The union leaders used the hope of the next Labour government as a way to avoid having to organise any action to fight for the abolition of low wages.

Over one year into the life of the government New Labour has shown that it will not end poverty pay. The trade union movement must start the fight for a decent living wage now. This means £4.61 for all. It means no exemption for 16 and 17 year-olds and no lower rate for 18 to 20 year-olds.

The fight for £4.61 should be the first step towards a decent minimum from half male median wage to two thirds of that figure, around £6. This is already the position of such major trade unions as Unison. Instead of lobbying the government and simply urging it to meet £4.61, as the Unison leadership argued at their recent conference, they should start fighting for it now.

Any real fight against New Labour's derisory figure means conflict with Blair - and that's just what our union leaders do not want. They want to be reasonable, they want to avoid confrontation. Their main concern is maintaining a cosy relationship with the government, not abolishing poverty pay. That is why it is up to us to take this fight forward, to organise in our workplaces and union branches to build a campaign of action at work and on the streets that will force the government to meet our most basic demands. ■



Brown: clawed back minimum wage for young workers to fuel a boardroom pay bonanza

**We need £6 an hour minimum to end poverty pay!**



## LAWRENCE INQUIRY:

## Killers and cops must face justice

**THE FIRST PHASE** of the official inquiry into the racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence will draw to a close in July.

During the course of the past three months, the public investigation has lifted the veil on the Metropolitan Police's sickening record of incompetence, indifference and racism. Being black makes you a suspect in the eyes of the British police - even if you've been brutally murdered by white racist thugs. That is what the Lawrence inquiry has shown.

And in showing this it has stirred up anger against the police and against racism. It has strengthened the cause of anti-racism, despite Jack Straw's hopes that it would defuse the issue and channel it into a legal backwater. Black people and all anti-racists have been moved, in growing numbers, to fight back against police racism and against all other instances of racism in the course of this inquiry.

The testimony from police officers has provided a damning indictment of their contempt for black youth. Stephen's friend, Duwayne Brooks, who was with him at the time of the April 1993 murder, immediately became the cops' prime suspect.

Not even bothering to attempt to find out if Duwayne had been hurt, they

repeatedly questioned him about whether he was carrying weapons and what he had done to provoke the attack.

The police implied that Stephen was a local "cat" burglar, repeatedly referring to the gloves and woolly hat he wore at the time of the killing. Detective John Bevan suggested to Duwayne that the attack on Stephen could not have been unprovoked and that he and Stephen had been harassing a group of white girls at a local McDonald's shortly before the murder.

What were the grounds for asking such questions? Certainly no evidence, certainly no accusations against Stephen by anyone. No, the grounds were that Stephen was black and that's how British police treat black youth.

**Ignorant**

There has also been abundant evidence of senior officers appearing ignorant of basic points of law and long-standing police guidelines. Chief Superintendent Matt Baggott told the panel that the use of racially abusive language such as "nigger" by Stephen's killers was "not sufficient evidence of racial motivation." Apart from demonstrating the man's profound ignorance and racism, this is in direct contradiction to police guidelines on racially motivated crime in place since the late 1980s.

Contrary to police claims that they had met a "wall of silence" from local residents either too frightened or indifferent to come forward with evidence about Stephen's murder, the inquiry has shown that a number of local people were prepared to give information about the killing to the police, including the names of key suspects.

On the night of the murder one of the investigating officers, Sergeant Nigel Clement, claimed that he immediately began questioning local people, yet only one person could remember being questioned over an hour after the murder.

The Lawrences were horrified to see the police officer in charge of the investigation screw up a piece of paper which they had just given him. It included the names of suspects. The names had been given to the family on the day after the murder by a woman who had seen the men washing blood off their clothes the night before.

When the names of the Acourt brothers, Gary Dobson, David Norris and Luke Knight had been given to the police by several different sources, the police finally began surveillance of the Acourts' house. Even though they had enough evidence they decided not to arrest them. Instead, as bin bags were carried out of the house the officers conducting the surveillance were unable to alert others since

they had no means of communication, not even a mobile phone.

While the police are clearly embarrassed by the inquiry, they are already attempting to undermine its findings and avoid any possible repercussions.

Some police officers have had the cheek to say that they felt "let down" by the Lawrence family! They claim that they are being treated unfairly, with suspicion.

**Harsh**

Others, including the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Paul Condon, have complained that the questioning at the inquiry has been too harsh. Of course, police questioning techniques are a model of sensitivity! They never lose their temper, punch you, make you sign false confessions and lie about your answers in court - not much.

The Met have even gone so far as to imply that the inquiry itself will damage race relations. Mike Bennett, chairman of the metropolitan branch of the Police Federation, has called on Jack Straw to reject the report. He claims that the damage done to race relations "could be irreparable".

A telling response to Condon and his fellow officers came in a statement from the Lawrence family:

"It is a matter of concern that Sir

Paul appears to believe it is the truth coming out that puts community relation at risk rather than the conduct of his officers."

Thanks to the courageous determination of Stephen's parents, Neville and Doreen, the Lawrence case has become symbolic of the treatment meted out to thousands of black people by police forces across Britain. The Lawrence case has struck a deeply resonant chord throughout the black communities of London and nationally.

We should demand the Labour government prosecutes all police officers found guilty of racism or negligence in the Lawrence case. This is a murder case. Racism and negligence have let the killers off the hook to this day. That is a crime. So too must we demand of Labour that the police killers of black people in custody, like Ibrahim Sey and Shije Lapite, are brought to trial.

But to really honour the memory of Stephen Lawrence and ensure that such tragedies are not repeated we have to press on with the fight against racism, organising community defence against the police, racist thugs and fascists, and laying the basis for a people's system of justice, based on working class communities, that can ensure that racist killers are never allowed to get away with their crimes. ■



LAST MONTH the prosecution case against nine men from West Africa accused of rioting collapsed in disarray. The nine defendants stood accused of leading a 100-strong "riot" at the Campsfield detention centre in August 1997 - a centre specifically built for holding those seeking political asylum in Britain.

The men should have walked free from the dock at Oxford Crown Court. Instead, five of them were swiftly transferred to the Victorian hellhole of Rochester prison, while a sixth remains confined in a psychiatric unit "too ill to be released".

The outcome of the trial is the sharpest indictment yet of New Labour's racist immigration policies. In May, the Home Office renewed Group 4's contract at Campsfield for another three years.

At the trial, prosecution witnesses repeatedly contradicted themselves, each other and - crucially - Group 4's own video evidence from the night of the uprising. For example, Group 4 supervisor, John Allen, told the court that none of his officers had placed their hands around a detainee's neck, yet a video showed a guard with his hands locked around a man's neck.

Though the trial made a mockery of Group 4's account of events, the disturbance at Campsfield was not just the product of the guards' fevered imaginations. The uprising was the inevitable result of innocent men having to endure abysmal conditions. In April, an official inspection report by Sir David Ramsbotham pointed to a limited diet of lousy food, poor quality bedding and rooms, and the lack of recreational facilities.

But even if the conditions were improved and the privatisation of the prisons reversed then resistance would still continue against the injustice of imprisoning asylum seekers.

Notably the Ramsbotham report went further, questioning the whole policy of arbitrary detention of asylum seekers without trial and on the word of immigration officers. Campsfield has become an international scandal with a United Nations Working Party on Arbitrary Detention seeking to visit the facility. Hungary is the only other European state to attract similar UN scrutiny in recent years.

Many detainees began a hunger strike on 23 June to protest at their own continuing imprisonment and the transfer to Rochester prison of the men cleared as the prosecution case disintegrated.

Socialists and anti-racists must seize the opportunity provided by the case of the "Campsfield Nine" to demand the Labour government ends its racist immigration policy. We must expose the appalling treatment of asylum seekers and press the wider labour movement to fight for:

- the closure of Campsfield and other immigration detention centres;
  - the release of all detained asylum seekers;
  - the repeal in full of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act;
  - restoration of full benefit rights to asylum seekers and;
  - the abolition of all immigration controls.
- Demand the release of the acquitted Campsfield defendants from Rochester prison: Stanley Nwaidike, Sambou Marong, John Quaqah, Enahoro Esemuze and Harrison Tubman.

## Teachers beat back Section 11 attack

**FORTY TEACHING** jobs have been saved by a militant campaign in Hackney, London. Four hundred teachers, parents and students demonstrated outside Hackney Town Hall on 17 June demanding that Hackney Local Education Authority (LEA) restore the jobs of 40 teachers they had sacked at the end of May. They were lobbying the education committee which later that evening voted to rescind the cuts and the 40 redundancies.

Cuts of over £300,000 were planned in the funding of Section 11. The Section 11 service provides additional teachers to work with those children who speak English as a second lan-

guage. This service is match-funded directly by the government, so not only were Hackney LEA cutting their money towards Section 11 but it would have meant an additional loss of government grant money.

The council had voted through the cuts as part of the education budget in March but for over a month the LEA denied their existence. The teachers concerned and the local union were told that there were no cuts. Even some of the councillors claimed that they hadn't noticed it at the time! But letters arriving in the post informing teachers they wouldn't have a job in September was stark confirmation of what was going on.

Hackney National Union of Teachers (NUT) organised an effective campaign against the cuts. Immediately parents and school students joined in the activity, petitioning and leafleting the main shopping areas and outside schools.

The national NUT was approached to call strike action in defence of the jobs. The union has a position of fighting all compulsory redundancies. Yet the response of the national officials was appalling. They agreed to hold an indicative ballot - a ballot to ask you if you wanted a ballot. Then they would only hold the real ballot on the condition that there was a high turnout in the indicative ballot. If the national union had had

its way action would have been called, at the earliest, in the last week of term.

The stalling tactics of the national union sparked an angry response from rank and file NUT members. Whilst the first ballot went ahead (resulting in a vote of over 90% to ballot for action), an unofficial reps meeting was held. Around 80 people attended from many different schools. The meeting voted unanimously to organise unofficial strike action. In two secondary schools and one primary school union groups had already voted to take unofficial action. The action was called for the week following the education committee lobby but by then the fight had been won. Letters, with no apology to those

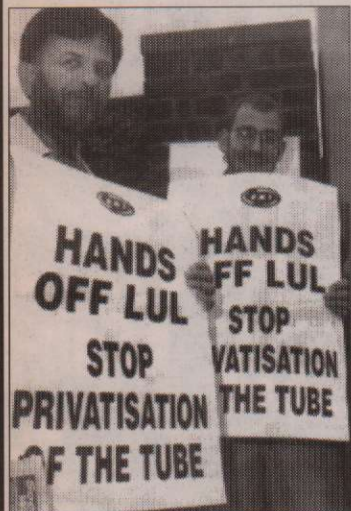
who had faced redundancy, were dispatched the day after the education committee vote, withdrawing all the redundancies.

Despite the fact that unofficial strike action was not needed, Hackney NUT members demonstrated that it is possible to organise such action, in spite of anti-union laws and national union bureaucrats.

Such is the momentum built up by the campaign that Hackney NUT is now planning to go onto the offensive: fighting to ensure that we get rid of the temporary contracts which weaken the Section 11 service and make it easier for the LEA to target certain teachers. ■



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As Serbia gears up for another war of ethnic cleansing we examine the revolutionary answer to renewed war in the Balkans - page 9



### Marxism: the basics

Introducing a new series on the basics ideas of revolutionary Marxism, Richard Brenner examines how the early socialists broke with Utopianism to base their strategies on the struggles of the working class - page 8

### Coming soon

The next issue of *Workers Power* will be a new look 16-page issue, due out late August.

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# EDITORIAL

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# End of an era?

**WE ARE APPROACHING** the end of an era. Neo-liberalism was the economic theory adopted by world capitalism when, in the 1970s, the long, profitable post-war boom came to an end. It is now clearly past its sell-by date.

Spending cuts, privatisation, mass unemployment and above all flexible working - read cheap, bullied labour - were the medicine neo-liberalism prescribed for the working class. For the capitalists the medicine was de-regulation: no more import quotas and controls, no more taxes and restrictions on buying and selling shares.

And the medicine seemed to work. In the developed countries, ruthless right wing politicians like Thatcher and Reagan took on organised labour and won. Third world countries were hammered into debt penury and their economies opened up to ever more intense imperialist exploitation.

The reformist leaders of the working class responded by moving further to the right, abandoning even the pretence of being any sort of "socialists". And then, the cherry on top, Stalinism collapsed, opening up more than a quarter of the world once again to the profit system and dragging down with it countless national liberation movements, western Communist Parties, and a generation of left intellectuals.

And if, in the 1980s, neo-liberalism was about smashing up unions and smashing down barriers to greed, in the 1990s it could even claim to be building something up. In South East Asia, former third world economies were industrialising and booming, blazing a trail that, before long, debt-blighted Africa could follow. The stock markets were growing, throwing up vast skyscrapers up out of inner city wastelands.

It did not matter that the double-figure industrial profit rates of the 1950s and 1960s were gone for good: rising share prices could increase your investment massively, year on year, no matter how flat the profits of individual companies remained.

