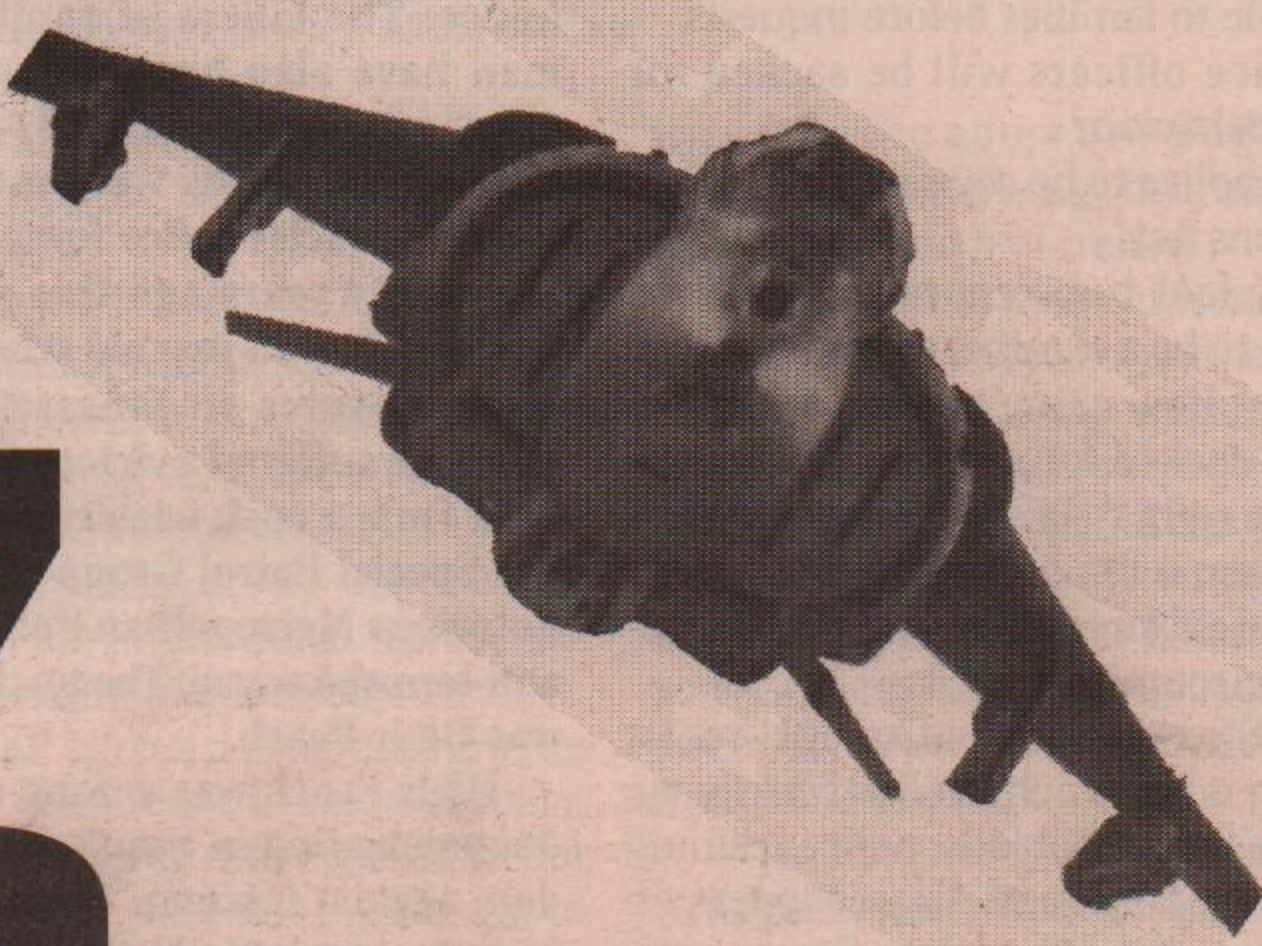


# workers POWER

## As Nato bombs, Kosova dies



### WE SAY:

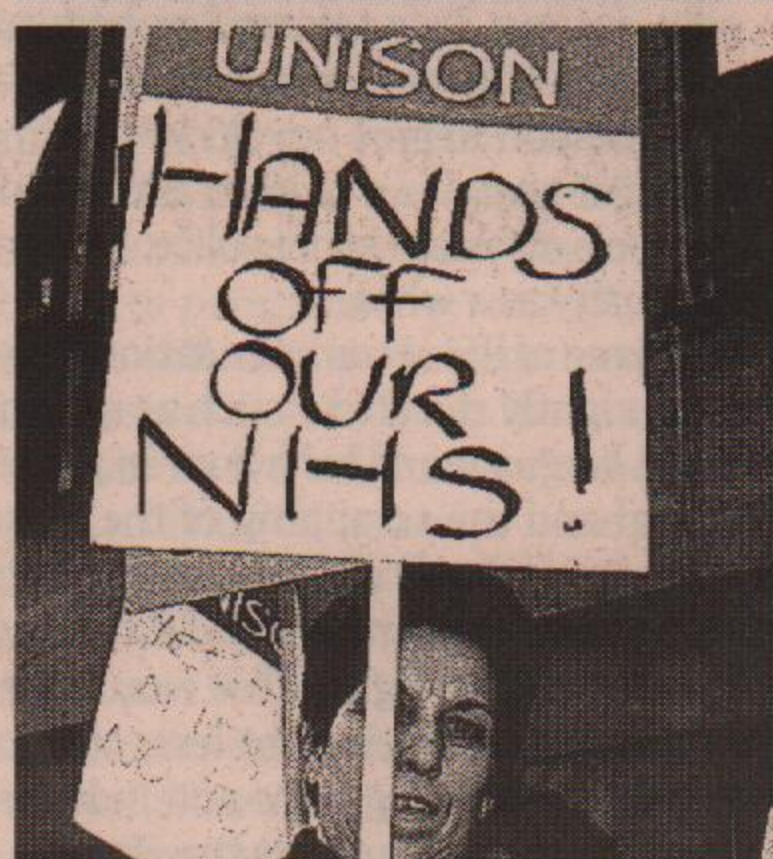
- STOP NATO BOMBING SERBIA!
- SUPPORT KOSOVA'S FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE!

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### LOW PAY

## We want a decent minimum wage with no exemptions

LABOUR PROMISED us a minimum wage; they have delivered. But what they didn't tell us was that at their dinner parties and in the exclusive clubs they were also making a promise to the bosses. They have delivered on that promise as well; they have given them the right to pay poverty wages.

The government's minimum wage rate will be set at £3.60 an hour. That is just £144 per week. Criminally, it will be £3 for young workers aged between 18-21 and nothing for those under 18. Before he resigned, the Minister for

Low Pay, Peter Mandelson, told a bosses' conference that he wanted businessmen to get "filthy rich" under New Labour. To say this, and then preside over a filthy insult of a minimum wage for millions of workers, shows the true nature of New Labour.

The European decency threshold for pay is £7 an hour - nearly double the government's rate. Don't workers have the right to decent wages, don't their children have the right to a decent life?

Announcing the minimum wage, Margaret Beckett declared that the gov-

ernment had decided to "err on the side of caution". Were they afraid that some employers might not be able to afford a higher rate or that some firms might be forced to close down. Rubbish. Research across Europe shows that introducing decent pay actually helps create jobs.

And, if our bosses are so hard up, how come they can afford to pay themselves obscene salaries? It has been estimated that the head of drugs company Smith Klein Beecham earned £93 million last year - around £45,000 an hour. BP boss

John Browne earns £833 an hour, a person on the minimum wage will have to work six weeks to earn this amount.

The corporate kingpins are the kind of person that this "business friendly" New Labour government worries about. This is the kind of person which they bend over backwards to protect. Their "caution" allows the bosses to make vast profits at our expense; they will take care of the mega-rich, and let the poor rot.

The national demonstration in Newcastle this month is a chance for workers to say no to low pay. Called by Uni-

son and backed by the TUC, the demonstration is against the miserably low rate set for the minimum wage and against the exemption of young workers. After all, is food, clothing or rent cheaper if you are under 22? Or does New Labour simply think young people deserve to live on wages well below the poverty line?

The demonstration on 10 April must be the beginning of a militant fight back against low pay and of a campaign to force Blair and Brown to meet our demand:

**For a minimum wage of £7 - now and with no exceptions!**

## LAWRENCE REPORT

# Straw's reforms – no answer to racism

FOUR WEEKS after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report was published Jack Straw has produced his "Action Plan".

It is based on the Inquiry's recommendations, with an eventual aim of achieving "the broader vision of an anti-racist society".

Sounds good? The bosses' liberal press thinks so. The Guardian editorial gushed:

"There could be no doubt at the end of the Home Secretary's press conference yesterday that this was a Government that was going to act...belatedly, serious race reform has begun."

But of course neither the original Macpherson Report nor Straw's Action Plan get anywhere near to addressing the roots of racism in the police, let alone in society as a whole.

Some of the recommendations have been rightly rejected – such as making racist language and behaviour in private illegal and the scrapping of the "double jeopardy" rule allowing people to be retried for the same offence if new evidence came to light. This would lead to more harassment, not less, of black people and other groups and individuals fighting back against the state.

Labour has already presided over a massive increase in the use of telephone taps since they came to power. Bugging people's homes or people being hounded by the bosses' courts until they get convicted (imagine how many more Guildford Fours there could be if they could retry us over and over again) will do nothing to undermine racism. Whether Jack Straw was concerned about civil liberties or about the time and expense of the court cases is debatable.

Other recommendations have been fudged. The power to discipline police

officers five years after retirement is to be "further reviewed", as is the forfeiting of police pensions for serious disciplinary offences. The proposal for an independent police complaints system is to undergo a feasibility study dependent on cost and freedom of information around all aspects of policing will be covered by new legislation. But there are already more restrictions than the Macpherson report outlined. The government will consider (with the police!) whether a written record of reasons should be given to all those stopped and searched.

- So what are we left with?
- Training for the police
  - More recruitment of black and Asian people into the police
  - Citizenship education in schools
  - More information will be made available to families before inquests
  - Police officers will be sacked for racist behaviour
  - The police to be covered by the Race Relations Act.

The last two recommendations appear to be a significant step forward. But just how many coppers will actually be sacked for racism? Few, if any. And the right to take the police to court for racism is limited since you can only get legal aid for representation in "exceptional circumstances".

So Straw's vision of an anti-racist Britain is to be achieved primarily via lessons for school kids, police training and more black and Asian coppers on the beat. What neither Straw nor Macpherson will ever admit is that no amount of training or recruitment of black people can change the inherently racist nature of the police because the police exist to act as a force of state repression.