There were wars. But the military analysts of the new world order assured us that these would be localised, if vicious, civil conflicts: wars between states were a thing of the past; from now on the world's armies would be mainly peace-keeping forces in fractious states with deep-seated ethnic and religious rivalry.

There had been economic crisis too - notably the 1987 stock market crash. But at the end of the day America agreed to spend its way out of the crisis. Neo-liberalism, we were told, was a system in which banks could go bankrupt, shares could crash but in the end the economy would come bouncing back.

Now, every single one of these pre-conceptions is being blown apart. The neo-liberal medicine turned out to be just snake oil.

Economic crisis has destroyed the myth of the South East Asian "tigers" as trailblazers for the capitalist future. It

has destroyed the image of Japan as the successful model for imperialist capitalism. And, as we explain on page 11, it now threatens to drag the rest of the world into the kind of global, synchronised recession unseen since the 1930s.

To cap it all, Russia and China, where the move towards capitalist restoration has had the gurus of neo-liberalism salivating for the last decade, now look set to play a critical role in generalising the economic crisis.

And suddenly the local wars and politi-

volatile of the crisis points difficult.

As the political and economic crises mesh together, fascism is re-emerging and gaining in strength. In Queensland, Australia the extreme racist One Nation party holds the balance of power and could be set to grow across the country. In France the Front National is at its strongest ever. In Austria the far right FPO of Georg Haider is waiting in the wings. Boris Yeltsin pleads with the west to help him stifle Russian fascism while in Jasper, Texas gun-toting and swastika-

## Economic crisis has destroyed the myth of the South East Asian "tigers" as trailblazers for the capitalist future. Now it threatens to drag the rest of the world into the kind of global, synchronised recession unseen since the 1930s

ical upheavals that have been written off as peripheral can be seen to threaten the stability of whole regions. Speeches about "peacekeeping" efforts only point to the increasing inability of the major world powers to stabilise their New World Order.

The storm centre has moved to East Asia. The Indonesian revolution that began with the overthrow of Suharto was never primarily about crony capitalism and the warring factions of the Indonesian elite: it was fuelled by the vicious austerity package imposed by the IMF and the dictatorship's brutal suppression of any democratic rights for the masses. It will continue as long as millions of lives are being wrecked by currency slumps, recession and mass unemployment.

In South Korea, the IMF's austerity plan is only just beginning to bite: and here, unlike in Indonesia, there is a huge, militant workers' movement. It is now faced with a life or death struggle to retain its wages and conditions.

The arc of crisis stretches through to India, which is involved in a nuclear stand off with Pakistan (and, implicitly, China) and which is currently governed by a far-right Hindu nationalist coalition which includes fascist parties.

In Europe, the Balkans expose the paralysis of the US and European powers as a guerrilla war for independence has broken out in Kosovo. The Kosovan resistance has been armed by Albanian brothers and sisters who themselves launched an insurrection only last year.

On their own, every one of these wars and revolutions, potential or actual, would be containable within a New World Order underpinned by an unchallenged US military power, compliant imperialist powers in Europe and a Russia too stunned by the capitalist restoration process to worry about foreign policy. But the growing threat of economic crisis makes concerted imperialist intervention into even the most

carrying thugs of the Ku Klux Klan parade past the grave of a black victim of racist lynch law.

But reaction is not going unchallenged. The other, crucial part of the equation, is the world working class. And while the British labour movement has suffered defeats from which it is still recovering, globally not only is the working class growing in numbers, it is growing in strength, confidence and organisation.

The mass strikes in France, Denmark and Germany against Maastricht-inspired austerity drives, the heroic struggles of the Australian dockers and the UPS workers in the USA, the increasing militancy of workers throughout Latin America, the determined action of the South Korean workers, all provide evidence of a world workers' movement prepared to go forward, of a force capable of defeating the bosses' attacks and crushing the far right.

World capitalism is, in short, assembling all the elements of a historic crisis: recession, slump, war, fascism - and revolution.

When Stalinism collapsed, Workers Power recognised that something fundamental had happened to the world system. While others mourned the corrupt dictators we took hope from the fact that one of world capitalism's major pillars of support had been knocked away: Stalinism had been a key bulwark against revolution.

We recognised that the collapse of Stalinism had opened, at one and the same time, a new world-historic period of revolution and an initial phase of counter-revolutionary despair and demoralisation. The features of that counter-revolutionary phase were the disorientation of the working class of the former Stalinist states and the massive ideological retreat of all forms of non-revolutionary socialism in the workers' movements of the capitalist countries.

Now the end of the counter-revolutionary phase is in sight. And just as

the key features of that phase involved the ideological disarray of the workers' movement, its ending must bring the ideological disarray of the bourgeoisie.

There is no replacement ideology in place for neo-liberalism. Its most far-sighted critics within the ruling class - like financier George Soros - simply advocate a kinder and more regulated form of the present system. The far right remedies on offer, from the outright neo-Nazis to their "respectable" allies, consist essentially of a return to economic nationalism. A return to protectionism may well be the outcome of the crisis - but it cannot be a solution to that crisis.

As the crisis unfolds, millions will ask: what is the alternative to a system whose survival demands mass unemployment, poverty, ethnic cleansing and the horrors of war?

So it is time, once again, to spell it out: global socialist revolution. To end the misery of recession, the economy has to be taken out of the control of big business: it needs to be owned by a state based on the rule of democratic workers' councils and run, not for profit, but to meet human need. Democratic socialist planning - made vastly easier both by the advent of information technology and by the advanced planning techniques of the capitalist multinationals - could reorder the world economy to ensure work, food, health and education for all. It could guarantee an end to the destructive wars and ethnic conflicts that blight capitalism.

Capitalism creates the conditions for the socialist revolution, and it is recreating them before our eyes. But one crucial thing is missing. To steer the working class struggle through the rapids of crisis and war all those who believe in the socialist future of humanity have to fight for it. The revolutionary workers' party and the revolutionary international: these are the missing keys to the whole situation. Revolutionary leadership will mean the difference between victory and bloody defeat, from Indonesia and South Korea to Britain and France.

To the militants ground into ideological submission in the 10 years since the collapse of Stalinism, we say: wake up! To the new generations of workers and youth being thrown into the fight against unemployment, fascism and war, we say: these fights have been fought before. The class fighters whose bones lie in the mass graves of every counter-revolution this century paid dearly for the mistakes made. We do not need to repeat these mistakes. Revolutionary Marxism can provide us with the answers to dispense with capitalism once and for all.

If capitalism survives, the horrors of the 21st century will make the horrors of this century look puny. World crisis gives us the chance to destroy the system before it destroys us. Take that chance: help us build the revolutionary socialist alternative. ■

Turn to page 11

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## FIRE BRIGADES UNION: Essex dispute

# FBU must turn up the heat

**ESSEX FIREFIGHTERS** are facing the threat of cutbacks in the service for the fourth year running. After apparently having reached an agreement following last year's action, the new council (now joint Liberal Democrat/Labour) is seeking £ 1.2 million in cuts. It is planning to axe 16 posts, 2 foam tenders and the high rise appliance based in Chelmsford.

Essex Fire Brigades Union (FBU), one of the best organised brigades in the country, voted overwhelmingly to take strike action against the cutbacks. So far they have had seven strikes, ranging in duration from 2 to 24 hours. To try and offset the effects of the action management are buying in scab Army Green Goddesses (now well over 30

years old) to cover during the strikes. In fact they are prolonging the time they need to use these antiquies by locking out strikers for a full 24 hours, even when the actual strikes are for less.

Support for the strikes has been solid both in Essex and in other brigades around the country. At a rally in Chelmsford recently Ken Cameron said that if any member were to be sacked for striking there would be a recall national conference with a National Executive Committee recommendation for a national strike – even though this would be illegal.

Clearly the national leadership realise that there is far more to this dispute than just cuts in Essex. The national employers' organisation wants to

attack the conditions for FBU members currently laid down in the Grey Book. At the same time the government is preparing to announce a new pension scheme for the fire service which is significantly worse than the present one. A defeat for the militant Essex brigade would have serious implications for the whole of the fire service.

If it was simply a local dispute it would be very easy to settle as management have a current budget underspend of £250,000 and there is £26 million in reserves. But precisely because the management are spearheading a national offensive, the present series of limited strikes may not be enough to force the council to back down.

What is necessary is an all out strike



FBU members must take the lead in organising for an all out strike

throughout Essex. Firefighters need to organise the rank and file across the areas to ensure that, if management carry out their threats to take disciplinary action, Cameron is forced to turn his words into action and organise an

immediate all out national dispute. Such a strike can not only stop the Essex attack but also put a stop to the planned national attack on the FBU by the bosses and their Labour backers and challenge the anti-union laws head on. ■

## LABOUR'S TRADE UNION REFORMS

# Struggle against "Fairness at Work"

**THE LABOUR** government's proposals on trade union laws, Fairness at Work, include some new safeguards for workers but leave in place a large part of the Tory anti-union laws, such as the ban on solidarity strike action.

In response to Labour's proposals the trade union movement should be launching a mass campaign for union rights. Such a campaign should include the fight to repeal all anti-union laws as well as recruiting and organising a new layer of young workers.

But instead, most trade union leaders and the TUC have effectively accepted Fairness at Work. Some are putting a positive gloss on the proposals, others like John Monks are expressing "disappointment" with some clauses. Some are talking tough but are preparing to go along with the White Paper: Unison chief Rodney Bickerstaffe makes impassioned speeches for workers rights but he ditched the Hillingdon hospital workers who were sacked because they stood up for their rights.

The Hillingdon employers were deemed to have acted unlawfully even under the Tory law – but the workers still haven't got their jobs back. Solidarity strike action with proper union backing was the one thing that could

have helped them – but Bickerstaffe and his like will continue to block such necessary action.

For many trade union leaders, the anti-union laws have positive aspects. The ban on solidarity action and the insistence on ballots for strike action mean that the bureaucracy can keep a grip on workers' action. This lessens the chance of struggles getting "out of control" and threatening the position of the existing leaders. It's no wonder the union leaders aren't clamouring to lead a militant campaign against Fairness at Work.

### Continuing

One section of the movement however, is continuing the campaign. This is a loose alliance now called the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Union Laws, created following the Reclaim our Rights conference held in March. The coalition is headed by Socialist Labour Party-supporting trade union executives, the NUM and RMT, together with other leftist leaderships like that of the CWU. A second conference is being held on 4 July. So far, the proposals made by the steering committee fall far short of the kind of militant, active campaign needed.

The main proposal is for a "massive

demonstration" against the anti-union laws to be held next May Day. This is a fine idea – but the present trade union leadership shows no signs of calling anything of the sort. They are far too wedded to the current government. Such a mass demonstration could best be built as a result of struggle, of strikes, union building campaigns, and action such as solidarity strikes called in defiance of the law. It would be built in spite of the trade union leadership.

This is not what the United Campaign leaders are planning. Their idea is to lobby various union executives, to hold a fringe meeting at the TUC and so forth. They are proposing a top-down, bureaucratic campaign. Instead the conference should insist on building at rank and file and local level, supporting workers in struggle, demanding trade union leaderships organise action against the laws. We want to see local meetings open to all trade union activists, unemployed and youth with the aim of building campaigns with real roots and delegates from branches and stewards committees.

### Opportunities

Such campaigns should also be building the unions. The current situation does provide real opportunities.

The proposed right to recognition when the 40% threshold is passed, the expectations many young workers have of fairer play under the new government, the fight back by post and rail workers – all these combine to produce conditions where the union movement could launch a massive and successful recruitment campaign.

Instead of concentrating on individual benefits – the stress of many of the current recruitment drives – a real "Back to the Unions" campaign would take up issues such as the minimum wage, the fight against low pay, collective representation and action against bullying managements like those in the new "white collar factories".

A recent spate of local Union Rights rallies, organised primarily by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), looked as though they might provide such an initiative. But at the meetings themselves, SWP speakers seemed short of proposals as well as very unwilling to challenge the union leaders speaking from the platform. One-off leafleting sessions are fine but very limited. Really effective local campaigns need backing from local trade unions, unemployed organisations and youth. This means a sustained argument inside

those bodies as well as in Labour Party branches to win support for union building and campaigning against Blair's anti-union proposals.

### Controversial

One controversial issue in the United Campaign is the question of demands on Labour. The campaign is dominated by a coalition of the SLP and Labour lefts and centrists. The former claim there is no point in looking to Labour; the latter still have illusions in them. Workers Power argues that we must demand that Labour scraps the anti-union laws – but that the only way this will be achieved is if unions and workers themselves take on the laws, making it impossible for the government to sustain or justify them.

Workers Power supporters will continue to argue in every forum possible for campaigns to build fighting and democratic unions. We will warn that even the "left" leaders will tend to fudge and trim when it comes to action in defiance of the law – sometimes giving a "nod and a wink" to unofficial action but not taking the risk themselves. Any serious campaign will involve a challenge to these leaders, not reliance on them. ■

# Solidarity with sacked Tameside workers

**IN EARLY JUNE** Tameside Care Group (TCG) bosses finally acted on their threats and sacked all of the 200 plus striking care workers. They have been on official strike since the end of March after TCG boss, Alan Firth, announced the imposition of new contracts. These would have meant pay cuts of up to £2.05 an hour, loss of maternity benefits, sick pay and holiday entitlement.

Three months into the strike Unison's full-time officials desperately want a "negotiated settlement" with the TCG. But management is not interested.

The strike currently faces key problems.

First, Tameside Council, which created TCG, is intimidating branch officials and members because the bosses fear potential solidarity action. Coun-

cil management have instructed branch secretary Noel Pine not to use his facility time to represent the strikers. Unfortunately, rather than confront the council, Noel has gone along with them and booked unpaid leave to undertake negotiations.

Council employees are now being threatened with disciplinary action if they attend meetings to discuss the strike, or if they join picket lines even in their own time – another outrage.

Tameside Council's edicts are a direct attack on Tameside Unison. The branch must fight this harassment. Trade unionists cannot allow them to determine what we do and discuss within our own organisation – let alone in our spare time! If anyone is threatened with disciplinary action as a result, the whole branch should be called on

to strike.

Another problem is the lack of solidarity action from other Tameside branch members. The branch leadership, starting with Noel Pine, need to organise a boycott of all TCG-related work. This means social workers, finance staff, bin workers and support services, must have nothing to do with the TCG.

Unison officials will oppose this action, they will say that it is illegal under the anti-union laws. But if the strike is to win, then solidarity action is essential.

This strike remains winnable but more militant tactics are needed.

Alongside solidarity action we need occupations and mass pickets. At first the branch leadership opposed occupations of the scab recruiting agencies.

They argued that it would jeopardise official Unison support, so they forbade union banners and strikers to attend the first agency occupation.

But militant action works. Following the occupation of Taylor Brookes by strikers and supporters, the agency agreed to stop supplying scabs.

Mass pickets are crucial to the dispute. Following the Duckinfield picket where the police used the anti-union laws for the first time, the pickets have been moved from evenings to mornings. This is a mistake. The police were never neutral: their job is to break strikes, our job is to win them. The branch leadership were terribly wrong when they repeatedly praised and thanked them. The strike has been left unprepared for the heavy-handed police tactics. We must rebuild the pick-

ets and mobilise the rest of the branch and the wider labour movement in support.

It is essential that the strike committee takes control of the dispute. It is the strikers dispute they should run it. It is totally unacceptable that negotiations are being undertaken by Unison Regional and local officials in secret without the inclusion of strikers representatives. Unless the strikers are involved in the talks themselves there is absolutely no way of telling what shabby deal may be agreed behind their backs.

The strike committee needs to start a real rank and file organisation across the branch. Such an organisation is vital to ensure there is no sell-out and to take the action necessary to win the dispute. ■



## RAIL: The battle against privatisation

# United action can win

**T**HE MAIN rail union, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), called an all-out 48 hour strike on the London tube network on 14 to 16 June. This was in response to Deputy Prime Minister and RMT member John Prescott's "Third Way" proposals for the underground. After an 84% yes vote on a 47% turn-out the actual strike was even bigger than the ballot result.

Six and a half thousand RMT members shut down 28 stations and caused half the trains to be cancelled in the rush hour. The Circle Line and most of the Central Line were closed and only 28% of the Piccadilly Line trains ran. A mere 13 out of 80-90 scheduled trains left the Morden depot.

Many ASLEF drivers ignored the instruction to cross picket lines from their soon to be ex-general secretary Lew Adams and the Northern Line branch even issued a counter-leaflet urging members to respect the RMT pickets. ASLEF's general secretary elect, Dave Rix, sent a message of support to the strikers.

### Stoppage

In a separate dispute, more than 12,000 main line maintenance and infrastructure workers in the RMT held a four-day strike from the 19 to 22 June. Nine different companies were hit in this industry-wide stoppage and 1,000 maintenance workers joined the RMT in the three weeks prior to the strike, showing once again that a militant fightback is the best recruitment policy for the unions.

Railtrack - which contracts out the maintenance work - admitted, "there will be considerable impact on services". The private profiteers, displaying callous disregard for passenger safety, following the recent train derailment on the GNER intercity and the German train crash, cancelled all ultrasonic inspections in the run-up to the strike to get around their obligation

to repair faulty track and tunnels within 24 hours of its detection.

Further proof that the bosses are worried could be found in the attempted victimisation of RMT rep Bill Ashcroft, who was dismissed two hours after the strike dates were announced. Within 24 hours, an unofficial walk-out, spread by flying pickets, had brought RMT, ASLEF and white-collar TSSA members out in solidarity. Bill was immediately reinstated. The witch-hunt backfired, giving the strike the best start imaginable.

### Wrong

According to the RMT leadership, the current strikes are about the effects of privatisation, not privatisation *per se*. How wrong can you get.

Since the Tories privatised British Rail, workers' jobs and conditions have been decimated. Over 42,000 jobs have been chopped, and the working week has shot up as a result. Some companies now expect a 72-hour week, six consecutive 12-hour shifts, from their workers! Short-term contracts threaten to completely replace permanent ones.

This has been accompanied by a constantly worsening service. Investment has fallen from £1.56 million in 1992-93 to £933 million in 1995-96, despite the tax-payers' subsidy rising from £628 million in 1989 to £1.76 billion last year. Fares have risen by 20%, twice the rate of inflation, while train cancellations and delays have soared. The final straw for most passengers and railworkers is that the rail companies make £1 billion profit a year out of this chaos.

Tube workers have seen through Prescott's "Third Way" proposals. Labour plans to sever the track and maintenance of the London Underground (LUL) and hand it over to the private sector for up to 30 years adding £3 million annual costs to the running of the network.

Yet, RMT general secretary Jimmy Knapp persists in presenting the disputes as two sectional and economic battles. The mainline maintenance workers are demanding a 35-hour week, job security and paid breaks; the LUL workers a guarantee on no redundancies and no changes to conditions after privatisation. The link is clear despite Knapp's claims - privatisation and the fight for a publicly owned rail network.

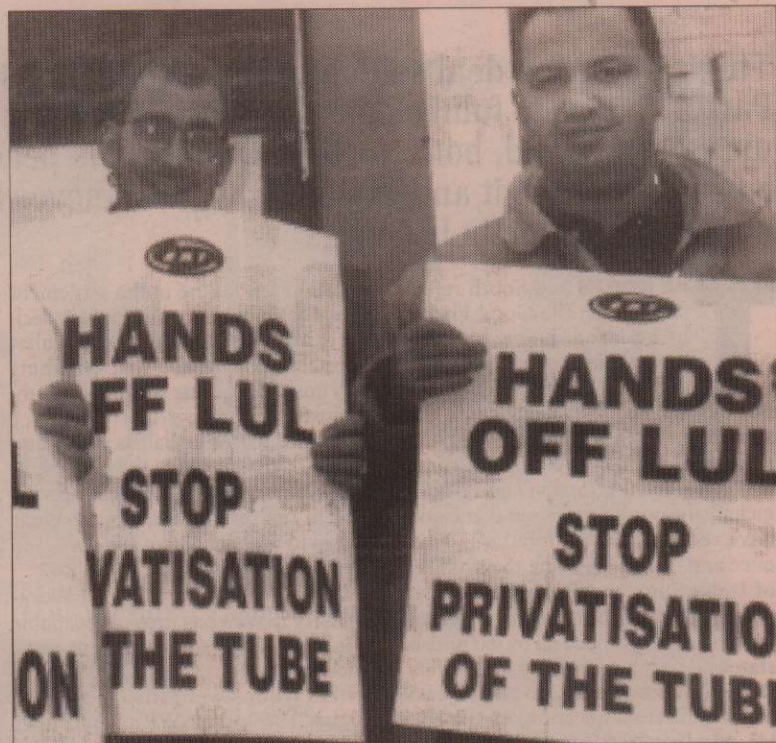
Labour's manifesto promise of a fully-integrated and publicly accountable railway system seems a very long time ago. They know it can only be achieved by kicking out the private companies, boosting investment and alienating their rich friends - just what they don't want to do.

The RMT-sponsored Labour MP John Hepple had the gall to tell the RMT conference, "I don't think you get anywhere with banners and placards" and called the anti-privatisation campaign an "absolute waste of time". No wonder the conference nearly voted to sever its links to the party and ASLEF members elected SLP member Dave Rix to replace Labour loyalist Lew Adams for general secretary.

### Renationalisation

Alongside their existing demands, railworkers should fight for no more privatisation and the immediate renationalisation of the rail network under workers' control, without any compensation to the fat cats who rob us of £1 billion a year. Of course, the fight for a cross-union indefinite strike to reverse privatisation will be overtly political. As such it will come up against the anti-union laws and put the unions on a collision course with the Labour government. So be it.

A fight for these demands would open the door to a unified strike across the rail network, putting even more pressure on ASLEF to join in the action. Rank and file strike committees, draw-



RMT workers have the power to shut down the rail and defeat the government's plans

ing in maintenance and tube workers as well as members of ASLEF, TSSA and other sections of the RMT who want to take action, can lead this fight now.

Maintenance workers are due to come out on a week-long strike starting on 29 June. Out on their own the action will take a long time to bite. Tube workers have, ominously, not been called out again until 12 July, thus allowing LUL management time to regroup and organise a scabbing operation. One industry wide indefinite strike is the surest, quickest and least costly way of securing victory and the only one that can halt privatisation once and for all. ■



## UNISON: Bournemouth Conference

# Signs of dissent under New Labour

**U**NISON'S RECENT national conference was anything but dull. With Labour in government what should the union do about Private Finance Initiative (PFI), Best Value and the minimum wage?

The bureaucracy knows what it has to do. Last year Unison's National Executive Committee (NEC) commissioned the QC Brian Langstaff to report on campaigning organisations within the union. The report was used to launch a witch-hunt against the left, specifically targeting the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union (CFDU).

The Unison bureaucracy, led by Rodney Bickerstaffe, wants to make Britain's biggest union and main organiser of public sector workers, safe for Blair's welfare state reform and Tory public spending limits.

The Langstaff report is estimated to have cost the union between £10,000 and £50,000 (although the leadership ludicrously claimed it was only £750). It proposed the banning of groups that campaigned against current Unison policies and for tighter central control of branch funds, effectively outlawing left wing organisations within the union.

Following the conference debate the prescription was less clear cut. The bat-

tle for democracy was lost after Bickerstaffe, in a vicious and demagogic tirade against the left, pulled conference behind a motion from the Scottish Region. All the important amendments from the left were lost.

But the willingness of the bureaucracy to support this motion represented a concession. The Langstaff report was unworkable. It made collective campaigning to change union policy virtually impossible - instead conference "reaffirms the right to organise, campaign and communicate to change, modify or replace policy through the constitutional channels of the Union, while acting within agreed Union policy." But it still prohibits "organised factions" and "external political organisations" from receiving any branch funds.

### Pose

The motion gave the leadership the opportunity to pose as democrats and rail against sinister left groups abusing branch funds. They spent £73,000 witch-hunting Leeds Union (barristers' fees, hotel bills etc.) to investigate £150 given over three years in affiliations and donations to the left wing CFDU!

In the minimum wage debate Trade Minister Ian McCartney was given half an hour to berate the unions for "whing-

ing" about New Labour. The immediate effect of the speech was to anger delegates. The left won vote after vote amending the NEC's emergency motion, with criticisms of the Low Pay Commission and Unison's NEC member on it.

Amendments were won calling for a national demonstration, support for industrial action to force the implementation of the minimum wage, a motion to the TUC and reaffirmation of Unison's half male median earnings formula for a minimum wage (currently £4.61).

But in the end the NEC opposed the amended motion and it was voted down. Aided by Blair's announcement that young workers would only get £3 an hour as a minimum wage another motion was passed calling for a demo, no exemptions and a motion to the TUC. The top table didn't want this either.

PFI and Best Value proved more tricky for Bickerstaffe and his cronies - they were forced to accept positions to the left of where they feel comfortable because the delegates on the conference floor are having to face these attacks head on, positions were won calling for: the immediate scrapping of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), a national lobby of parliament against Best Value, PFI, the underfunding of public services, and support

for workers taking industrial action to prevent privatisation.

The Hillingdon Hospital strikers won a victory as an emergency motion was passed calling for reinstatement of full membership and dispute payments, and negotiations on reinstatement of the strikers after Pall Mall, the original contractors accepted at Industrial Tribunal that they had been unfairly dismissed. This was eighteen months after the NEC withdrew support from the dispute without even allowing the strikers a say in the issue.

### Promises

Standing ovations and promises of support were given to the Tameside and Islington strikers. But the experience of Hillingdon is a warning to any Unison member looking for the support of the leadership.