What most black people learn

through bitter experience is that the police are not a neutral force, there to protect us all from harm – they are there to preserve a society based on gross inequality that explicitly uses racism to justify the continuing exploitation of semi-colonies and as a means of dividing and ruling the working class at home. The police defend British capitalism – they protect the bosses' property and are there to confront the

oppressed and exploited when they fight back. The police are, in fact, a racist institution.

Reforms of the police are useful in order to weaken their ability to protect the power and privileges of the bosses but they are not an end in themselves – the police force needs to be abolished as part and parcel of getting rid of a society based on private property.

As opposed to Jack Straw's Action

Plan, trade unionists and anti-racists should be fighting for: an end to stop and search, the disarming of the police – take away the CS spray and long handled batons, an end to bugging, reform of the judiciary – election and recallability of all judges, workers' control of anti-racist hiring and firing policies and for the right to organised self defence for black, Asian and working class communities under attack.

## POLICE MURDER

# Remember Blair Peach

STEPHEN LAWRENCE'S killers will probably never be sent down because of the racism of the Metropolitan Police. The killers of another young man have also been allowed to get away with murder; this time the killers themselves were members of the same racist police force.

Twenty years ago this month, in April 1979, a 33 year old school teacher died. As scores of witnesses have testified, he suffered a vicious blow to the head from a cosh wielded by a thug of the Special Patrol Group (SPG) – the notorious Metropolitan Police riot and anti-terrorist squad. The teacher's name was Blair Peach.

Blair Peach was among thousands demonstrating in Southall, west London, against fascism. They were there to protest against a National Front (NF) rally. Merlyn Rees, Labour Home Secretary at the time, ordered in the SPG in order to protect the fascists.

The police, in time honoured tradition, had cordoned off the centre of Southall in order that NF leader Martin Webster could speak at a meeting

in the town hall. The SPG were called in to disperse the angry crowd of anti-fascists, "as the police rushed past [Peach] one of them hit him on the head" said an eye witness.

An internal police investigation into Blair's death discovered illegal weapons such as coshes in the lockers of members of the SPG, (which an independent coroner identified as having been responsible for the single blow that killed Blair Peach). But the report of the investigation, which named six SPG officers, has never been published in full. And no police officer has ever been charged.

Scandalously unrepentant, only two months later in June 1979, Commissioner McNee of the Met warned anyone considering any form of protest "If you keep off the streets of London and behave yourself, you won't have the SPG to worry about".

The SPG was so hated for its attacks on demonstrators and picket lines that eventually the Met caved in to the bad publicity and wound it up (only to found new crack squads to fulfil simi-

lar roles). Ingrained racism and contempt for working class protest is still alive and well in the Met. Workers and the oppressed continue to die in police custody, continue to be intimidated and beaten up on picket lines and demos, and the police continue to let racist thugs and murderers off scot free. Cosmetic changes won't alter these facts.

Workers have the chance to protest again at the vicious murder of Blair Peach at a demonstration this month. His friends and members of the union to which he belonged, the National Union of Teachers, are also campaigning for Jack Straw to reopen the case and publish in full the secret report into Blair's death.

**National Demonstration to Unite Against Racism – Who Killed Blair Peach? Saturday 24 April Assemble 1pm Dominion Centre, The Green, Southall, London. Rally – Southall Park For more information and publicity phone 0181 980 3601**

## PINOCHET

# Law Lords broker rotten compromise

THE LAW Lords voted by 6 to 1 that Chile's former dictator General Pinochet can be extradited to Spain to face prosecution for torture and conspiracy to torture. But, disgracefully, they have also ruled that the majority of the charges brought against him should be dropped.

Jack Straw now has the responsibility for the final decision on whether extradition proceedings can resume. The initial Law Lords' decision of November last year was overturned by the Court of Appeal because of Lord Hoffman's links with Amnesty International. The Law Lords drastic reduction in the charges that Pinochet can be extradited for will undoubtedly mean that Straw has a much better excuse for letting him off the hook, if New Labour decides it hasn't the guts to see through the extradition.

The entire elongated legal process is a worked example of injustice. It shows the lengths the British capitalist state will go to save a man they count as one of their allies, regardless of his horrendous crimes against humanity. The rotten compromise the Lords have come up with is a smack in the face for those thousands of Chileans and others who

still grieve for the loved ones murdered and tortured by Pinochet.

The public school educated Law Lords, including Lord Millet, the highest ranking freemason in the judiciary, have dismissed 27 of the 30 charges brought by a Spanish magistrate against Pinochet on the grounds that they were committed prior to September 1988. This is when Britain, Spain and Chile, amongst other countries, signed the UN Torture Convention, under which all signatory states can try cases of official torture.

Pinochet's murderous regime began terrorising, raping, torturing and murdering Chileans and any foreigners that got in its way in 1973 – but the Law Lords have declared that Pinochet cannot be touched for the vicious assault on the working class movement he led in Chile unless it can be proved beyond doubt that the crimes took place after 1988.

So while anti-Pinochet campaigners celebrated the upholding of the decision that state immunity does not protect former heads of state from prosecution under British law, Pinochet's supporters were also able to claim a victory of sorts. The Boeing 707 that arrived at RAF Brize Norton on Wednesday hoping to whisk Pinochet back to Chile had a wasted trip but the drastic reduction in charges gives the likes of William Hague and ex-Tory Chancellor Norman Lamont the opportunity they wanted to pile on the pressure on Jack Straw to release Pinochet on compassionate grounds or some other feeble pretext.



Shadow Home Secretary, Sir Norman Fowler, was quick to assert that the judgement meant the case for extraditing Pinochet had "effectively collapsed".

The star turn in the ranks of the vile right wingers rushing to Pinochet's aid was of course the ever more ghoulish Margaret Thatcher. She engineered a media blitz on Friday including a photo session as she visited Pinochet for morn-

ing coffee at his £10,000 a month Wentworth Estate house (paid for by his supporters). Pinochet apologised for having to receive the eminent baroness in the "small" and "simple" four bedroom luxury house.

Thatcher's visit was broadcast live on Sky TV and she followed it up with a press conference outside her office in London. She announced that there were two reasons the British people has to be

grateful to General Pinochet, "first for your help during the Falklands campaign and... we are also very aware that it was you who brought democracy to Chile."

As Diane Dixon of the anti-Pinochet Chile Committee angrily responded later, "Pinochet didn't bring democracy to Chile, he destroyed it." Thatcher and the rest of the Tory apologists for murder and torture are keen to see Pinochet released because any trial would inevitably reveal the depth of complicity of the US and UK governments with his regime.

Despite the legal and media machinations of Pinochet's supporters, Jack Straw should extradite him now. In Spain, Judge Baltasar Garzon has sought to strengthen Jack Straw's resolve by adding 33 previously unlisted cases of alleged torture to his extradition request – all having taken place after the 1988 cut off.

If any justice is to be done in memory of the thousands who died and the thousands more that have been emotionally and physically scarred by the torture and abuse meted out by his regime, then Pinochet should stand trial for all of the crimes he is responsible for since 1973.

This would be a massive blow to murderous dictators and to their "respectable" backers, the imperialists of the US and the UK. It would also be a massive boost to the confidence of the Chilean working class and all those struggling against oppressive regimes. **Extradite Pinochet now!**

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Workers Power examines the forthcoming elections in Scotland and Wales

# SNP: nationalist dead end

SCOTTISH VOTERS go to the polls on 6 May to elect an Edinburgh-based parliament and local councillors across the country. The election will be hotly contested with a predicted turnout of over 80 per cent.

New Labour has reclaimed a clear lead in the opinion polls from the Scottish National Party (SNP), though it may not win an overall majority of the 120 plus seats. If the Blairites have their way a Labour-led coalition with the Liberal Democrats looks a distinct possibility.

The Scottish election is set against the background of a sharp rise in unemployment. While the official jobless figures continued to fall in the south of England, thousands of Scottish workers wound up on the dole – many as a result of the impact of the Asian economic crisis on the “silicon glen” electronics industry. This year the threat to shut the Bishopton munitions plant at Renfrew, and Volvo’s announcement that it was closing its Irvine truck factory mean even more job cuts in Scottish manufacturing. Meanwhile, plummeting oil prices have given bosses the pretext to cut the North Sea’s offshore workforce.

The level of anger among workers at the reality of New Labour in government has been higher in Scotland than in England. A swiftly organised demonstration outside the Scottish Labour Party’s annual conference attracted 1,500. Larger numbers gathered on 13 March to protest at the threat to close the Volvo plant.

Glasgow City Council has provoked opposition with its proposal to turn management of its housing stock over to private landlords and housing associations, part-privatise its library service and declare compulsory redundancies across the board. There is to be a ballot across



The Scottish Socialist Party does not offer a revolutionary alternative

the 12,000-strong Unison branch for strike action over threatened job losses.

The SNP wants to capitalise on this anger. Workers must not let this happen.

Under Alex Salmond’s leadership the SNP has straddled a fine line between posing as the champion of “Old Labour’s” commitment to social welfare and talking of Scotland becoming the next “Celtic tiger”. Salmond’s SNP can float alternatives to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) at the same time as SNP councillors in Perth and Kinross cut a £20 million PFI deal around offices, car parks and council housing.

The SNP’s latest wheeze is its pledge to cancel Gordon Brown’s penny in the pound cut in the basic rate of income tax with the additional revenue to go on health and education. But this means working class households will shoulder the burden of any extra spending. The SNP has no intention of using the new

parliament’s power to vary tax rates by three per cent to increase the levy on high earners.

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), formed late last year by Scottish Militant Labour and the Scottish Socialist Alliance, will be standing candidates in a number of first past the post constituency elections and in slates across the Scottish regions in the proportional representation component of the election.

The SSP agreed a programme at its founding conference in mid-February. Most of its demands are supportable, but its programme does not even begin to address the mounting economic crisis confronting the Scottish working class. It mainly consists of modest reforms, with the partial exception of an ambiguously worded demand for nationalisation of the land.

On the monarchy the SSP could only agree to the policy of holding a referendum on abolition once in power and

they failed to adopt any position on Britain’s continuing military presence in the north of Ireland.

The SSP is not a revolutionary alternative. And in many constituencies it does not represent any serious forces. However, we do call for a vote for the SSP’s seven-person list in the Glasgow region. This is led by Tommy Sheridan, the former Scottish Militant Labour activist, who has achieved significant electoral support at a series of elections from 1992 onwards.

Sheridan emerged as a candidate of struggle having played a decisive role in the non-payment campaign against the poll tax. He has since become the effective leader of the opposition to Labour on Glasgow City Council. At least on Clydeside the sustained level of support for Sheridan marks a genuine break from Labourism by a significant section of the local working class.

The SSP cannot claim comparable

backing elsewhere in Scotland, nor can the SWP, which is standing five candidates in the constituency section. Though SWP candidates have played an important part in some local strikes, they are not at present candidates of struggle with a substantial base of support. Their programme is not qualitatively better than the SSP’s.

In the case of the Falkirk West constituency election workers should vote for the current Westminster MP Dennis Canavan, who has the backbone to stand after Millbank excluded him from the approved list of candidates for the Edinburgh parliament.

Elsewhere, however, Workers Power calls for a critical vote for Labour.

There is still an important difference between the Labour Party, however pro-boss its programme, and the SNP. Labour still relies on the organised working class for nearly half its funds and has retained its formal links with the trade unions. The SNP survives instead on a combination of donations from the likes of Sean Connery, some Scottish capitalists and substantial funds from expatriate Scots in North America. It is in no sense a left or working class party. While we fully support the right of the Scottish people to self-determination up to and including secession if they so choose – we are against separation which would risk breaking up the British working class along nationalist lines.

In the struggle between Labour and the SNP, and in the absence of a revolutionary alternative, we are for a Labour victory. But we are also for organising the working class to impose their demands on Labour and resist its inevitable betrayals. This must begin now within the labour movement to stop the Blairites pursuing a coalition with the Liberal Democrats after the 6 May poll.

## WALES

# Labour’s toothless assembly

ON 6 MAY the Welsh Assembly will become a reality.

The functions of the Welsh Secretary of State and the Welsh Office, and the budget of £7 billion from Westminster and £1.2 billion from the European Union will pass to the Assembly.

However, the Assembly will be little more than a talking shop – it will have no tax-raising or primary legislative powers and Westminster will veto any decisions that are not to the liking of Tony Blair.

While the referendum vote in favour of the Assembly was very small, the nationalists of Plaid Cymru will try to capitalise on the anger of workers over the attacks they have suffered in recent years. The decimation of the coal and steel industries and the impoverishment of small farmers have hit Wales particularly hard.

From having a highly skilled and highly unionised workforce, Wales has fast become a haven for multinationals bribed with generous grants to set up low paid, low skilled “screw-driver” final assembly plants. The country stands at the bottom of the league of state spending on housing and education. Unemployment is above the national average and the inner cities and old mining valleys experience some of the worst levels of poverty in the EU.

Labour – new and old – is complicated in this decline. Its domination of the local councils, which have overseen decades of cuts and hand-outs to big business via Tory government initiatives, Blair’s championing of Alun Michael and his manipulation of the union block vote to ensure Michael’s victory over Rhodri Morgan have all caused anger and resentment amongst the Welsh working class and many Labour activists.

But Welsh workers still appear to be loyal to Labour. Many will support Labour in the elections in the hope that a Labour dominated Assembly can offer some respite against the continuing decline in jobs and living standards.

Because there is no revolutionary alternative in the coming elections and because of these continuing illusions, socialists must give critical support to Labour on 6 May – a vote for Labour combined with sharp criticism of their policies and a fight to rally Labour supporters to a revolutionary action programme to meet the needs of the working class.

We need to combat the popular idea that “Morgan would be different”, pointing to his absolute support for Blair’s politics, his role in helping Blair get rid of Clause 4 and his opportunist espousal of Welsh nationalism. Socialists also need to combat Plaid

in these elections. It is putting forward its left face, promising to abolish health trusts and restore free eye and dental check-ups. Their standing in the polls since the Michael victory has risen from 18 per cent to 23 per cent, while Labour’s has dropped by 11 per cent to 51 per cent.

Plaid is a nationalist trap for workers. Plaid will tie the Welsh workers to Welsh bosses and take them down the dead-end road of small state independence within a federal EU. It will attack the workers whenever they threaten the interests of a capitalist “Wales”.

The “left” forces standing against Labour – the Welsh Socialist Alliance (now United Socialists) and the Socialist Workers Party – represent neither a revolutionary alternative nor a section of the class breaking with reformism. The Alliance is a rag bag of individuals and groups, dominated by the Socialist Party.

At its conference it voted down a revolutionary programme put forward by supporters of Workers Power on the grounds that it was a “recipe for disunity” and then failed to agree its own “unity programme”. Later, without any consultation it published a series of basic reformist demands – which were agreed behind the scenes with the SWP.

These challenges to Labour are inept, inadequate and irrelevant.

A real challenge can be built by fighting to mobilise the Welsh workers around a revolutionary action programme. We will demand that Labour defends the interests of the working class and we will campaign to rally workers to fight against Labour when they betray the interests of the workers who voted for them. The key demands we put on Labour, and fight for independently, are:

- Nationalisation of all privatised industries and utilities, without compensation to the bosses and under workers’ control

- Full employment now; 35 hour week for all with no loss of pay

- Job creation through a programme of state funded public works under trade union control

- No sackings – open the books of all firms threatening redundancies or closure to workers’ inspection; nationalise them without compensation and under workers’ control to guarantee every job

- Full employment rights for all from day one and a minimum wage of £7 an hour with no exemptions; equal pay for equal work – end the discriminatory low pay for women; abolish all the anti-union laws

- No cuts in services or education; fund a massive expansion of public spending – on the basis of budgets drawn up by working class communities them-

selves – by taxing the rich; not a penny or person for the army

- Raise all benefits to the highest level in the EU

- Legalise all drugs under a state monopoly, with education and medical help for all users; stop the racist police attacks and harassment by organising black and workers’ self-defence

- End discrimination against Welsh speakers – for the right of Welsh speakers to receive education in their own language; no to Welsh only schools – for the integration of Welsh and English speakers within a fully funded and fully comprehensive, non-selective education system.

None of these demands can be fulfilled via the toothless Assembly. We call for full tax-raising and legislative powers for the Assembly, but we are clear that it will not deliver socialism in Wales.

While we support the right to self-determination for the people of Wales, we are against separation and fight for working class unity between Welsh, English and Scottish workers. We are for a British revolutionary socialist party, part of a world revolutionary International, capable of imposing these demands on Labour through militant class struggle and capable of leading the fight for a socialist revolution against capitalism itself.

UCLH

## Bureaucrats sell out strike

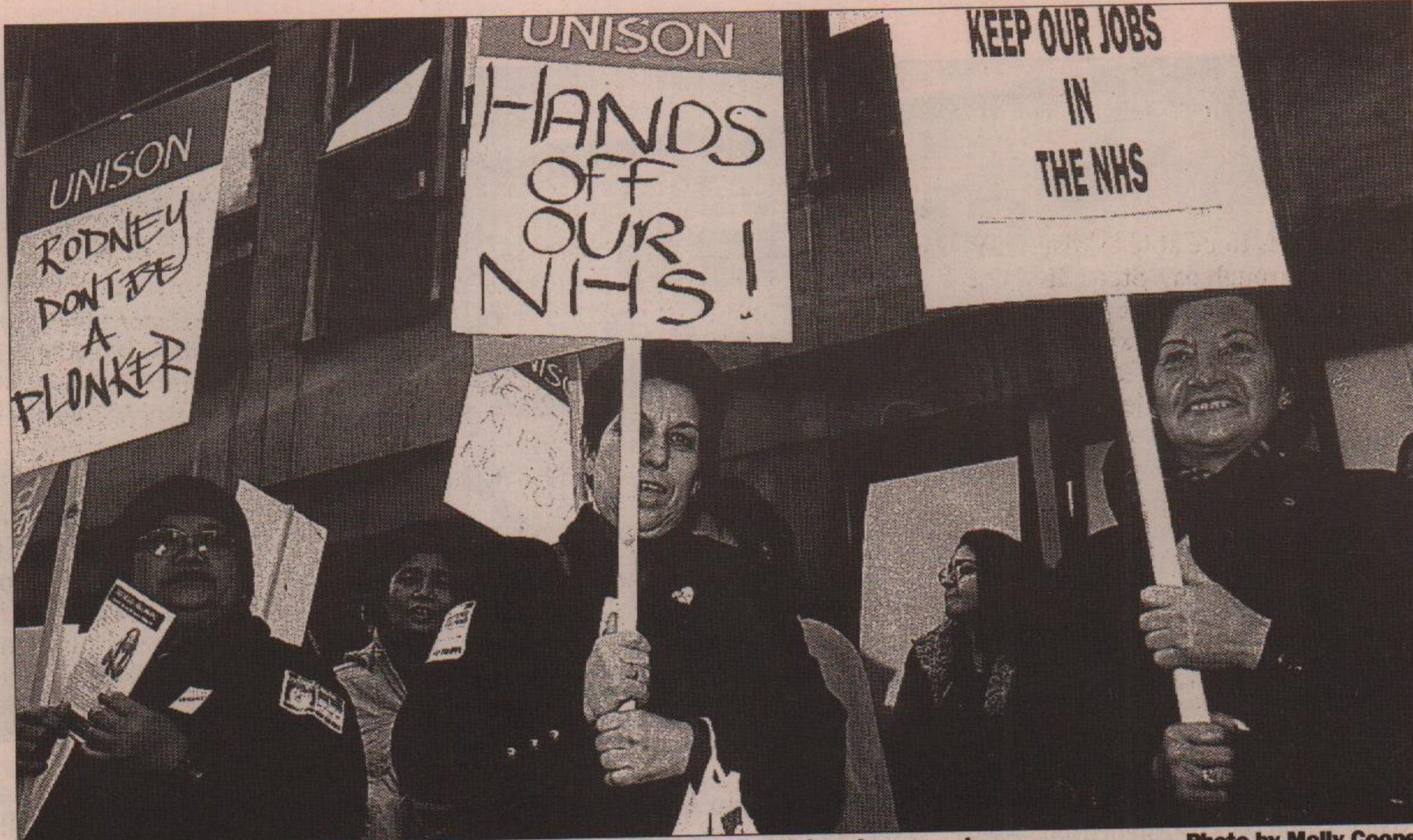
STRIKING HEALTH workers at University College London Hospitals (UCLH) were ordered back to work last month by union officials. The Unison bureaucracy's "action committee" withdrew support for their indefinite strike after only a week and a half. Now the union leaders look set to move against the branch leadership in a series of disciplinary actions.

Meanwhile the 200 strikers vowed to return to work with heads held high after a two week strike that attracted massive support from trade union branches and community groups across London and beyond.