University College London Hospital branch tried to rally support for branch secretary and SWP member Candy Udwin, who is threatened with victimisation for organising strike action against PFI. The motion fell after a platform speaker convinced delegates that the leadership would support a victimised branch secretary, whatever her political allegiances and that UCLH branch were worrying about nothing.

Unfortunately, conference's refusal to support Candy will give encourage-

ment to the UCLH management. A year under New Labour has led to a recognition that the union faces new problems. The rank and file want to see Labour improving the situation for public sector workers and make sure that the union keeps the pressure on the government. The bureaucracy wants to make sure it controls and limits our fightback against Blair.

While many delegates have illusions in Blair and New Labour the "wait for Labour to deliver" mood of last year has gone. There is no rank and file organisation to capitalise on this disillusionment. Neither the SWP nor the CFDU have consistently fought the witch-hunt and neither have a coherent strategy for mobilising the members' growing desire for change into an active challenge to Bickerstaffe and Blair.

The reaction of the delegates to McCartney's speech is a sign of things to come under New Labour. As rank and file opinion swings away from the leadership, as New Labour's attacks hit home we will have renewed opportunities to build a rank and file movement to defeat the bureaucratic leaders, democratise the union, put it on a war footing and launch the action we need to defend jobs and services, end low pay and end all Labour's plans to whittle down the welfare state. ■



# IRISH PEACE DEAL

# SOCIALIST WORKERS

The Irish peace deal sealed by June's elections to the Northern Irish assembly has demonstrated the Socialist Workers Party's failure to fulfil elementary socialist and international tasks in relation to the Irish struggle. Despite its enormous popularity in Ireland, both North and South, the peace deal was a pro-imperialist settlement. **Mark Harrison** argues that socialists must oppose it and explain why it can never bring a just peace to Ireland. But this requires a clear understanding of the national question in Ireland.

**T**HE NORTH and South referendums on the Good Friday Irish peace deal were heralded by the British press as the first all-Ireland votes since 1918. But the fact that they occurred on the same day was the only thing they had in common. The two referendums asked different questions and didn't include the one key question that could have resolved the national question once and for all – ending the division of Ireland into two states and in so doing abolishing the Northern Irish sectarian statelet, propped up by the British state and occupied by thousands of its troops. The key purpose in placing two entirely different questions on the ballot paper was to suggest that the national question in Ireland has somehow been resolved.

If this suggestion were true then the fundamental reason for the "troubles" would be eliminated, since the national question has been at the heart of the last 30 years of struggle and sacrifice. The 1921 division of Ireland laid the basis for the modern Irish war. The sectarian six-county state in the North, which discriminated against Catholics and led to their revolt in the late 1960s, would not have existed if the national question had been resolved in the only real all-Ireland vote of 1918.

In fact, the Good Friday settlement does not even begin to resolve the national question. The Unionist, mainly Protestant veto on Irish unity is expressly maintained by the settlement. The new assembly (see box) has been elected on the basis of a sectarian headcount.

### Dormant

The potential for a future round of "troubles" – the popular media term for the progressive struggle of the nationalists against their oppression and the reactionary efforts of the loyalists and the British to keep them oppressed – remains. Popular support for the peace settlement, divisions in the Unionist camp and the capitulation of the leadership of the revolutionary nationalist struggle, Sinn Fein, currently mean that this potential is dormant. Changed circumstances could re-activate it.

The abject failure of the settlement to deal with the national question, decisively underlines its pro-imperialist character. The peace will be inherently unstable because it is a peace without justice.

For this reason socialists were duty-bound to wholly oppose the settlement. This meant issuing a clear call to vote "no" in the referendums and a clear refusal to vote for any of the parties in the assembly elections.

Unfortunately, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has proved incapable of taking a clear and consistent revolutionary position on Ireland. When the British troops went into Ireland in August 1969, the SWP's forerunner (the International Socialists) refused to call for their withdrawal, they pushed the British state's own excuse that they were there to shield the beleaguered nationalist masses from brutal loyalist bigotry. When the Official IRA blew up the Aldershot barracks in 1972, the SWP dropped its position of unconditional but critical support for the IRA and began linking the correct slogan of "Troops Out" to the feeble call to "Stop the bombings" – a miserable collapse in the face of hostile public opinion in the oppressor nation – Britain.

In the wake of the Good Friday settlement the SWP have maintained the method that led to these errors: they refuse to recognise the national question in Ireland is itself a class question. So in practice the SWP counterposes the slogan of self-determination for Ireland as a whole, to a call for working class unity around economic questions. This false counterposition is combined with a refusal to recognise the central importance of the national question to the working class of the North.

Early in this century Lenin rightly condemned the refusal of socialists to support just national struggles as "imperialist economism". Imperialist because it is the product of a labour movement in an oppressor nation that refuses to recognise the importance of ending national oppression in a colony or semi-colony. Economistic because it elevates the importance of economic issues in the workplace above a general political question that is not immediately rooted in the workplace.



A familiar story: RUC riot police shield Orange bigots' parade against nationalist protesters in west Belfast

Through embracing this method the SWP has failed to develop a real working class answer to the nationalists and therefore has no means of breaking the nationalist working class from the leadership of Sinn Fein or, indeed, the Protestant working class from the loyalist and unionist parties. Their position throughout the period of the peace talks and referendums demonstrates this clearly.

### Unification

Nowhere, in the considerable coverage and comment devoted to Ireland in recent issues of both *Socialist Worker* (SW) and *Socialist Review* (SR), is there a call for self-determination for Ireland as a whole, the unification of Ireland on a revolutionary working class basis or the withdrawal of British troops and the ending of imperialist rule

over Northern Ireland. These are staggering omissions when you consider that the SWP claims to be the revolutionary party in Britain.

Instead of these revolutionary demands the SWP treats the whole problem "internally" – that is: the real problem is the communal divisions in the North and the sectarian institutions that underwrite them. The answer is to unite the workers. Chris Bambery wrote:

"Protestant and Catholic workers face common exploitation. Both have paid the price in full of sectarian divide and rule. Both have a common interest in challenging the rule of capital that oppresses the vast majority of Irish men and women – North and South, Protestant and Catholic." (SR May 1998)

No Catholic or Protestant will take a blind bit of notice of such a crass sim-

plification. They know that sectarianism was institutionalised in favour of the Protestants. That is why loyalism remains, unfortunately, so strong among Protestant workers. It is not essentially to do with religious ritual. It is to do with the fact that in the six counties Protestant workers still enjoy relative privileges, over Catholics in the fields of housing, employment, pay rates and, crucially, in key state institutions. Marginal these privileges may be but in a situation of generalised poverty their relative significance becomes all the more important.

Loyalist pretensions to superiority over Catholic nationalists were not simply a matter of ideology, but had a very real and persistent material basis. The privileges of the almost exclusively Protestant aristocracy of labour, at workplaces like Harland and Wolff

# A poll for continued partition

THE 26 JUNE elections to the Northern Irish assembly – a key component in consolidating the reactionary peace settlement – failed to yield a clear-cut result. Under a system of proportional representation David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) will be the single biggest party, but with only 28 of the assembly's 108 seats. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists, who spearheaded the call for a "no" vote in the May referendum on the Good Friday deal, captured 20 seats.

The Paisleyites' strong showing not only confirms that a substantial proportion of the Protestant middle and working classes remain steadfastly opposed to even cosmetic changes in the form of Unionist rule, but could spell serious trouble for the functioning of the assembly itself. The "refuseniks" of the UK Unionist Party won five seats, while the UUP contains a substantial minority who are unhappy with Trimble's line. There are several individuals who are unknown quantities.

Within the nationalist population, the SDLP retained a clear edge over Sinn Fein, though the latter's rising electoral support defied the predictions of many pro-imper-

alist commentators. In the past Workers Power's sister organisation, the Irish Workers Group, has called for a Sinn Fein vote in Northern elections.

But Sinn Fein has moved from the party representing physical force opposition to the British presence to a party promoting a peace deal that could well copperfasten the partition of Ireland for many years to come. Gerry Adams' and Martin McGuinness' aggressive sales pitch in favour of the Good Friday agreement marked a watershed for Irish republicanism.

Gerry Adams has claimed that the new assembly is an important aspect of the Good Friday deal's "all-Ireland" dimension. In fact, the creation of the assembly is crucial to promoting the idea that the whole problem of the North can be resolved internally. Its existence will do nothing to achieve a progressive resolution of the Irish national question.

Against this background, socialists could no longer extend Sinn Fein critical support in the elections. The necessary and correct line in the elections, taken by the Irish Workers Group, was abstention.

### ASSEMBLY ELECTION RESULTS FOR 108 SEATS

Party	Seats won
Ulster Unionist Party	28
SDLP	24
Democratic Unionist Party	20
Sinn Fein	18
Alliance	6
UK Unionists	5
Northern Irish Women's Coalition	2
Progressive Unionist Party	2
Unionists	1
UUU	1
UU	1



# PARTY FAILS KEY TEST

which remain bastions of Protestant employment, were, of course, a useful weapon to divide the workers. This courting of Protestant working class support by the Unionist capitalist class related directly to the nature of the northern state. It stemmed directly from the unresolved national question.

To wish this away, as Bambery does, means that you dodge the difficult, but not impossible task, of winning Protestant workers to an anti-imperialist position. The history of the past 75 years has shown that if you fail to win a substantial number of Protestant workers to oppose the undemocratic partition of Ireland, you will never forge working class unity. For although Catholic and Protestant workers have – episodically – fought together against the bosses, this unity has shattered the minute the national question has been posed.

Worse, the SWP's approach has increasingly led to the indiscriminate use of the term "sectarian". In the editorial greeting the referendum result SW declared:

"The key to winning workers away from their sectarian past and communal politics is socialist politics." (SW 30/5/98)

## Oppressed

Of course, socialist politics is the key to the future, but it will be a socialist politics that directly answers the national question as well as other issues. The SWP's glib statement begs some important questions. Which workers and what communal politics are we talking about and are they all the same? The SWP choose not to enlighten us, but it is clear from the editorial (based on an interview with their sister organisation in Ireland), that they are referring to both the loyalist and nationalist communities – in short, drawing an equal sign between the relatively privileged and most oppressed sections of the working class.

Certainly, sectarianism exists in Catholic communities but we will not break anyone from "communal politics" unless we recognise the distinction between the justified struggle of the nationalists and the loyalists' reactionary opposition to it. You cannot hope to simply appeal to both communities to forget the past and ignore significant aspects of the present if you are serious about building working class unity.

Yet that is what the SWP's Irish sister organisation does in their planned open letter on "trade union rights, the minimum wage and attacks on welfare", these are the issues "through which we can begin to forge unity from below". They state many people will reply to this call with: "and what about the IRA's decommissioning of weapons?", or "what about the 95% Protestant RUC?", or "what about the continued gerrymandering in local government?"

But they ignore such questions in favour of "class unity from below". In fact, socialists must directly address those issues related to the national question. This is the only way socialists can win nationalist workers away from Sinn Fein and the SDLP, and the only way they can begin to build lasting unity with Protestant workers. Instead, the SWP effectively pretend there is no national question.

The SWP does, of course, oppose Orange bigotry, in particular as manifested by Paisley, as well as the repression meted out to nationalists. But they do not tackle the root causes of either. Worse, by failing to locate the battle against sectarianism in the struggle to smash the northern statelet and unify Ireland on a revolutionary socialist basis, they end up appealing to British imperialist forces to defeat the bigots.

In an editorial reminiscent of their posi-

tion on the troops going into Ireland in 1969, they wrote:

"The only way to secure real peace in the future is if the British government stands up to Paisley and confronts the Orangemen during their anti-Catholic marching season. The question is, will Tony Blair have the guts to do it or will the British government once again stand in the way of peace in Ireland?" (SW 18 April 1998)

This is a rotten reformist attitude to peace in Ireland and to the Orange marches. Who will the British government use to confront the Orange marches in this schema? The RUC? The British troops? These forces exist to crush the nationalists and time and again from Bloody Sunday in 1972 to Drumcree in 1997 have acted to defend imperialist rule and the sectarian institutions of the six county statelet. No socialist should call on the imperialist, oppressor government to tackle reaction on the march. They never will. They should organise the workers to deal with these marches through mass mobilisations and organised self-defence.

Nor is the British government's stance on the marches the key to lasting peace in Ireland – quite the opposite. Only complete and unconditional British military withdrawal from Ireland, can create the conditions for a lasting peace. To say otherwise is to deny the most pertinent fact about the Irish question – that Britain is the principal problem, not a neutral agent for the solution of that problem.

It is not a question of Blair's guts, but of British policy. British policy is to defend the union – for the last 30 years it has done this militarily, and for the last few months it has done it diplomatically.

The SWP don't see the settlement as a victory for British imperialism. They admit it is not a solution, but they argue it is a step forward:

"The vote [for the settlement] was a rejection of the hatred and bigotry spouted by Ian Paisley and other Unionists . . . The settlement could open up the potential for class politics to develop in response to attacks on workers' jobs, conditions and livelihoods." (SW 30 May 1998)

Both these claims are false. The overwhelming vote for the settlement among Catholics expressed understandable war weariness. Its endorsement by Sinn Fein was an admission that its strategy of guerrilla war against the British presence was bankrupt. Its turn to an alliance with the bourgeoisie of the South, the US Irish lobby and the middle class of the North marks a huge step away from its revolutionary nationalist origins.