The strike was part of a long-running dispute with hospital chiefs who plan to transfer portering, domestic, catering and other ancillary services to the new private employers Balfour Beatty and Amec this year – four years in advance of the opening of the new hospital site built under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

UCLH workers have faced obstruction from the courts and their union leadership in their attempts to organise action against this move, including the declaration of a previous strike ballot unlawful. The strikers were forced to observe a legal ban on action against the "future employer" and against PFI itself, and to restrict action to a fight for guaranteed continuity of wages and conditions. After a successful one week strike in February (see WP 231), strikers voted for indefinite action, which began on Monday 15 March.

They faced bureaucratic sabotage from beginning to end. After previous court rulings the Unison leaders instituted disciplinary cases against two branch officers, Dave Carr and Candy Udwin, to be heard on the very day the strikers returned to work – 10.00am on



Anger and militancy of UCLH strikers was undermined by the actions of Unison bureaucrats

Photo by Molly Cooper

Monday 29 March. So much for solidarity brother Bickerstaffe!

The branch was forced to submit every leaflet to the Unison officials for approval – every one of which was subjected to petty changes, wasting time and blunting the edge of the strike call: leaflets containing the strike call arrived at 4pm on the Friday before the strike began. Busy with their proof reading, the officials could not find time to visit the picket line, where more than 200 workers – many of them migrant workers – faced unprecedented police harassment and racism.

Meanwhile management propaganda inside the hospital insisted that the strike would "only last two weeks"; this was a suggestion echoed by police

inspectors. The source of this – which was news to the strikers – was undoubtedly the Unison full time officials.

The strikers themselves remained solid throughout. There were mass meetings nearly every day and an open strike committee; delegations were organised to numerous workplaces every day.

On Wednesday 24 March the Unison Industrial Action Committee – an NEC committee of lay delegates – called off the strike, criticising the "outside presence" of socialists and other trade unionists on the picket lines, the "trouble" on the pickets, and claiming the strike was too small. At a mass meeting strikers rejected the basis of the ruling but agreed to suspend their action

in the light of this blatant sell out. They agreed to march back to work and carry on the fight to force the new employers to guarantee wages and conditions.

Why did the strike not win? There were problems with the numbers out: the hospital workforce is 5,000. The Unison membership is 1,000 – and about 600 of these voted in the strike ballot. In the end a solid core of around 250 strikers came out, with some people turned away by initial picketing.

This represented a large percentage of the permanent ancillary staff but, with casual contract workers already doing a lot of ancillary work it meant that management were able to use them, augmented with minibus loads of people from the local job centre, to keep ser-

vices going. Another weakness was the small numbers of nursing staff on strike. In the past nurses have struck in their hundreds at the hospital. This time, though the majority of nurses remained sympathetic to the aims of the strike, they didn't join it. The underlying reason for this is actually the way in which PFI divides the workforce. The nurses' immediate jobs and conditions – unlike those of the porters, caterers, domestics etc. – are not under the same threat from PFI.

Every one of these problems could have been overcome if the branch leadership had been allowed to run the strike without bureaucratic sabotage. It was the bureaucracy that forced the branch to limit the aims of action to "wages and conditions" of the transferred workers, preventing all leaflets from making propaganda against PFI itself. It was the officials who told management it would only last two weeks, who condemned the pickets and "outsiders", who refused to come to the picket line, who applied every bureaucratic brake in the book to stop the strike's momentum.

One strike committee member told *Workers Power*:

"The branch should now launch a national network of Unison branches faced with bureaucratic sabotage and victimisation. We should call a national conference of Unison members who want an alternative to constant retreats before the managers and New Labour. It is vital that we organise across the union – a rank and file network that can hold the officials to account and replace them when necessary and transform Unison into a fighting union accountable to its members. As the leaflet says, that we are taking into work with us on Monday: Our fight goes on."

### SHEFFIELD

THE ALL out indefinite strike by Housing Benefit workers in Sheffield is a key test of New Labour's zeal for privatisation.

Sheffield City Council passed this test with flying colours. Three weeks into the strike Labour councillors voted on 22 March to sell off the housing benefit service to the private company CSL, despite previously promising a three month review before any decision was made.

Labour claim that CSL can afford to invest in the service but the council can't. CSL can afford the investment because the council has already handed them a £130 million contract to run its finance department!

The 86 Unison members taking strike action are clear that not only will privatisation mean attacks on pay, terms and conditions by CSL, it will also mean a rotten service for claimants.

## Benefit workers fight privatisation

Despite the intimidation from the council and now the carrying out of its threat to privatise the service the strike is solid. And many grassroots District Labour Party members are disgusted at the councillor's actions, while local MP Bill Michie still supports the strikers.

The strikers have also won support for the strike from Unison branches and branches of other unions up and down the country. They have held lobbies, rallies and a demo which have all raised the profile of the dispute.

However, with CSL making statements that it wants to negotiate the details of the hand-over with Unison and regional Unison officials stepping up the pressure on Sheffield Metropolitan

Branch to call off the action in favour of a sell out "deal" – the strikers need to spread their action.

The strike is a political one – if the council gets away with privatising a well organised section of workers then no one else is safe in Sheffield City Council and it will spur on councils everywhere to do the same. The rest of the council's workforce needs to be won to taking solidarity strike action, to defend their colleagues and defend their own jobs which will be in line for privatisation next.

The council has shown it is prepared to take on and try and defeat the housing benefit section. Other workers must now join the strike to stop the council

succeeding. By paralysing the functioning of the whole council we can force them to back down from their decision to privatise.

To get this the strikers will have to tackle the treacherous behaviour of the Unison bureaucracy. Regional official Jim Cafferty has used all sorts of dirty tactics to try and browbeat the strikers backed to work. They have refused. But with Cafferty using the Unison machine against them they need to turn directly to Unison members to put the argument for solidarity action to back and win the strike and to organise the rank and file in Unison to turn this call into reality.

At the same time the political argu-

ments in favour of the strike need to be taken to Sheffield's working class communities – it is the claimants in these communities that are currently under threat of eviction notices from private landlords when the benefits cheques stop arriving. Support Committees, rooted in these communities, could build on the support for the strike that already exists.

**Messages of support, donations or requests for speakers: Sheffield UNISON, Arundel Gate Court, 175 Arundel Gate, Sheffield S1. Phone 0114 273 6307, fax 0114 276 6412**

### MANCHESTER

## Defend the 35 hour week

MANCHESTER UNISON is balloting for the first strike in its history. The ballot follows the council's decision to rip up a 25 year old agreement on the 35 hour week. From April all new starters will begin on 37 hours. Management's excuse is the implementation of the single status agreement which harmonises the conditions of the former blue and white collar staff. They are trying to make the former white collar employees, who won a 35 hour week in 1974, pay for the reduction in hours of the former blue collar

employees from 39 to 37 hours.

Management want to confront the entire branch, of over 13,000 members, to undermine the union and prepare the way for a further round of cuts and privatisation.

At a mass meeting of around 1,000 members it was unanimously agreed to ballot for three days of across the board action, as well as sectional indefinite strikes on full pay. This followed a warning from a Regional Officer at the meeting that Manchester's attack was clearly political and had been discussed

and agreed at by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, who wanted to confront one of the strongest branches in the country.

Manchester must win this fight. There are, however, serious weaknesses in the branch officials' strategy. If the council is set on breaking the union then one day protest strikes, important as they are, supported by sectional action will not be enough to win this dispute. What happens if management start victimising those members on the sectional action? Do we wait

until the next one day strike to act? What if the protest is not enough to make them back off?

The branch officials must make it clear from the outset, that any victimisation of strikers, will be met by immediate branch wide all out action. If, after the second one day strike, the council have refused to back down, there must be a branch wide escalation of action up to and including all out.

The withdrawal of 35 hours clearly effects all those on 37 hours, not only

because it is an attack on a union agreement, but because it means they will lose any real prospect of ever winning 35 hours for themselves.

If we are to ensure that the former blue collar employees are solid, then we must demand the 35 hour week for all as the objective of this strike, to start the day after our total victory.

We need to organise rank and file members across the council to hold our branch leaders to account, win the ballot and the strike. We need to establish a strike committee, drawing in activists well beyond the small layer of officials, which can hold the officials to account and ensure that the leadership of the strike is in the hands of the real representatives of the mass of members.

**workersPOWER**

# Fight green paper

THE EASTER NUT conference in Brighton will be debating how to respond to the fundamental change in pay and working conditions facing teachers.

The government's green paper on pay sets out proposals to introduce performance related pay (PRP) for all teachers. Every teacher would be appraised each year and the Head teacher would then decide how much you are worth – within the limits of the school budget, of course.

Despite the government's rigged consultation exercise (they moved a meeting planned for inner London out to Hammersmith, miles from a tube station) they have failed to find any support amongst teachers for their proposals. Bemused officials from the DfEE have been unable to defend the green paper faced with a barrage of questions and arguments put by teachers.

Education Secretary David Blunkett, however, remains determined to go ahead. The proposals were never about improving the pay of teachers. They are designed to give teachers and their unions a bloody nose.

Teachers, alongside parents and students, have fought against cuts and closures; they have defended comprehensive education and opposed selection; they are fighting against the privatisation of education. Blair wants them neutralised.

He wants to be able to discipline teachers through pay. Step out of line and your pay will be cut; do as you're told and you might get a few extra quid. Serious divisions will be created between teachers, all on different levels of pay and pitted against each other in the bid for who might get the pay rise this year.

The stakes are high. Are the unions ready to fight? No.

The other major teaching union, the NAS/UWT, is not opposing the green paper and PRP in principle, despite rank and file anger. The NUT formally opposes PRP but has shown little stomach for a fight. The Executive have refused calls for a national ballot for strike action – even for a one day strike. They opted instead for a lobby of parliament – not a mass lobby, but just two teachers from each constituency. Even this was called off "on the advice of the police" when

the leadership discovered that it had been planned for the same day that the Pinochet verdict was to be announced.

The Socialist Teachers Alliance, the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union and the Socialist Workers Party have been backing the call for a one day strike and in London called an all London reps meeting to discuss the campaign. But the left needs to turn its words into deeds. This year a left candidate, Christine Blower, is standing for election as General Secretary against Doug McAvo. Her campaign must be used a rallying point for those who want action on pay and who are prepared to fight.

A serious fight against PRP will have to be built by rank and file teachers. We need to begin organising now for a total boycott of appraisal – formally linked to PRP or not. We should build on the action on workload, refusing to cover and taking action on class sizes.

NUT conference will be an opportunity to launch such action, against attempts by the right wing to derail the struggle. The left must seize the chance.

# workers POWER

BCM BOX 7750 LONDON WC1N 3XX ★ 0181 981 0602

COMMENT

## The fight in Unison

**THE PUBLIC sector union, Unison, stands today at the forefront of the class struggle in Britain. This struggle is not just between bosses and workers; it is between bosses, workers, bureaucrats and the government. Major political issues are at stake. The features of the battle for Unison are:**

- workers in local government and the health service fighting privatisation and cuts
- local government workers fighting Labour's cuts in wages and increase in hours to create low cost, low provision, business friendly councils
- union officials waging a witch-hunt against the left and other militants
- officials trying to shape Unison into a model of "new unionism".

The evidence of working class anger in Unison is plain: in the recent UCLH strike, the Sheffield Housing Benefits strikes, the strikes against a pay freeze in Southwark, the strikes in defence of the 35 hour week in Manchester, as well as a host of actions in councils from Camden to Glasgow.

What unites these struggles? New Labour is reversing the relative protection its councils gave to public sector workers during the Tory years and its historic commitment to a fully state-funded NHS. Labour's determination to reduce the cost of state spending is tied to its refusal to tax the rich to fund public services.

But the strikes are also united by the strategy of the Unison bureaucracy. The 10 April demo called by Unison will be policed by a private security firm. The aim is to stop the left having any identity on the march. The march is to be a polite pressure point on Blair over low pay and a means of channelling rank and file anger into passive protest.

The Unison bureaucracy are intervening in strike after strike to try and destroy the influence of the left, especially the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Instead of trying to win the disputes the bureaucracy is busy disciplining strike leaders (as at UCLH, where the bureaucracy's action could encourage the management to victimise militants), suspending left led branches – as it has just done with the Birmingham Unison branch – and trying to engineer sell outs, as it is doing in Sheffield.

The bureaucracy knows that a defeat for militant action will strengthen its war against the left. Taming the union will allow Bickerstaffe to use it, not as a battering ram against New Labour but as a bargaining chip. If it accepts PFI (under protest), then he believes he can demand better terms from Blair. Blair may decide he has no further use for the bureaucracy and kick them out on their ear. But for now there is no doubt that Blair is holding out the promise of a continuing relationship provided the unions "modernise" i.e. kick out the left, abandon class struggle and play ball with New Labour.

The left's response to this will be decisive. We could win and upset the whole strategy of both the bureaucracy and Blair. We can do this because the anger at PFI, cuts and attacks on pay and conditions is tangible and is growing. But to win we have to take the fight to the bureaucracy.

This is where the left fall down badly. The Socialist Party (SP), which caved in to the first round of the witch-hunt when its Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union (CFDU) was attacked, holds positions on the NEC. But when UCLH was sold out SP leader on the NEC Roger Bannister neither lifted a finger nor uttered a word. SP members must break with their leaders if they are to play a useful role in the current battle.

The SWP are different. They are certainly entering the fray, leading UCLH and playing a key role in Sheffield and elsewhere. They are clear that the bureaucracy has to be fought. And they are meeting the witch-hunt with an open proclamation of their politics.

But while the SWP are game for a fight they are crippled by their politics. Their current strategy is to mobilise support for sectional disputes through collections and speaking tours, where possible escalate them into all out strikes and trust that such militant action will outflank the bureaucracy.

The bureaucrats ability to force a return to work at UCLH, despite the very widespread support the strike evoked in other unions and workplaces and despite its exemplary militancy, shows that this strategy is insufficient.

We repeat, the key is to take the fight to the bureaucracy. By this we mean building a rank and file movement that not only links militants and branches together as an information network, but links them as an organised fighting force to challenge bureaucratic control of the union and to replace the bureaucratic leaders.

Branches, stewards committees and regions opposed to the bureaucracy must urgently to come together at a conference – in open defiance of the leadership's ban on such gatherings – to form such a movement.

Such a movement is vital to winning existing disputes, curbing Bickerstaffe's assault on the left and to the future battles against Blair. Unison must become a democratic union – with officials elected annually, accountable, recallable and paid the average wage of the workers they represent, with sovereign mass meetings and a sovereign delegate national conference – a class struggle union, committed to a militant fight against Blair's attacks, and a union led by class fighters.

A rank and file movement can begin the fight to make Unison all of these things. But such a movement itself has to confront politics. It has to be built as a political movement. Only a revolutionary organisation, one with a sizeable fraction of members inside Unison fighting for their communist politics in the union, will build a rank and file movement of this sort.

The SWP is not such an organisation. For all its militancy it remains wedded to a strategy of believing that strikes alone are sufficient to "spontaneously" transform Unison. Workers Power's Unison fraction – a communist fraction organised around the bulletin *Well Red* – is committed to building such a movement and fighting for such politics. Join us in this fight.

## Students demand free education

**OCCUPATIONS, DEMONSTRATIONS – students are willing to fight for decent colleges and free education.**

Even the Blairite lackeys at the head of the National Union of Students (NUS) could not ignore the mood of anger. At the NUS conference at the end of March, members of Labour Students were forced to talk left in order to save their seats on the executive.

President Andrew Pakes fought off a left challenge to his leadership but was forced to call for action, at least rhetorically. The left, standing on a united slate, did manage to secure a few officer posts and seats on the executive, but overall Labour Students did just enough to stay in power within the NUS.

Of course, once the election was out of the way they reverted to form, opposing left

motions, such as one calling for the return of grants, and attacking those who had organised rent strikes and were involved in non-payment campaigns against tuition fees.

At such a crucial time in the fight against fees, the Labour Student leadership is worst than useless. But students have shown a determination to fight – with or without the union leadership.

Occupations and non-payment campaigns have been spreading across London and beyond. The occupation of Goldsmiths' College in London achieved an impressive victory. After seven days in occupation Goldsmiths' students forced the college authorities to back down and withdraw expulsion letters given to those who had not paid fees. Occupations at Camberwell, over appalling conditions, and at

UCL over fees have followed.

It is vital that action against the fees is maintained. During Easter thousands of students will be facing expulsion because of non-payment.

Non-payment campaigns need to be built at all universities and colleges. Local action committees need to be built to co-ordinate action and these should be linked into a national action committee. Strikes, occupations and mass demonstrations can win.

The head of Goldsmiths' college, Ben Pimlott, has apparently written to the government telling them that unless an alternative to fees is found quickly there will be a massive wave of occupations and the whole system will become unworkable. Let's make that a reality.

## Derecognition threat to union

MEDIA WORKERS are getting organised to fight their vicious anti-union bosses. But journalists at the NUJ's Annual Delegate Meeting in Eastbourne heard how the "Fairness at Work" legislation has spurred an employers' offensive, leading to the victimisation of militants, plans for mass redundancies and strike busting operations.

Delegates gave standing ovations to three victimised FoCs: Dave Toomer of the *Bolton Evening News*, Greg Challice of the *Sheffield Star* and Taman of the *West Africa* magazine chapel. All three had led action to stop attacks on wages and conditions. Challice and Toomer were sacked for representing their members, while the whole staff of *West Africa* magazine, based in South London, faces redundancy after its year long dispute.

In recent years the NUJ has been controlled by the "left" – a coalition of left union bureaucrats, the Communist Party and centrist "Trotskyists" (*Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Appeal*). The left maintained its hold on the NEC and at conference easily won the elections for union Vice President and Treasurer

against an old-Labour style bloc based in the broadcasting sections of the union and in Ireland (the NUJ organises in Britain and the whole of Ireland, where it remains strong).

Despite this left face the NUJ leadership remains paralysed by its bureaucratic approach to struggle and by personalised apolitical disputes amongst the leadership.

The conference, while it passed many "left" motions – including calls for the release of the PKK's Ocalan – threw out an attempt by Workers Power and the Socialist Workers Party to commit the union to an action programme outlining a political alternative to New Labour. NEC member and Treasurer elect Anita Halpin, who is also a member of the Communist Party, said: "we all support nationalisation but now is not the time for it" – to the mystification of delegates from nationalised BBC and RTE broadcasting giants.

*Socialist Outlook's* John Lister led the fight against the action programme on behalf of the standing orders committee, which successfully ruled it out of order, curtailing all debate. To rub salt

in the wounds, the NEC backed a witch-hunting motion demanding "membership lists of caucuses" and warning of "outside influences" – which was thrown out by a massive majority of delegates.

At the numerous fringe meetings delegates heard how low-paid journalists in the regional and local press were fighting hard for recognition in the run up to the Employment Relations Act, which becomes law in summer. *Birmingham Post and Mail* has led the way with an agreement for recognition as soon as the Act becomes law. But the union's national newspaper organiser, Jeremy Dear, warned that recognition is only as strong as the union that fights for it.

The task now in the NUJ is to build a network of militants in branches and chapels to fight the upcoming recognition disputes. The NUJ left has chosen the old "broad left" method" of capturing the union bureaucracy first. Those who want to fight need a rank and file network, organised across unions in the media industries, and a political alternative to Labourism. That is what Workers Power members in the NUJ and GPMU fight for.

# Bill's brave new world — for a few rich bosses

Bill Gates, the third richest man in the world, has published a book about how capitalism might look in the 21st century. *Colin Lloyd* explains why capitalism's brave new world is science fantasy

**B**ILL GATES, the owner of computer giant Microsoft, has written a new bible for the managers and employers of the 21st century. Entitled *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, (Penguin 1999) it is a fascinating insight into the way the other side thinks.