## Defeat

In other words the nationalists, who gave so much in the struggle against Britain, were accepting that the revolt they launched in 1968 was effectively over. This is a defeat. And the party of



revolutionary nationalism is compounding this defeat by betraying the goals for which the nationalist masses fought.

The vote among the Unionist population was nothing like so overwhelming and the support for Paisley's DUP in the assembly elections reveals that despite the settlement bigotry and sectarianism is alive and well among the Protestants, including the Protestant workers.

Precisely because the settlement has neither satisfied the aspirations of the nationalist masses nor broken the Protestant masses from their attachment to Unionism, in itself, it cannot and will not "open up the potential for class politics". The potential for class politics does exist, of course, but it is despite the settlement, not because of it. After all the national struggle is itself a form of the class struggle.

The SWP's ambiguity about the outcome of the referendum is not surprising. *They never once said how people should vote.* They refused to campaign for a "no" vote, even though they argued the settlement was a "bosses' deal" and that it would not "match the hopes for peace". To refuse to take responsibility for arguing with the masses on how to vote in a key referendum is cowardly. If you oppose the settlement you should vote against it. Why did the SWP not take this logical step?

The answer to this is to be found,

yet again, in their economism. In this case it manifested itself in a form of pacifism. The masses wanted peace, reasoned the SWP. The deal would not bring peace, but because the main forces arguing for a no vote were either Paisleyite bigots or die-hard nationalist guerrillaists, the SWP could not afford to identify themselves with either. Better to keep quiet on how to vote, tail the sentiments for peace expressed by the masses and continue to bang on about the alternative of "class unity".

As the Irish SWP put it:

"Socialists are for peace in Northern Ireland because it creates the best conditions for Catholic and Protestant workers to unite." (SW 18 April 1998) Socialists are, in general, for peace, but we are certainly not pacifists.

We recognise that there are just wars. We recognise that the working class will need to use force of arms to defeat its class enemies and we believe that the day-to-day class struggle itself – from the picket line, through the fight against fascism and the fight to stop the Orange marches of hate – pose the need for organised physical defence in the here and now.

The long war of the IRA in Ireland was a just war because it was fought against imperialist oppression. It failed because it was based on an elitist, guerrilla struggle, not because it was violent. The aim of socialist struggle in that war was to mobilise the masses, to build mass organisations, capable of defending workers against the British troops, the RUC and the RIR. It was to wrest leadership from the nationalists, not in order to secure peace at any price, but to secure a just peace. The masses have been robbed of a just peace. They have had an imperialist peace foisted upon them.

## Class unity

But the peace they look forward to has not created "the best conditions" for class unity, as the SWP claim. After all, peace in Northern Ireland reigned from partition in 1921 through to the nationalist revolt of 1968/69. Were those years marked by class unity? No. Despite occasional joint struggles, the predominant feature of those years was disunity, as Catholics faced discrimi-

nation at the hands of Protestant bosses and pogroms at the hands of the Protestant middle class and sections of workers.

The current peace because it does nothing to tackle the root cause of sectarianism – the partition of Ireland – will not necessarily create any better conditions for class unity than the previous era of peace. Of course a powerful socialist force could use the conditions of peace to develop class unity. That is certainly possible. But it will not do this by keeping quiet about the national question or by counterposing defence of the welfare state to the great unsolved democratic question that the workers of the North know full well remains a decisive issue.

Soon after the referendum, for instance, *Socialist Worker* itself reported an attack on Catholics who were protesting against an Orange march:

"Police and British soldiers stationed in a nearby park taunted local people as they made their way towards the town centre according to eyewitnesses. The RUC fired 30 plastic bullets at Catholic demonstrators." (SW 6 June 1998)

This is the continuing reality of Northern Ireland after the settlement, reflected in the Paisleyites' strong showing in the assembly elections. Class politics have to address this reality and cannot counterpose the economic struggles of the workplace to it.

Class unity has to be built around a combination of democratic and economic demands. The key to Irish unity lies in mobilising the working class North and South to champion the economic interests and democratic rights of all workers. To ignore the latter, as the SWP do, will minimise the number of Protestant workers who can be broken from sectarianism and imperialism.

When Bambery writes that "the class divide is a crucial fault line which runs through Northern Ireland society like all others" (SR May 1998), he is right. But when he fails to mention the other crucial fault line – the artificial border that runs around six of Ulster's counties dividing it from the rest of the country of which it is a part – he proves that the SWP will forever remain irrelevant to the mass of workers in Northern Ireland. Imperialist economism simply cannot see that for the masses in an oppressed country the violation of their national rights is a class question, is part of the class divide and requires a working class struggle for its successful resolution. ■



Pan-nationalist alliance: Hume, Reynolds and Adams



# The origins of scientific socialism

## MARXISM THE BASICS

### 1. SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS

**T**HE MODERN socialist movement originates with the Communist League, led by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, which published *The Communist Manifesto* 150 years ago as an expression of its world view, principles and aims.

The Manifesto establishes as its goal a very different kind of society:

"In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

Marx and Engels did not invent socialism. The idea of a classless society based on collective ownership of property existed long before 1848 and predates the rise of the modern working class movement.

During the 17th through 19th centuries, the capitalist class wrested supremacy from the feudal nobility. The great revolutions of this period gave rise to egalitarian and democratic thinking. At its most radical this thinking took socialist forms.

In the English Civil War of 1642-52, communistic ideas were popularised by Gerrard Winstanley and the movement known as the Diggers. During the French Revolution of 1789-93, Babeuf and the "Conspiracy of Equals" proposed revolutionary struggle for a socialist society. By 1800 there was a growing recognition among radicals that – despite its stated principles of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality – capitalist society afforded neither freedom, brotherhood nor fairness to its new and growing class of wage-labourers.

One socialist writer of this time was Claude Henri Saint-Simon. In 1802 he attacked the continued domination of post-revolutionary France by the old classes based on privilege, parasitism and idleness. He argued for the complete absorption of politics and the state into a rational organisation of the economy, to be founded on the principle that everyone should work.

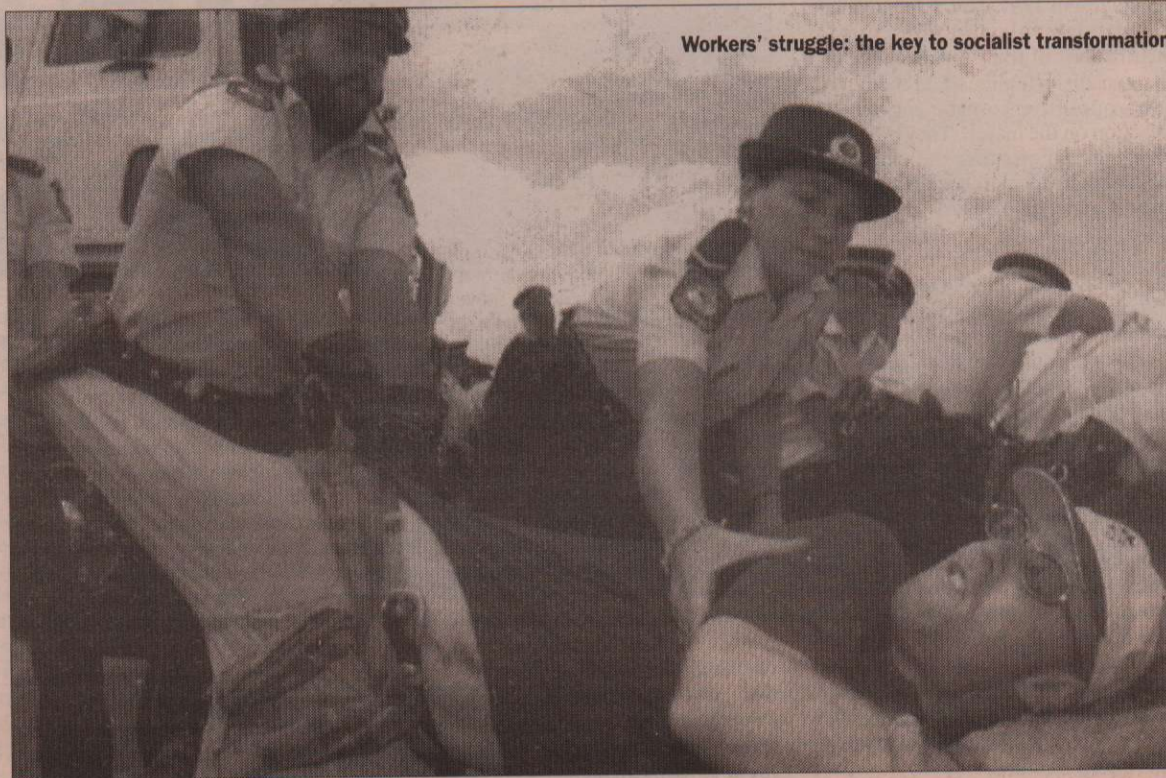
Although Saint-Simon was able to show the importance of class divisions in the French Revolution of 1789, he was writing before the emergence of a sizeable industrial working class. He therefore identified the two main social classes as "workers" and "idlers". The "workers" included those capitalists involved in production and distribution – including manufacturers and bankers, the key interest groups in the new capitalist system. His writings were designed to convince all of these "workers" that socialism would be a more rational way to organise society.

The most acerbic critic of early capitalism was François-Marie Fourier. In his 1808 book, *Theory of the Four Movements*, he attacked the French bourgeoisie's hypocrisy, exposing the real human misery of the poorest classes. He condemned the cynical trickery of the ruling elite explaining how "poverty is born of superabundance itself".

In England, the manufacturer Robert Owen promoted the theory that the character of human beings is determined by the conditions in which they develop. He established and managed a "model colony" at New Lanark in Scotland, with a fixed 10-hour working day, a great deal of personal liberty for the

In this issue we begin a series of articles to introduce readers, especially new and young readers, to the fundamental ideas and arguments of revolutionary Marxism. The importance of such ideas is twofold: first, they alone explain the crisis-ridden, class-divided world we live in; second, armed with these ideas, workers and youth can change the world.

In part one **Richard Brenner** explains the origins and development of socialist ideas and how Marx and Engels transformed these ideas into a scientific critique of capitalism and rooted the fight for socialism in the struggle of the modern working class.



workers and one of the earliest ever infant school schemes.

Nevertheless, Owen was dissatisfied that the workers remained under his direction as manager and proprietor. He wanted to bring about a communist commonwealth in which all wealth and property would be held collectively. He established co-operative communes as models of the rational society he proposed. He succeeded in forcing parliament to pass a law limiting the hours of factory work for women and children. In 1834 Owen was the key figure in the creation of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, the first ever attempt at a national workers' confederation.

Marx and Engels recognised and were indebted to the ideas and experiments of these early socialists. They valued them because they "attack every principle of existing society." Yet they criticised their theories and schemes, referring to them as those of "Utopian socialists".

The Russian Marxist, Lenin, later summed up Marx and Engels' view of Utopian socialism:

"It criticised capitalist society, it condemned and damned it, it dreamed of its destruction, it had visions of a better order and endeavoured to convince the rich of the immorality of exploitation. But utopian socialism could not indicate the real solution. It could not explain the real nature of wage-slavery under capitalism, it could not reveal the laws of capitalist development, or show what social force is capable of becoming the creator of the new society."

Marx wrote that the utopians could see the real class divisions and the antagonistic interests of the main classes in modern society but could not yet see the possibility of the working class uniting

in mass struggle:

"The proletariat, as yet in its infancy, offers to them the spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement."

For this reason, the utopian socialists developed out of their own heads, rather than out of the real conditions of capitalist society, blueprints for a better, more just and equal society. They then tried to convince the whole of society, including the capitalists, that it would be better for everyone to follow their socialist model, "for how can people, when once they understand their system, fail to see in it the best possible plan of the best possible state of society?"

The problem was that the reforming utopians' projects were doomed to failure. The effects of capitalist competition rendered most small scale co-operatives unable to compete in a growing capitalist market. The capitalists could not be convinced by appeals to reason, because it was in their immediate interest to maximise their own profits and compete effectively with their rivals.

The rationalism of the utopian reformers could not account for the material foundations of the prevailing ideas of the ruling capitalist class. Every major reform in the interests of the workers, whether economic or political, had to be forced out of the capitalists by working class organisation, campaigning and action.

Marx and Engels had the great advantage over previous socialist thinkers of living at a time when the industrial workers were beginning to combine as a class for economic and even directly political ends. In the 1830s and 1840s the Chartist movement in Britain agitated for universal male suffrage (which would enable working class men to vote).

trained, united, and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter on the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The death knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."