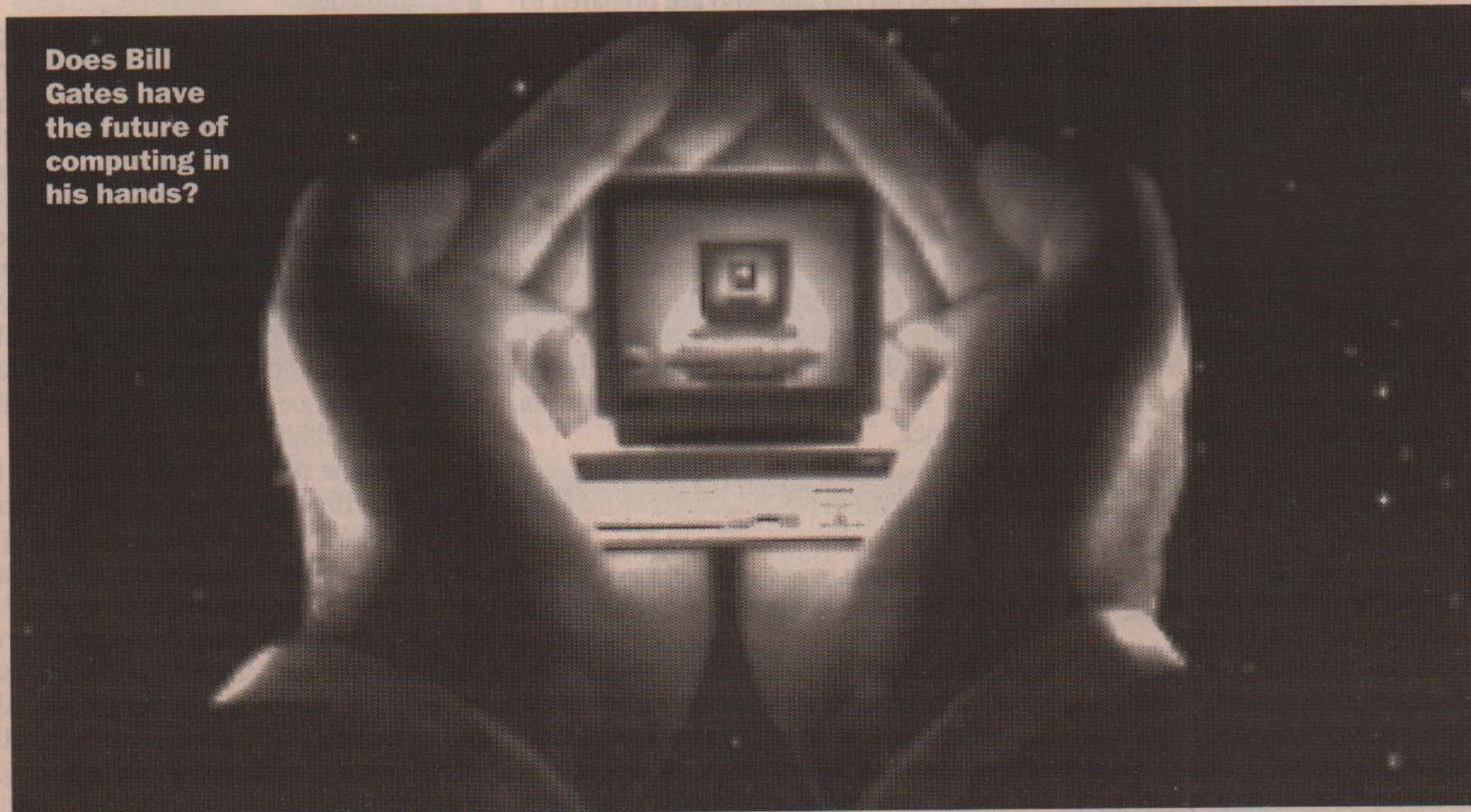
Management guru books themselves are big business and come in two flavours: "doom and gloom" and "brave new world". Recently most of the best-sellers have been doom and gloom books. Charles Handy, Geoffrey Sachs and George Soros – all pioneers of neo-liberal capitalism in the 1980s – have each produced books calling for a turn away from the destructive economic policy of letting market forces rip, and embraced everything from state intervention to Buddhism as the alternative. Soros' current bestseller is actually called *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*.

Gates' new book aims to buck the trend by explaining the bright new future that awaits humanity if only capitalism embraces computer technology. The fact that Microsoft is the world's biggest vendor of computer software may have something to do with this outlook. And the timing of the book may also have something to do with the fact that Microsoft is currently fighting (and losing) against the US government's anti-monopoly laws.

Still Gates' ideas do deserve scrutiny. His basic proposition is that in ten years time digital technologies will have massively changed the way we live and work. Everyone will have a PC at home and so be able to work from there. Massive savings of time and money will be made by applying the power of computing across the whole economy. Industrial production, currently shrinking compared with the growing service sector, will itself become essentially a service industry with some "products" attached. More and more workers, including clerical workers, will be shifted into "thinking work", whose current tasks will be done by computers. Most buying and selling will be done electronically, Gates claims. He hammers home his message with slogans like "Develop processes that empower people", "Take government to the people" and "Create connected learning communities".

The first thing that has to be said about Gates' vision is that it is, by definition, hopelessly confined to the minority of humanity that lives in the metropolitan imperialist countries, minus a large urban "underclass" and plus the upper bourgeoisie of some third world countries. Even the "inefficient" 20th century way of using computers that Gates attacks is beyond the reach of the majority of humanity, as are telephones, reliable power and often even clean drinking water. While today global income inequalities are determined by "geography" Gates says, in 2020 they will be determined by education, as skilled workers across the globe will do work over the internet. Just what unskilled workers will be doing – and just how a skilled and educated worker in Nairobi will be

Does Bill Gates have the future of computing in his hands?



empowered by his or her computer, or be able to afford to buy it – Gates never considers.

In fact, the whole book is premised on ignoring the question of what will be done with all the resources freed up and all the workers put out of jobs by the huge economies of time and money computers could make possible. Only a capitalist, who doesn't know the meaning of the word poverty and is out of touch with ordinary people, could write such rubbish.

However, there is a second series of questions posed for socialists by Bill Gates' vision of a brave new world: could it happen, will it happen – and if not why not?

The short answers to these questions are: yes it could, no it won't and, well, because of Microsoft.

Many people who today think of themselves as radical, mistrust technology profoundly. As one writer recently put it: "they see anything smarter than a pocket calculator as a threat to the human race and everything with a central nervous system as an honorary member of it."

Marxists have nothing to do with this backward and unscientific view. We see science, the technologies it breeds and the machines it produces as the tools for liberating humanity from a life of enforced labour and want. What is needed is for science, technology and production to be freed from the constraints of their current form of ownership and control (private capitalists and multinational corporations) and put to use to meet the needs of the majority.

As such, many of the uses Gates suggests for information technology ought to arouse our excitement as well as our cynicism. In a chapter entitled "No health care system is an island", Gates shows how digital technology available today could cut up to 50 per cent of the costs of health care, massively improve the quality of diagnosis, spread expertise and put patients in control of monitoring their own health and configuring their own care.

Gates, of course, lives in the USA, a country where more than one third of the population has no access to anything

but the most basic health care, and where in inner city black communities male life expectancy is lower than in Bangladesh. The whole supposition behind Gates' argument is that somehow poverty and class inequality will be eradicated by technology itself. It is this part of his vision that is really science fiction, not the technical part.

The reason why it won't happen is the capitalist system of private property, class inequality and the power of multinational monopolies – of which Microsoft is one of the biggest and most powerful.

The whole history of Microsoft is a lesson in how capitalist monopolies retard the progress of implementing technology and warp the results to benefit the few rather than the many.

In the beginning there was IBM, a US multinational that had cornered the market in mainframe computers. IBM's monopoly position strangled and held back the creation of a mass consumer market for small computers until other firms broke that monopoly and won the right to produce "IBM clones" – what we today call personal computers. They all relied on an operating system supplied by Microsoft called MS-DOS, which was crap.

Smaller computer makers like Apple, Commodore and Atari pioneered much more user-friendly operating systems using a mouse and pointer. In their struggle to put these firms out of business the "clone" manufacturers again used their monopoly power to prevent the implementation of the superior technology. Bill Gates supplied them with his own version of the "mouse and pointer" system – called Windows – which

was, again, crap. In the process, he turned the tables on the computer manufacturers and made Microsoft itself the most powerful monopoly: put Windows on your computers or die, Microsoft told them.

Then came the internet. Sensing the power of the net, some firms advocated "network computers", low cost computers that could download the software needed and thus do without Windows. Sun Microsystems pioneered an internet computer language called Java,

which could replace Windows. Another firm, Netscape, pioneered the technology needed to access the World Wide Web in graphic format.

Gates responded by trying to put them out of business: sabotaging attempts to

pioneer low cost network PCs, trying to sabotage Java, and creating his own Microsoft alternative to Netscape that PC manufacturers using Windows (i.e. most of them) were forced to install.

Microsoft was using the time-honoured monopoly practice of using the huge power of a multinational company to stifle competition and innovation. Eventually the US capitalists got frightened of being so heavily dependent on Microsoft. Gates was hauled before the courts in a series of "anti-trust" cases. The outcome could dismember Microsoft, but in the end it will lead to the creation of a new monopoly.

Meanwhile one computer boffin's attempt to undermine monopoly capitalism's control of vital information technology is also being sabotaged by the system. Linos Thorvalds wrote an alternative to Windows called Linux and distributed it for free. Other computer

boffins liked it because, unlike Bill Gates' creations, it was excellent. For years it was exchanged between computer programmers, who improved it for free and were able to collaborate and share knowledge. Then the capitalist system took notice and in the past few months huge multinationals like IBM have committed themselves to "using" Linux, and told all their own programmers to get working on new uses for it. These of course will not be free: they will be sold on the market and used in the corporate battle to topple Microsoft.

Linux was the computer equivalent of trying to overthrow capitalism by living in tepees and growing your own food. So what's the socialist alternative?

The massive gap between the potential uses of digital technology and its actual use is not a product of complacency and lack of vision, but a product of capitalism itself. It is the profit system which dictates that advances in software and hardware must be (a) restricted if they have a commercial or military value, (b) available only to those who can afford it, and (c) controlled by giant capitalist firms. Added to this the profit system is itself in crisis. In fact, one of the main reasons for the recent surge in computer technology has been the need to squeeze every last drop of profit out of the production system, after three decades of very low profitability.

The computer industry as a whole, however, has been stalled by the economic crisis. Last year "overcapacity" in the microprocessor industry – which makes the silicon chips that every computer needs – led to a massive drop in the price of chips. Suddenly computers could be produced for a few pounds instead of hundreds. Capitalism's response? To shut the microprocessor plants: from South Wales to South Korea they were closed. All the high tech plant was put up for sale. All the expertise learned by workers was thrown on the scrap heap.

The 21st century promises more unemployment, more crises, more poverty – no matter how fast the computers of the managers and a few "knowledge workers" run. Bill Gates' brave new world will never become reality as long as production remains in private ownership and control. But under a system of state ownership, planned production and workers' control the marvels he describes could be achieved, surpassed and shared between all the workers and poor people of the world, not just among a small layer of better-paid workers and their managers in the imperialist countries.

Socialism is about re-orienting production to meet human need, not profit. Bill Gates' book shows us how we could use computers to meet human need "at the speed of thought" – making democracy more democratic, workers' control more powerful and socialist planning more flexible.

But to do that we will have to take Microsoft, IBM and all the rest of the capitalist corporations out of the hands of the "shareholders" and into the hands of the working class. Not surprisingly, this is not the conclusion Gates draws.

*Marxists see science, the technologies it breeds and the machines it produces as the tools for liberating humanity from a life of enforced labour and want*

# marxism THE BASICS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

## Marxism and the family

Helen Johnston explains why the nuclear family is not as normal as its defenders would have us believe

"FAMILY LIFE is the foundation of society" said Gordon Brown in his recent budget speech. To prove Labour is serious about addressing the breakdown in the family, the government is making various changes in social policy aimed at reasserting the "normal" family. At different times this century family life has appeared to be breaking down and capitalism has been on the offensive to preach good family values. This is because family unit of today exists to serve the needs of capitalism.

Contrary to what the bourgeois press would have us believe, the "normal" family has not always existed. The social organisation of human society has changed throughout history. Friedrich Engels, in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, argued that the family, as a social unit, developed as a result of economic and social changes within human society:

"The determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life... On the one hand the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools required therefore; on the other the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite epoch and definite country live are conditioned by both kinds of production." Engels identified the origins of the patriarchal family (and the state) within the break-up of the primitive commune and the establishment of private property. In the light of more modern research, some aspects of Engels' analysis has required modifying, but fundamentally the anthropological evidence continues to support his overall conclusions.

What social organisation existed prior to the family? Primitive human society was organised on the basis of kinship groups. Possessions were generally held collectively on a communal basis. Things were produced for the immediate consumption of the group. Such primitive societies are usually known as hunter-gatherer societies.

Both matrilineal and patrilineal groups existed. Some groups recognised the importance of the mother in defining the children, others respected the father's line. In general, regardless of how the children were defined, a rough kind of equality existed between the sexes.

There was a division of labour within these communes, but importantly all work was regarded as of equal value. Although women tended to work closer to home, for example gathering (this made child rearing easier), this was not seen as oppressive or less valued. Men, in general worked outside the immediate household, for example hunting. Even in communes which were structured along a patrilineal line, work divided along this basis was treated on an equal basis. Domestic work was communal:

"...the household is run in common and communistically by a number of families, the land is tribal property... There can be no poor and needy - the communistic household and the gens know their responsibility towards the aged, the sick and those disabled in war. All are free and equal, including the women. There is as yet no room for slaves."

As the forces of production (tools) developed so surplus produce came into existence. A struggle developed between the kinship groups and the emerging family unit for the control and ownership of this surplus. Individuals who held high positions within the kinship groups began to assert their control over the surplus and possess it as private property. A very early and primitive form of "class struggle" saw the breakdown of the kinship groups and common property and the emergence of individual families and private property.

It is difficult to fully explain how men came to be the sex which, predominantly, gained control of the surplus. One theory is that they may have had greater skills in war because of their greater role in hunting, defending their own surplus and attacking other groups to acquire theirs. Whatever the decisive reasons the outcome was that inheritance of the surplus moved towards the male line and the patriarchal family came to dominate. Since

### IN BRIEF

- The family emerged as a new kind of social unit with the development of private property.
- The isolated family unit is a creation of class society.
- The idea of a 'normal family' has changed throughout history.
- The family is fundamental to capitalism and plays a specific role for the capitalists.
- The family is the material basis for the social oppression of women, lesbians and gay men and youth.

men needed to be sure that their children would inherit their surplus, monogamy was imposed upon women.

This did not happen overnight, but developed over thousands of years. Engels referred to the breakdown of the primitive commune, the overthrowing of "mother right" and the victory of private property as the world historic defeat of women. The social oppression of women was a result of a process rather than a conscious act against women by men. It meant women were systematically excluded from an equitable claim over the product of their labour.

Engels also identified the individual family unit as the beginning of class antagonism. "The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male."

The change in the form of the family did not just coincide with the development of class antagonism, but both were a consequence of the same economic development: private property. The family unit as we know it today is very different to the family in the time of slave societies or under feudalism. But in each case it has been shaped by the needs of the dominant mode of production.

In the early days of capitalist society the family unit was severely weakened as the masses were forced off the land and into the factories. Long hours, dangerous conditions and child labour led to illnesses and early death. The capitalists were literally using up the pool of labour. Social cohesion was on the point of breaking down. In response to this the working class fought to defend itself and its struggle coincided with the realisation by the most far-sighted capitalists that it was in their interests to ensure that the working class could at least reproduce themselves or they would have no workers for their factories.

The end result was the creation of the ideal family. Not only did this provide a means of ensuring the more efficient reproduction of labour power - it also had enormous potential as an ideological weapon backing up the oppression of women. The bourgeoisie imposed their own idea of a family upon the masses: a mother and father and their children - the nuclear family.

The family unit is fundamental to capitalism since it is the arena where labour power (the working class) is reproduced. On a daily basis the family is the site where an individual worker's capacity to work is reproduced - going home to eat and rest so you are ready for work the next day. It is also the means for reproducing and raising the future generations of workers. The problem is that it performs these functions relatively cost free for capitalism on the basis of the domestic enslavement of women. Women are the unpaid carers, cooks, cleaners and comforters in the family, and capitalism accordingly treats them as the subordinate member of the family team.

For whole periods domestic slavery was counterposed to social labour for women - hence the lingering ideology of "a woman's place is in the home". But even though women have entered the workforce big time nowadays, they are still the primary domestic workers and frequently carry out jobs that are designed to fit in with their allotted role in the family - part time work, work as carers, secretaries and personal assistants to men etc. etc. The result of this is that working class women are often more oppressed, having to carry out the "double shift" - paid work and then unpaid domestic work. What working women have gained through entering social production and the world of collective solidarity capitalism seeks to take from them by ensuring that they have little or no time for participation in collective life and organisations by increasing the amount of work they have to perform in the family.

Marxists understand the family unit, then, as a key structure through which the social oppression of women is perpetrated. It is necessary to capitalism because there is no other profitable means of ensuring the production and reproduction of labour power.

And because it plays this role for capitalism it should be no surprise that the ideology to justify the individual family - put yourself and your own first - enables capitalism to divide us. Fundamental divisions are created by the family because it is the material basis of the social oppression not only of women but also of youth and lesbians and gay men.

Youth are oppressed because they are completely dependent on the family and have few rights within capitalism. Economic dependence and the absence of democratic rights can, literally, imprison youth within the family unit, even where that unit is the site of violence, abuse and persecution against them.

Lesbians and gay men are oppressed because of the centrality of the family for capitalism. Any groups who undermine the monogamous, heterosexual "norm" of the bourgeois family are regarded as a dire threat to society and stigmatised accordingly. Lesbians and gay men pose a threat to the ideology of the monogamous family unit. They testify to the fact that sex is a pleasurable experience in its own right, separate from the family unit. The price they pay for championing love and pleasure over the capitalist norm is not only being branded abnormal but of being deprived of democratic rights concerning child custody, recognition as couples where pensions and property is concerned, in housing allocation and so on.

Such divisions cannot be simply wished away. The capitalist family unit has to be challenged and replaced at both an ideological and practical level.

Social oppression weakens the fighting strength of the working class. Oppression and the divisions it create must be fought by revolutionaries and there is a proud tradition within the revolutionary workers' movement.

Communists, such as Clara Zetkin, have argued the importance of organising amongst working class women and ensuring that they are brought into the workers' movement. In the Second and then the Third Internationals socialist women argued for special forms of work among women. This was not done divorced from the party. Special attention was needed to draw women out of the backwardness, passivity and low level of culture capitalism imposed on them through their role in the family.

This was also argued for within the party to counteract the sexism women often experienced. It was necessary to have a working class women's movement. This was not separate from the class struggle but part of it. It was used to address the needs of working class women. Women's liberation cannot be addressed separately from the need to overthrow capitalism and we cannot overthrow capitalism without liberating women.

It from this communist tradition, that we draw our programmatic demands today in our fight to overthrow the bourgeois oppressive family structure and capitalism. Central to this is the call for the working class women's movement. It would be built among working class women at work, in unions and the working class communities. The movement would address not just the economic conditions working class women face within capitalism but the social oppression working class women experience. For women to participate fully and equally in the labour movement they will have to fight for their voices to be heard, for their participation to be taken seriously and for the class as a whole to take up the demands of women.

These demands would include practical means by which we can undermine the isolation of women through their role in the family. The key means of doing this is the socialisation of domestic labour: free high quality 24 hour child care, so that women are not tied to the home for years of their life; state subsidised laundries and restaurants to reduce the domestic work many women have to do on top of a full time job. Only such measures can remove the oppressive functions of the family unit and open up a new world of possibilities for human development that replace narrow individualism with human solidarity, oppression with liberation.

**WAR IN THE BALKANS**

The Nato attack will not protect the Kosovars: it has been the signal for a new round of ethnic cleansing. Workers should support Serbia's right to self defence – but not at the price of justifying Milosevic's genocide. A statement from the **International Secretariat of the LRCI:**

# Stop Nato bombing Serbia!

## Support Kosova's fight for independence!

Nato forces have launched a massive attack on Serbia. On the orders of this US-led military machine, warplanes rain bombs and cruise missiles on dozens of sites across Serbia every night.

Serbia's air bases, communications systems and troop concentrations are being blasted with the aim of forcing the government of Slobodan Milosevic to accept the Rambouillet peace accords dictated by the Nato powers.

Milosevic refuses to accept the entry of Nato troops into Kosova or to withdraw Serb troops from the province. His reasons for this are obvious. Serbian troops, paramilitary police and fascist irregulars are not only engaged in an offensive against the guerrilla forces of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA), they are now using pogroms and artillery shelling to drive tens of thousands of ethnic Albanian villagers from their homes. Just as in Bosnia, this represents the filthy policy of ethnic cleansing.

Nevertheless, socialists must unreservedly condemn the Nato attack and call for its immediate cessation. However, at the same time they must call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Serb forces from Kosova and support the struggle of the KLA and other Kosovar forces to drive them out. The Kosovar resistance fighters represent a progressive struggle that deserves, indeed demands, the support of the international working class.

Serbia has no right to retain control of Kosova. The Kosovars form 90 per cent of the population of the province. Slobodan Milosevic established and consolidated himself in power on the basis of abolishing the autonomy of Kosova and by brutally and brazenly violating the linguistic and cultural rights of the Kosovars. Ten years of Serbian oppression has convinced them of the need for full state independence. This will of the Kosovars for independence is testified to by elections in which they voted only for parties which demand independence, by ten years of unremitting resistance to the imposed Serb authorities, and finally by the mass guerrilla struggle of the KLA.

Only the most extreme and



unremitting pressure by the Nato powers has persuaded the KLA (wrongly) to join Kosovar president Ibrahim Rugova in accepting the limited autonomy of the Rambouillet accords. The US and its European Nato allies, for all their recent hand-wringing over the sufferings of the Kosovars, steadfastly refuse to recognise their right to self-determination – if that includes separation from Serbia. They thereby show to the world that their democratic credentials are completely bogus. The working class movement world-wide must defend the Kosovars against the Serbian forces of occupation. It should

recognise the right of the Kosovars to acquire arms and supplies from whoever is willing to give them and also their right to take full military advantage of the imperialist bombing to drive out the "Yugoslav" forces.