Modern socialism, therefore, linked its aims to a real social phenomenon. The development of capitalism itself spurred the development of its successor.

The struggle of the workers for a shorter working day, higher wages, rudimentary social provision, education and voting rights brought them into a permanent conflict with the employers. Here was a force which had a direct interest in the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist commonwealth. The proletariat's strength in numbers and centrality in production gave it both the force and the cohesion to effect sweeping social change.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude from this that socialist ideas and consciousness arise spontaneously within the working class and its organisations. If this were the case, Marx and Engels would never have found it necessary to organise a political party to bring socialist ideas into the working class movement. The dominant set of ideas in any society are those of its ruling class, and "bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology... it is more fully developed, and has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination." (Lenin).

The spontaneous struggle of the workers against their employers tends, of its own accord, to result in demands for necessary improvements and reforms, but not ordinarily in the demand for a complete break with the capitalist organisation of society. These ideas, which arise only on the basis of an understanding of the whole of society have to be formulated through the medium of a political party. It is the task of the revolutionary party to take these ideas into the working class movement, to fight for their triumph among workers over other, bourgeois and petit bourgeois ideas.

Only such an organisation, uniting millions of workers through a democratic structure, armed with a scientific socialist theory, centralised and disciplined in relentless struggle, can raise the working class from a class in itself, struggling over the price at which it sells its labour-power to the capitalists, into a class for itself, striving to overthrow class society and build socialism. ■

#### KEY CONCEPTS

**Utopian socialism:** Socialism based on idealised blueprints for the future rather than the reality of working class struggle.

**Proletariat:** Another name for the working class – all those who work for a wage and do not own property in the means of production (i.e. shops, machinery, land etc.)

**Rationalism:** Theory of human behaviour that ignores or downplays the effects of class and ideology and suggests that all humans will basically act in accordance with rational judgements.

**Means of production:** Factories, mines, offices, transport systems and raw materials

**Mode of production:** The class system dominating society at any given time: thus we can talk about the capitalist, feudal or slave modes of production in history (as well as more complex forms)

#### WHAT TO READ

K Marx and F Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*  
F Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*  
Available from Workers Power on 0181 981 0602



**KOSOVO:** Serbia prepares new round of ethnic cleansing

# Support Kosovo's struggle for self-determination

**Kate Foster** reports on the war in Kosovo, where the 90% Albanian population is fighting against ruthless repression by the Serbian state

**T**HE WAR in Kosovo is on the brink of an escalation that could see ethnic cleansing on the scale of Bosnia and serious NATO military intervention.

The first phase of the current crisis opened in 1997, after the revolution in Albania which provided an ample supply of small arms to the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo. Despite the fact that 90% of the Kosovo population is Albanian, it remains part of Serb-dominated Yugoslavia.

Since 1989, when its status as an autonomous province of Yugoslavia was revoked, the Albanian majority have endured military rule, arbitrary repression, and complete exclusion from local government, management and the education system.

The Albanian revolution unlocked the anger that had built up: mass demonstrations in the major towns and cities were followed by a guerrilla campaign by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) against the Serb occupation forces.

Serb president Slobodan Milosevic deployed up to 50,000 regular army units and special forces, including heavy artillery and aircraft, and launched two military offensives against the KLA, utilising the same "ethnic cleansing" techniques employed by Serbia in its war against multi-ethnic Bosnia in 1992-4. The second attack effectively sealed Kosovo's border with Albania.

In June, there was a lull in the conflict as the imperialist powers that run the G8 and NATO attempted to impose a "peaceful" solution.

Despite the fact that these powers have gone to war for the "right of self-determination" of the Falkland Islanders or Kuwait, they remain firmly opposed to the goal that most ethnic Albanians are fighting for: the right to secede from the rump Yugoslavia, in which they have no civil rights and to run their own country.

The imperialists are opposed to self-determination for Kosovo because it could destabilise the whole southern Balkans. Neighbouring Macedonia also has a large ethnic Albanian population, and the break-up of Macedonia would raise the possibility of drawing Serbia, Greece, Albania, Turkey and Bulgaria into a much larger regional conflict.

So, after a London conference, the western powers issued a peace plan to Milosevic (via a meeting with Boris Yeltsin) and despatched US special envoy Richard Holbrooke to negotiate with both the Serb and Kosovo Albanian leaderships.

The imperialist-backed plan is for "autonomy" that will leave Kosovo under Serb military and economic control, but end the Albanian population's status as second class citizens in terms

of work, housing and education, with some form of powerless "self-government" thrown in.

The success of this plan depended on two things. The first is the political influence of Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the "official" Kosovo resistance to Serbia over the past decade: the People's Movement of Kosovo (LDK). Rugova is a pro-imperialist "liberal" whose strategy of passive resistance was always designed to force the west to intervene to broker a half-way deal to full national independence.

However, his willingness to compromise with Milosevic and his refusal to acknowledge the existence of the KLA is steadily weakening his hold over the masses. On 24 June the Nato Secretary General, Javier Solana, met Rugova and insisted that the LDK should resume talks with the Serbs on autonomy. But under mass pressure, Rugova declined to talk his way into surrender, and Holbrooke's peace initiative was stalled.

The second precondition for the success of the peace plan was that Serbia holds off from a third, and decisive, military offensive. This now looks unlikely, precisely because of the success of the KLA on the ground. The KLA has been gaining both in terms of recruits and territory. It is estimated that it currently has around 20,000 fighters and controls 30% of Kosovo. Within the next few weeks there is a real possibility that the KLA could surround Pristina, the Kosovo capital.

Holbrooke recognised the growing power of the KLA when he organised an unscheduled meeting with two of its military commanders in Kosovo in late June. He left without winning any concessions on his demands that the KLA remove the roadblocks that are the key to its control over rebel areas.

At the same time rebel guerrillas have begun to carry out reprisal attacks on the minority Serb population. In addition to entirely justified military attacks on economic installations like mines and infrastructure, there is reported evidence of KLA involvement in the kidnapping of Serb villagers and the expulsion of Serbs from rebel-held areas. Such reprisals are never justified, and seem designed to provoke Serbia into a new military strike that will, in turn, pose the question of NATO intervention.

In response to the breakdown of negotiations the Serbian army looks set to launch another offensive that will trip the conflict into a new phase.

However, the Kosovan resistance would be wrong to rely on imperialist intervention, both for practical and political reasons.

The imperialists are split over the possibility and aims of military intervention. Britain and the United States favour offensive military intervention like air strikes and, if necessary, troops on the ground. However, they make clear that such intervention would be directed against the KLA as well as Serb troops in the area.

Other Nato governments, like Italy and France, are less keen on risking becoming embroiled in a bloody conflict by deploying their forces. Meanwhile Russia and China remain opposed to any intervention and would veto any military involvement by the UN.

Thus, there is no chance of getting approval for western military intervention through the UN Security Council, and very little of getting NATO unanimity. So the practical outcome of western military intervention would be, in all likelihood, the same piecemeal and bloody compromise that occurred in Bosnia. One option being touted is to "sanitise" the conflict by sealing off

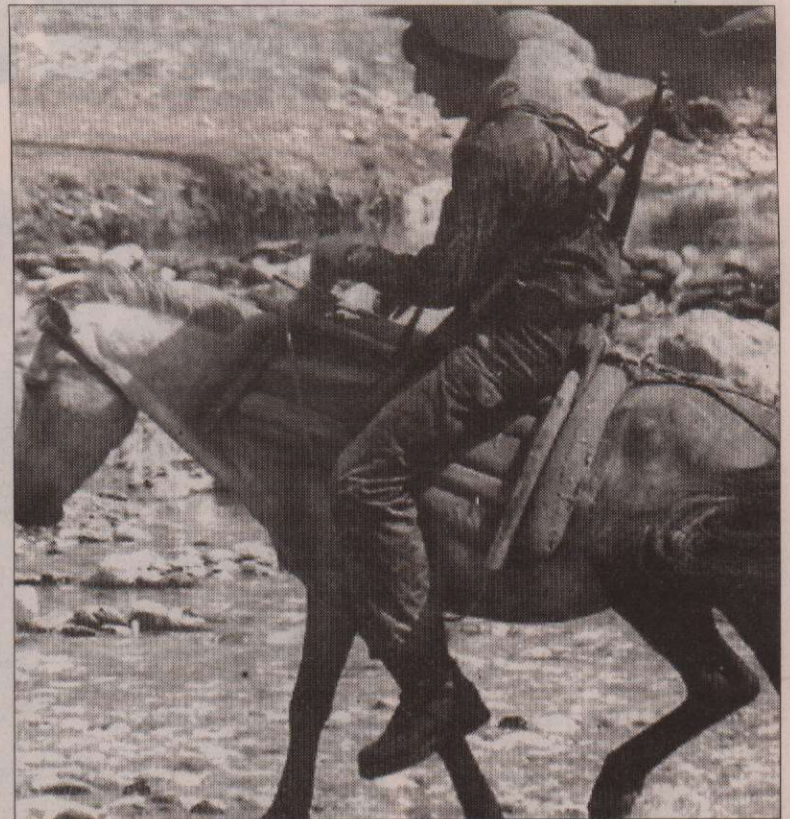
the borders of Kosovo - from every direction where help could come to the stricken ethnic Albanian masses. This will be accompanied, yet again, by an arms embargo - that will starve the masses of weapons while Serb factories go on churning out bullets for the occupying army - and by a ban on refugees fleeing the conflict.

Politically, imperialism has no will to see the right of national self-determination for the people of Kosovo fulfilled. Its main goal in the Balkan region is stability: stability so that the long, drawn out process of capitalist restoration can take place and so that the regional ambitions of two highly armed and crisis-ridden semi-colonies - Greece and Turkey - can be kept in check.

Imperialism has already allowed the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the name of stability, and the trampling of the national rights of minorities throughout the region. It is determined that Kosovo will not get independence. Even if it militarily attacks Kosovo's Serbian enemies it will do so, just as it did in Bosnia, to rein in Serb nationalism and force it to act as one of the main guarantors of stability.

Faced with the potential escalation of the fighting, what attitude should socialists take to the conflict?

Workers Power stands for the right of self-determination for the Kosovo Albanians. Our opposition to senseless slaughter and to unjustified acts of ethnic cleansing cannot mean we back away from recognising the right of the Kosovo people to fight for independence. That is why we support the KLA's struggle against the Serbian military.



Kosovo Liberation Front member: Guerrilla warfare may be able to tie down troops for a long period but victory depends upon the actions of the masses in the towns and cities

At the same time we oppose NATO military intervention and warn against those who peddle illusions in it. The years since 1992 have shown that imperialism can do nothing progressive in the region. It has fought a series of rearguard actions against the breakup of Yugoslavia that in every case have sought to preserve borders drawn, or power wielded against the wishes of the oppressed nations and minorities of the region.

The most radical option being considered by imperialism (full-scale intervention) would stop Serbian aggression only at the price of disarming the KLA. The most likely option will simply place a line of police tape around the conflict to stop the fighting spilling over into a wider Balkan conflict. In the first case Kosovo might "win" at the price of the imposition of a pro-US government and an unjust peace, well short of independence. In the second case, Kosovo could simply be murdered like multi-ethnic Bosnia.

That is why we call for all NATO/SFOR troops to be withdrawn and firmly oppose any western military intervention.

Instead we fight for a solution based on the interests of the workers and poor peasants of Kosovo. Rugova's LDK wants Kosovo to become a "UN protectorate": we want Kosovo to become a workers' republic.

The considerable mineral and agricultural wealth of the area should be taken out of the hands of the privateers and former bureaucrats: expropriated without compensation and run under workers' control. That is the solution we fight for throughout the Balkans, and it is the solution opposed by the pro-capitalist, ex-bureaucrats and criminals who run each of the fragments of former Yugoslavia.

The socialist solution is not removed from the agenda by the threat of war and the struggle for national liberation: on the contrary, it is the only progressive solution to the situation.

Workers throughout the world have a duty to side with and support any oppressed nation fighting for its rights, even where its fighters commit stupid and inhuman acts of ethnic cleansing themselves and even where its political leaders have illusions in western imperialism. In Britain we must demand that the Labour government immediately recog-

nises the "Republic of Kosovo" as a state.

When the next phase of the struggle opens, with a new Serb offensive and the threat of western retaliation, the workers' movement must organise practical and political solidarity with the Kosovo struggle.

At the same time, revolutionary socialists warn that the current tactics of the KLA - which despite the existence of radical elements remains a cross-class alliance, led by the middle class - can only lead to defeat. An extended guerrilla struggle in a rural area supported by the masses may pin down occupying forces for years, but it cannot win liberation.

The struggle must be urgently transformed into a mass uprising against the Serb occupation, with arms distributed to the masses. Elected revolutionary action councils should run the liberated areas: these are the best guarantee against revenge ethnic cleansing and the emergence of local "warlords", and actually existed in parts of Albania during the revolution of spring 1997.

Across the whole of Kosovo, workers and peasants should convene a revolutionary constituent assembly that decides on Kosovo's status as an independent state, and its future relationship with its neighbouring countries.

By building workers and poor peasants councils in the context of this struggle the basis can be laid for genuine working class power, for a workers' republic run by democratic workers' councils and defended by a workers' militia.

The KLA and the Kosovo masses confront a well armed and murderous Serbian military. In addition to demanding and procuring the heavy arms needed to resist, the KLA must use its strongest weapon: an internationalist appeal for solidarity from Serb and Montenegrin workers in Yugoslavia, whose sons are being herded off to kill and die in Kosovo in an unjust war.

The most consistent fighters for independent Kosovo can and must be won to the perspective of Balkan wide socialist revolution, with working class methods of struggle used to rip up the current patchwork of ethnic states and to create a Socialist Federation of the Balkans in which the rights of all minorities are respected. ■

## KOSOVO: MAP AND TIMELINE





## RUSSIA: Economy in crisis

# Crony capitalists line their own pockets

**“ONLY THE** veneer of capitalism has been achieved.” The words of Venyamin Sokolov, director of the Chamber of Accounts of the Russian Federation, sum up the root cause of the new crisis which hit Russia this spring.

The OECD's report for 1997 claimed that Russia had at last turned the corner to capitalist restoration. It would see economic growth and stabilisation in 1998. Yet in the last week of May the Russian stock markets went into tailspin losing 10% of their value in one week and 50% since the start of 1998. In addition the rouble went into free fall against the dollar. It was only stopped by raising interest rates to 150%. The gold and hard currency reserves of the Russian Central Bank have fallen from \$23bn last October to \$14.5bn at the end of May – equal to the cost of attempting to prop up the currency. The financial press is openly saying that a 30% to 40% devaluation is inevitable.

This crisis is linked to the long running financial crisis of the Russian state. The great mining-industrial-banking conglomerates that dominate Russia do not pay taxes. Worse, they shamelessly plunder the state revenues: they take state loans and grants for infrastructural projects or social schemes but do not use a single rouble of the money for its intended purpose. Instead, the managers enrich themselves. Loans from the west have plugged the gap in state revenues, but now a full 45% of taxes collected go to finance the foreign debt. The exasperated western press calls this “crony capitalism” – the same term as it uses in South East Asia. The IMF is demanding the slashing of state budgets, by means of an austerity plan, if the tax revenue cannot be increased. In April the government imposed a 30% spending cut and in May a further 15% cut was arranged.

The privatisation of Russia's state owned industries has resulted in the creation of a small number of huge companies: Gazprom, Berezovsky, Uneximbank, Lukoil, Menatep, Most, SBS-Agro, Alfa. Each involves mining industries that can command a profit from export sales or from sales to the state. Each has its own banking or finance institutions. Each controls a number of TV channels and newspapers. Their bosses all maintain their political “friends in government”. In fact, so powerful are these men that when the government wants anything done it has to call them into a secret meeting.

It was to just such a meeting that Yeltsin called the “the oligarchs”, as they are collectively known, on 2 June to try to sort out the crisis and prevent their feuding. Other powerful figures he has to consult are the mayors of Moscow and St Petersburg. Yuri



Tax demand, Russian style! In fact these paramilitary “tax police” are only used to harass small-fry, not the “crony capitalists”.

Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow, heads a powerful economic entity in its own right: the city government. Moscow, despite having only 6% of the country's population accounts for 13% of its GDP. Luzhkov won the concession from Yeltsin in 1992 that there would be no federal state privatisation in the Moscow region. All state property was passed to the city government which kept a major shareholding in 200 key companies. Luzhkov is linked to two of the biggest conglomerates.

Now he – like many others – has his eyes on the prize of the presidency in the year 2000. Boris Yeltsin is old and ailing. His “signs of physical and mental weakness have been multiplying”, according to *The Economist*. This has encouraged a whole series of would-be candidates to start to jockeying for position. As well as outsiders like former military strongman Alexander Lebed who won the important governorship of Krasnoyarsk on 17 May, prime minister Victor Chernomyrdin was evidently laying plans to run.

But on 23 March Yeltsin suddenly sacked Chernomyrdin, opening a parliamentary crisis by appointing an unknown 35 year old Sergei Kiriyenko, to succeed him. Kiriyenko is liked by the oil and gas tycoons, otherwise he would not have been chosen; but he also has to maintain the support of the IMF and its battery of “advisers” in Russia. To placate them he has appointed as his own key advisers, Yegor Gaidar and Boris Nemtsov, the neo-liberal “heroes” of the 1991 Big Bang and the privatisation drives of the last three years.

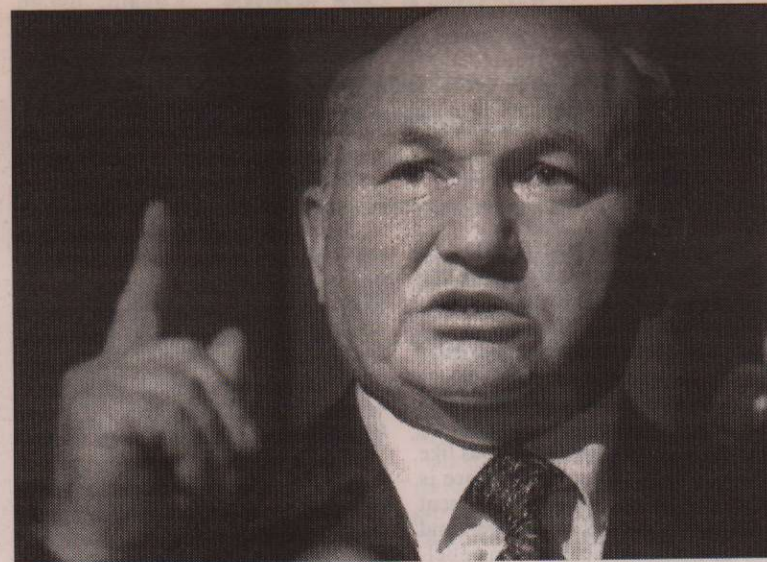
Chernomyrdin's fall may have been, in part, due to a row between the “oligarchs”. There had already been a dis-

pute over the sale of the last of the great state owned oil and gas enterprises, Rosneft. Chernomyrdin insisted on an open public sale. In fact there is still a chronic shortage of “legitimate” capital in Russia. Thus, there were literally no bidders for Rosneft. It will no doubt be disposed of in the usual manner with no benefit to the Russian state.

Kiriyenko is now engaged in negotiations on a \$15bn stabilisation package with the IMF. Interest rates still stand at 80% to defend the shattered rouble. A 30-40% devaluation is vir-

What does the IMF want? Ideally it wants western ownership of the majority of factories and mines, the taxation of the monopolies such as Gazprom, closure of the large number of insolvent banks and an end to “crony capitalism”. It still complains that there is hardly a system of contract law and that shareholders' rights (read multinational investors' rights) are not effectively upheld by the courts.

The IMF has one other factor to fear: the Russian workers. Late May saw the end of a two week blockade by Siber-



Yuri Luzhkov, all-powerful mayor of Moscow

tually inevitable. But the IMF remains sceptical that the government will take any decisive measures. It has so far only agreed to release a further \$670m tranche of the promised three year \$9bn.

ian miners of the Trans-Siberian railway. The strike ended after Yeltsin promised to pay the six months of back wages which they are owed, and help redundant miners find new jobs.

The blockade of the main rail artery

of this vast country was a brilliant success. More than 600 trains had been immobilised and losses mounted to \$29.2m. Keremovo miners have promised to keep pickets alongside the track until the back pay arrives. Yeltsin is under enormous pressure from the IMF to close the large number of unprofitable mines and sack a large portion of the country's 500,000 miners. When the strikes were ended in Keremovo and the North Caucasus, others erupted in the Vorkuta coal fields.

Year on year since the 1991 Big Bang, which destroyed the central planning system, Russia has seen its productive forces collapse. This wholesale destruction goes by the positively Orwellian name of “economic reform”. Into the gap left by planning a highly monopolistic, rentier capitalism is emerging, around the natural resources (gas, oil, rare metals) that can be sold abroad. But this has not been able to stem the tide of decline: on the contrary it is largely responsible for it. Unlike the situation in Central and Eastern Europe there has been no large scale influx of imperialist capital. Nor, as in China, is there an important exiled bourgeoisie in close proximity and willing to invest.

The social decline and large scale misery, combined with the failure so far of a revolutionary workers' movement to emerge, have spurred the development of reactionary forces feeding on despair, especially the despair of the youth who cannot find jobs. There has been a rising tide of attacks on foreigners in Moscow and other cities. It is estimated that there are some 4,000 neo-nazis in Moscow alone. In May a bomb exploded outside a synagogue and a black US marine on leave was beaten up by racist skinheads.

Russia desperately needs the rebirth of a revolutionary movement that will put a stop to the plunder of the country by the “oligarchs” and the IMF. The important remnant of Stalinism, the 500,000 strong Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), has shown its incapacity to relate to workers' struggles – let alone lead them. Its rancid espousal of Great Russian chauvinism debars it from leading the multi-ethnic working class of the Russian Federation and poisons its consciousness.

Only the creation of a revolutionary Trotskyist party can meet the objective needs of Russia's workers. It must set as its goal the expropriation of the “crony capitalists” and the oligarchs and the overthrow of the fragments of the old bureaucracy, which has changed its ideology but not its brutal dictatorial nature. The Siberian miners have shown the power that lies in the hands of the working class if only it can unite and act together. The task of revolutionaries in Russia is to show this road and lead the workers on to it. ■

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**ASIAN CRISIS: As Japan goes into recession ....**

# World economy on the brink of slump?

**Keith Harvey** explains why the Asian economic crisis could lead to recession and major political crisis across the globe.

**THE NEXT** six months will be the most dangerous and unstable period the world capitalist economy has experienced in ten years.

East Asia has fallen into a deep slump following the region's balance of payments crises and currency devaluations of last summer. Now Japan is in recession, its first for 23 years and worst since the Second World War. In the USA manufacturing output and employment have fallen.

Elsewhere, some of the star countries in what the financiers call the "emerging markets" – the third world and former Stalinist states – are teetering on the brink of financial collapse. Russia is only able to sustain the rouble at its present level by massive IMF intervention. In Brazil share prices dropped 15% in May alone. The South African rand is collapsing. And the Chinese government has threatened to devalue its currency to cheapen its exports – a move which would deepen East Asia's economic slump.

## The root of the crisis

Until the spring of 1997 the IMF, World Bank and most commentators were still praising the East Asian "tiger" countries – South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, Malaysia and Hong Kong – as models of economic development. Commercial banks in the west and Japan fell over themselves to lend money to private conglomerates in these countries. A seemingly limitless expansion in the manufacturing export sector and commercial property took place from 1992-96 as the region absorbed a full 40% of world investment.

But a massive crisis of capitalist over-production was brewing, especially in high technology sectors, semi-conductors, computers, autos and white goods e.g. fridges, washing machines etc. Driven by the thirst for profit, firm after firm and country after country invested in extra capacity believing that every tomorrow would bring yet another customer.

In 1994-95 two decisions were taken which made the 1997 collapse inevitable. The first was devaluation of the Chinese yuan which boosted its exports and added to the creeping over-capacity in the region (too many goods chasing too few buyers).

The second was Japan's decision in March 1995 to let the yen fall against the US dollar (it fell by 28% by December 1997). This was engineered to conjure up a Japanese export boom so as to drag Japan out of the virtual stagnation its economy has been in since 1990. Instead it hit the exports of the tiger economies, creating a balance of payments deficit in each country. Financing this growing deficit at fixed exchange rates with the US dollar proved daunting. When the over capacity hit hard and cut profit margins to the bone, the cost of servicing the balance of payments proved too much. A concerted speculative attack from the financial markets forced country after country to devalue.

Now the task of paying back the loans in US dollars proved impossible, provoking wave after wave of com-

pany and bank collapses.

Output crashed at an annualised rate of 20% in the first three months of this year in South Korea. Since March 1998 share prices have collapsed by 50%. Slumps of similar magnitude have affected Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia provoking massive trade union struggles and revolutionary upheavals (see Indonesia, back page).

But will the crisis spread further or be contained to East Asia? The signs are ominous. Japan is in the most immediate danger. Successive governments have failed to take the necessary steps to resolve the crisis of massive bad debts held by major corporations and banks alike – debts inherited from the 1989 stock market and property crash. Some estimates put these debts at over \$600 billion; even officially they are near \$400 billion! To solve Japan's bad debt problem would mean tearing up the social fabric of post-war Japan and forcing through a radical restructuring of failing and ailing Japanese finance and industry. The working class would be forced to pay, together with a sector of the capitalist class, through plant closures and bankruptcies.

Governments have first tried, and failed, to revive the domestic economy by three reflation packages (i.e. government spending programmes on public works). Then they tried the ill-fated yen devaluation. In addition the Japanese government cut the cost of borrowing for investment to nearly zero. Together, all the measures managed to keep Japan ticking along at around 1% growth a year. Until now.

Despite being pressed for more radical measures by the US government, Japan's ruling class leaders hope that further reflationary packages and tax cuts will revive demand. This is unlikely. Japan is in a no-win situation. Failure to off-load the crisis through closures and bankruptcies will see the yen under constant attack and it will fall as its trading condition worsens. At some point this will trigger a devaluation by the Chinese government to restore the export markets upon which its ambitious 8% growth targets rest. Without these growth rates there is little chance of social stability inside China while the government mounts a massive privatisation and closure programme for the state sector.

On the other hand, if Japan acts to resolve its debt crisis then the domestic economy is certain to slump on the back of mass unemployment and collapsed demand. Both these scenarios threaten the US economy with major withdrawal of Japanese assets and money. A massive flight of capital from America to Japan could provoke a huge interest rate hike in the US and a domestic recession there.

The US government was unworried by the initial effects of the Asian crisis. Firstly, US industry benefited



Hong Kong's chief executive Tung Chee-Hwa warned recently that Japan must take urgent action to support the Yen so as to stave off economic crisis.

from the collapse of commodity prices (e.g. oil and metals) by up to 20% in the wake of East Asian devaluations; secondly, stock market investors fled from the afflicted countries and into the safe haven of Wall Street, contributing to an unreal and unsustainable 25-30% a year rise in US share prices between 1996 and 1998.

But now the Asian crisis is having an opposite effect. US industrial output is falling as companies lose orders to cheaper Asian rivals and exports of machine goods to the tigers dry up.

But much worse threatens. US firms' profits are falling: they were down in the second quarter this year for the first time in three years and they will fall further.

Stock market prices across the developed countries are already massively too high if we compare (as the capitalist economists do) the relationship between share prices and dividends (the profits paid to shareholders). Just as they have been inflated on a wave of optimism share prices will collapse when this evaporates.

At this point the scenario for the world economy radically alters. A major stock market collapse in the USA will send the economy into slump.

Of course we have been here before: in October 1987 there was a world stock market crash but the world was saved from recession by an injection of "liquidity" (cheap money to borrow) from the US Federal Reserve. But ten years ago, the Federal Reserve borrowed Japanese surplus funds. Today it would be like borrowing from a bankrupt.

If the world's stock markets collapse, the USA will not be able to act as the dynamo for the rest of the world's economies by sucking in imports. It will be unable to sustain the capital injections the IMF needs to secure the claims of western banks in a range of unstable economies from Russia through Brazil to East Asia. A major step towards a global and synchronised economic slump would have occurred.

Protectionist measures would proliferate as import taxes and quotas reappeared. International trade would contract. In such circumstances the currently buoyant European Union economies could not sustain their growth rates and profit margins: they too would be drawn into a recession.

The collapse of the Asian tiger economies has already delivered a massive blow to the advocates of neo-liberalism and the private market. Free, open and unrestricted capital flows were said to be the only model of economic growth for Third World countries, promoting domestic efficiency and technology transfer which would allow all previously poor countries to move up the ladder of economic sophistication and prosperity. The Asian tigers were held up as models, not only for third world countries but for restructuring the western economies: remember Tony Blair's visit to Singapore before the election – the model for "stakeholder" capitalism?

## Exposed

Now neo-liberal dogma stands exposed as a lie. But unfortunately for the multi-millioned masses of East Asia, Russia and South America, it reigns supreme within the policy making institutions of global finance and the cabinets of every major capitalist government. Hence the crisis spawned by neo-liberal solutions to the last recession will be addressed by...neo-liberal solutions.

Budget-deficits must be cut so that the financial markets "regain confidence" and start providing finance again. The IMF "rescue packages" come with a high price. Deficits can only be reduced by slashing government spending on work, welfare, health and education for the masses. At all costs money must be found to keep up the payments to the country's creditors on Wall Street, Tokyo or the City of London.

Neo-liberalism and globalisation have been held up for two decades as the only way forward. Now they have created the conditions for a massive global synchronised recession that will rip up what is left of the post-1945 concessions the capitalists gave to the workers of the developed world and create the conditions for generalised revolutionary upheaval. ■

## The Marxist theory of crisis

**AFTER 150 years of trying, capitalist economists have failed to produce a coherent theory of capitalist crisis. All crises are seen as accidents. The economists' predictions, even short term ones, always contain the small print "barring an unforeseen crisis".**

**For Marxists, crises come as no surprise: they are intrinsic to the system. Capitalism is production for profit: food is not produced because people need to eat; it is produced because it is profitable. The same goes for every other commodity.**

**But capitalist competition demands constant technological innovation. To gain an edge on their rivals individual capitalists must invest a greater proportion of their money (capital) in machinery and technology and a smaller proportion on workers' wages. In the short term this can bring increased profits for individual capitalists and even boost the profits of the whole system. But in the longer term it reduces the very source of profits: the labour of the workers.**

**This is the source of the tendency Karl Marx identified as basic to capitalism more than 100 years ago: the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. The whole world capitalist system we see today has been shaped by that, as the capitalists evolve policies and mechanisms to offset, delay, reverse and even share out the effects of the tendency. But these "countervailing tendencies" cannot offset crisis forever.**

**At a certain point, the "over-production" of capital becomes manifest: there is too much capital for all of it to be invested profitably. First in some parts of the market, and then across the whole, investment dries up.**

**Good loans suddenly become bad. Capital in the form of loans is destroyed. Capital in the form of shares is destroyed. There is a call for downsizing and job losses. Capital in the form of factories and workers is destroyed.**

**On its own, at great cost in human misery, the system eventually recovers: there is no automatic and final crisis for capitalism. But the repeated crises, which plunge millions not just into poverty but into the grip of war, pose the questions: why do we put up with this system? What are the alternatives?**

**That is why every capitalist crisis brings the possibility of the socialist revolution and the death of capitalism itself.**



# Workers power

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- The class struggle and socialism
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Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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## Indonesia after Suharto

# Simmering revolution

**S**INCE THE mass demonstrations and rioting in Indonesia which forced the dictator Suharto's resignation in late May, President Habibie's regime has been struggling to keep control of the country.

Habibie's government seeks a peaceful transition to a parliamentary democracy where capitalism and the army are safeguarded. For this it needs time to demobilise the mass movement and allow the moderate ruling class parties to re-organise, while at the same time cracking down on the "extremists" who demand real change. In an attempt to placate the Indonesian masses Habibie has promised elections by next year.

But the change of a few figures at the top of the government, the promises of reform and the release of a few political prisoners have done little to stop the daily protests against corruption and injustice throughout the country.

Habibie has resisted demands to put Suharto and his family on trial for corruption and abuse of power. Suharto's estimated fortune is between \$24 and \$68 billion.

Meanwhile daily life for the majority has got progressively worse. Inflation is projected to reach 100% this year, while tens of thousands of workers have been laid off. The economy could contract by as much as 20%, plunging up to 60 million people below the poverty line.

Throughout June in cities across central Java demonstrators came onto the streets demanding the removal of corrupt governors and mayors identified with the Suharto regime. Demonstrations turned into riots after being attacked by the police.

Mass strikes have broken out as living costs continue to soar. In Surabaya, Indonesia's second city, thousands of dockers struck, paralysing one of the country's most important ports. They demanded a doubling of their wages, while students demonstrated called for the release of political prisoners, lower food prices and that Suharto be brought to justice.

In the capital, Jakarta, constant labourers' strikes have combined with almost daily demonstrations: students demanding action against Suharto; Christians calling for an end to discrimination in the religious laws; supporters of self-determination for East Timor.

While the moderate bourgeois parties are being allowed to organise, radical opposition groups remain illegal or under constant threat. Supporters of Megawati Sukarnoputri, leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), have been seizing back their party offices from the stooge leader Suharto imposed on the party in 1996. At the same time the People's Democratic Party (PRD) remains illegal and its



Indonesian soldiers form a cordon to prevent a trade union demonstration in Jakarta

leaders in prison.

Habibie has released a few prominent political prisoners, most notably the moderate union leader Dr Mochtar Pakpahan. The new government has also revoked the decree which banned his SBSI union federa-

tion. But the Justice Minister made it clear that communist prisoners, elderly members of the banned PKI imprisoned since the mid-1960s, would not be released. Leaders of the PRD are also classed as communists and remain in prison.

Even the right to form political parties has been curtailed. Only parties that subscribe to the five principles of *Pancasila*, the official Indonesian state "ideology", will be legalised.

Already the army command is demanding laws to restrict the

right of protest, and the civilian Attorney General responsible for investigating the Suharto family's corruption has been replaced by a military figure.

The opposition is increasingly polarised between those students and workers who demand action against corruption, the removal of the representatives of the old regime and solutions to the economic crisis and those moderates who want a carefully controlled transition.

Megawati Sukarnoputri used a mass demonstration on the anniversary of her late father, President Sukarno's death, to distance the PDI from the rioters and protesters who forced Suharto's resignation. Meanwhile, Amien Rais, leader of the Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah, is attempting to keep student support at the same time as diluting their demands and pushing himself as a reforming presidential candidate.

These leaders can only be relied on to do one thing - negotiate and backslide over the democratic rights of Indonesians. Students, workers and the urban poor need to organise their own councils of action to unite their struggles and win their demands. If they do that they can both sweep away the old regime and establish a workers' and peasants' government that acts in the interests of the masses instead of the local capitalists and the IMF. ■

## East Timor: Fighting for independence

**T**HE ECONOMIC and political crisis in Indonesia has given fresh impetus to the national struggle in East Timor.

In June President Habibie offered Xanana Gusmao, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence in Jakarta, his freedom in return for conceding recognition of Indonesia's claim to East Timor, which Indonesia invaded in 1975.

Gusmao is leader of East Timor's resistance movement FRETILIN, which demands the immediate withdrawal of Indonesian troops, the release of all prisoners and a referendum on independence.

The people of East Timor responded to Habibie's offer by stepping up their agitation for a referendum on full independence with demonstrations of thousands in the capital Dili.

The demand for self-deter-

mination for East Timor is an explosive one. East Timor was never part of the Dutch East Indies. Until 1975 it was a Portuguese colony. The 1974 Portuguese revolution was soon felt in East Timor. New political parties were formed and FRETILIN, a radical nationalist party, won the elections in 1975 and formed a leftist government.

Suharto, the now deposed President, had come to power by crushing the Indonesian Communist Party and removing the left nationalist, Sukarno. He immediately moved to smash FRETILIN.

The Indonesian armed forces invaded. Tens of thousands of troops met stiff resistance. A long drawn-out war of attrition developed. Indonesia's superior numbers, the systematic bombing of villages and herding the rural population into "protected

areas", in reality concentration camps, finally forced FRETILIN into the mountains to continue a small-scale guerrilla struggle. An estimated 200,000 Timorese were slaughtered, almost a third of the population.

The ongoing military occupation of the country, the torture and murder of anyone suspected of having sympathy with the rebels, the oppression of the peasants and failure to raise living standards, all contributed to FRETILIN's continued support.

FRETILIN's appeal for international help fell on deaf ears. While the imperialist powers hypocritically "condemned" the invasion, it was their war planes, ships, arms and napalm that supplied the Indonesian armed forces. The UN continues to recognise Portugal as the old colonial power! Even the 1991 Santa Cruz graveyard

massacre, which was broadcast around the world, when an estimated 300 protesters were killed by Indonesian troops, only resulted in the removal of the commanding officer - now a senior advisor to Habibie.

There has been no softening of repression against East Timor under Habibie. When several hundred East Timorese students and supporters peacefully occupied the Foreign Ministry in Jakarta for several hours their demonstration was viciously broken up by police units.

The most crucial weapon for the Indonesian occupation of East Timor has been the British-made Hawk fighter jet. The New Labour government has allowed the continuing export of military equipment to the Indonesian regime. The British labour movement must demand that the government stops this

trade in death and immediately recognises East Timor's right to self-determination.

Bishop Carlos Belo, who together with FRETILIN's Jose Ramos Horta received the Nobel peace prize in 1996 and who has enormous influence among the 90% Catholic population of East Timor, has been urging students and protesters to exercise caution. The Bishop and other affluent East Timorese argued for calm after Suharto's fall and have pinned their hopes on international pressure leading to a transitional arrangement for greater autonomy. Belo has refused to endorse the students' demands and talked of a 10 or 15-year wait for a vote on independence.

The real route to East Timor's independence lies not in seeking international or UN help in getting a long drawn out transition, but in linking the

struggle in East Timor to the immediate struggle of the workers and students in Indonesia to smash the post-Suharto "New Order" regime. Many of the more radical Indonesian opposition groups have supported the East Timorese right to self-determination, rightly seeing it as part of the united struggle against the new regime.

The students and FRETILIN are absolutely right to take advantage of the revolutionary crisis in Indonesia to gain their independence. The recent fatal shooting of a young man by the army, detonated a new wave of demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of the army and a referendum. It is now crucial that the emerging workers' and students' resistance to Habibie's regime be won to support for the just struggle of the East Timorese people. ■