But at the same time the workers' movement must actively oppose the air attacks on Serbia itself and any entry by Nato troops into Kosova. Ibrahim Rugova, the KLA and the majority of the population called for this mainly because of wholesale pogroms which the Serbs are carrying out and because of the genocide in which this may end. The Serbian forces – as was the case during the first

stages of the Bosnian war – have an overwhelming advantage in terms of tanks, artillery and trained military personnel. But in all probability the Nato bombardments will not bring an end to the Serb attacks on the ethnic Albanian population.

In the short term it has actually intensified them. Serb police and fascist irregulars have responded to the bombing with a reign of murder and terror in the towns and cities of Kosova. If, as is likely, the bombing is stopped after a destructive but ultimately tokenistic demonstration of force, then the Serbs will be free to complete their ethnic cleansing – at least of those parts of Kosova they want to permanently occupy.

Besides, Nato support for the Kosovars comes with a high price attached – the subordination of the Kosovars to imperialism's plans, their renunciation for years of the goal of independence and indeed the disarmament of the KLA, once the Nato troops are installed. This Nato protectorate is likely to be frozen into a near permanent one, like the Dayton "peace" settlement in Bosnia.

Workers throughout the world should not be driven by their natural revulsion against Milosevic to support the Nato bombing of Serbia.

The "humanitarian" concerns proclaimed by Clinton and Blair are only a smokescreen for the "world policeman" role that the United States and its European allies have arrogated to themselves since the collapse of the USSR. If their primary concern were for the Kosovars they would recognise their statehood, and give the KLA the weapons to drive out the Serbian troops.

The arch-reactionary consequences of the "policing" role of the imperialist powers have been demonstrated in the Gulf War, in Somalia, in Haiti, and in Bosnia with the implementation of the reactionary Dayton Accords. Last year the USA arrogated to itself the right to bomb countries which give shelter to Islamist "terrorists". Its most recent episodes have been the regular US and British bombing of Iraq.

What the USA and Britain are trying to establish is the unchallenged right to take military action against any regime or movement which defies their orders. The purpose of these interventions is to ensure that these countries carry out the political and economic diktats of the North American and Western European imperialist powers.

It is in the interests of the oppressed and exploited worldwide that the imperialist powers – the greatest and most dangerous force for reaction in the world – suffer defeat each and every time they attempt to impose their will even if their enemy (as in this case) is actually engaged in a reactionary struggle against a progressive force which the imperialists claim to be supporting for "democratic" reasons.

Therefore in Serbia and Montenegro – though not in Kosova which they have no right to occupy – we support the Serbian forces' self defence against Nato attack despite the fact that the Serbs would not face this attack if they withdrew from Kosova. The downing of Nato aircraft, the enforced breaking off of their attacks, will seriously weaken imperialism's grip world-wide.

### WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

- Stop the NATO bombing now
- Defeat the NATO attack on Serbia and Montenegro and end the UN economic blockade
- Victory to the Kosovar national liberation struggle
- Immediate and unconditional recognition of the independence of Kosova
- Serbian troops out of Kosova
- Arms with no strings to the KLA
- No NATO troops in Kosova – all imperialist troops out of the Balkans.



# Imperialist war games

**Dave Stockton** explains the conflicting strategies of the world powers for whom the Balkans are just a chess board, and civilians – Serb and Kosovar – just pawns

NATO BEGAN its bombing to force Slobodan Milosevic to accept the Rambouillet peace proposals. Nato promised to disarm the KLA in return for limited autonomy. Serbia would get to keep its present borders, but with 30,000 peacekeeping troops to prevent genocide.

Once Milosevic rejected this, and renewed the onslaught on Kosovar civilians, Clinton defined Nato's aims as threefold: "To demonstrate the seriousness of Nato's opposition to aggression, to deter Mr Milosevic from continuing and escalating attacks in Kosova and to damage Serbia's capacity to make war."

Nato commander in chief, General Wesley Clarke, made clear the military objectives: "We're going to systematically and progressively attack, disrupt, degrade, devastate and ultimately – unless President Milosevic complies with the demands of the international community – we're going to destroy his forces."

To do this they are using the full array of high tech weaponry available to the richest nations on earth. The claim that these smart weapons are aimed only at military targets, not at civilians, will not long conceal the inevitable body count of Serb civilians.

This will not produce a collapse of morale or a rejection of Milosevic amongst the Serbs, any more than the London Blitz, the Allied 1000-bomber raids on Germany, or US carpet-bombing of North Vietnam did.

The weakness of the imperialist powers' strategy is clear. Air power alone cannot force Milosevic to accept Nato troops in Kosova or to stop massacring the Kosovars. For all the high tech wizardry the "Yugoslav" army can be "destroyed" only by ground forces. And this – for the moment and in the foreseeable future – the Americans will not contemplate. It is equally unlikely that the French, the British or the

Germans would agree to do the dirty work for them.

Sir Michael Rose, British commander of the UN force in Bosnia, and like most of the British officer corps a strong admirer of the "Serb fighting man", commented:

"If you carry out any act of war, you have to be prepared to go the whole distance. But I doubt very much if the countries of the West would want to launch themselves into a Balkan war."

That is probably a correct estimate of the staying power of political lightweights like Clinton and Blair. It also reflects the fact that the US and British public has been trained to think of wars as remote, virtual affairs carried out by sophisticated machines and in which "our boys" get killed only by accident, and in hundreds rather than in thousands. This is the ideological legacy of imperialist attacks in the Falklands, Grenada, Panama and Iraq.

Each of these wars has reinforced America's "Vietnam Syndrome" – the unwillingness of politicians or public to risk high casualties in an all out ground war with anything less than overwhelming odds.

It is for these reasons too that the House of Commons and the US Congress witnessed a strange reversal. The Tories and the Republicans are the doom-sayers, even the party of peace. The Labour and US Democratic benches represent the war party. In part this is because the arch-reactionary right parties are not laden with the baggage of caring a damn about genocide and would do a deal with the devil and his grandmother as long as their interests were served.

Alan Clark, former Tory Defence Minister, has denounced the Nato attacks saying that "the Kosovo Liberation Army is a bunch of thugs, deeply involved in drugs". Most Tories, like the British Army high command, have a visceral sympathy for "martial" (i.e. oppressor) peoples.

Meanwhile, far from "stopping the brutal repression by the Serbs", as Clinton claimed it would do, the Nato attack has increased it. The 30,000 Serbian troops are continuing their brutal offensive against the Kosovars. As we go to press, on 28 March, most villages are reported empty of their population, as is Srbica a town of 20,000 people. Human rights organisations report the flight of maybe 100,000 since the present crisis began. And there are already 300,000 displaced people still not returned to their homes since last summer's offensive.

In Kosova's capital Pristina, an 85 per cent ethnic Albanian city of 200,000, joint units of the Serbian Interior Ministry police force (MUP) and Serb irregulars are dragging people from their houses, torching the buildings and conducting summary executions. The most famous human rights lawyer, Bajram Kilmendi, and his two sons have been executed.

It is a tragedy for the Kosovars that their leaders – like the Bosnians in the early 1990s – have put their fate in the hands of Nato. This military machine only pursues the interests of a tiny clutch of imperialist powers. It is interested in order but not in justice or democracy. The United Nations, when it does not follow the same interest, is gridlocked by other reactionary interests. Thus, Russia and China – historic and present day oppressors of nationalities (including Muslim ones) – would veto any assistance to the Kosovars.

It has to be stated that the progressive forces willing and able to come to the aid of the Kosovars are small indeed. Part of the reason for this is the terrible political crisis in the world's workers' movement. There is no revolutionary International to mobilise working class action. Such action, even though its organisers would have no state forces at their disposal, would be far from negligible.

During the Civil War in Russia in the 1920s, workers' opposition helped end the attempts by Britain and France to intervene to fight the Red Army. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, when they founded the Third International, modified the famous slogan which ends the Communist manifesto to "Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World, Unite!" Today there is no such workers' International. Blair, Schroeder and the Italian socialist premier d'Alema support Nato. Labour left winger Ken Livingstone does too.

Meanwhile, that wretched Stalinist remnant, the Communist Party of Britain, whitewashes the genocide in the most nauseating terms:

"The imposed 'peace' plan ignored the fact that Kosova is a Serbian province within Yugoslavia and dealt with the situation as though it was simply a question of ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians. As a result it placed an irregular armed force, the Kosova Liberation Army, organised and financed from outside the country, on a par with the elected government" (Morning Star, March 24 1999).

Figures like Tony Benn, whilst correctly condemning the Nato bombing remain stubbornly silent on the Kosovars. Socialists must demand that Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, people who have considerable influence in the workers' movement give a lead and, while denouncing Nato, denounce Milosevic's genocide as well.

Silence on the Kosovars equals support for Milosevic's genocide. It is an unpardonable crime.

Our strategy in this war starts from the class questions at stake.

In Kosova we stand for the right to independence and self determination, and the right of the KLA to resist genocide. We are for the driving out of all the occupying Serb forces. But we warn the KLA to make no alliance with Nato, which will swiftly disarm it

at the first chance in order to put back together the fractured Balkan order.

Nato's onslaught is a naked act of imperialist aggression. No worker should support it. We should condemn it and support Serbia's right to defend itself in Serbia and Montenegro. Despite the reactionary character of the Milosevic regime, on a world scale he is not the main enemy: the main enemy is Nato and imperialism and we stand for its defeat where it attacks Serbia and Montenegro.

Throughout the wider Balkan region, to the workers of Macedonia, Albania, Greece and Turkey, we say: reject nationalism, fight for a working class internationalist solution. That includes driving the Nato forces out of the Balkans but also embracing the struggles of the oppressed.

And in Britain we should go on the streets to oppose the war. We should call for the immediate withdrawal of troops from the Balkans and for Britain out of Nato. But we should make no alliances with the Serb nationalists, fascists and "socialists" who line up outside Downing Street with placards saying "Yids Out!"

This war could peter out into a bloody mess of low-intensity mass murder and a diplomatic stitch up, with Kosova divided and Milosevic returned to the status of a respected player in the imperialist order in the Balkans. But there is a chance that it could escalate out of the control of the laptop generals into an all out Balkan war.

As events move with lightning speed and unpredictability the watchword for every worker has to be internationalism and anti-militarism. We will not die for the new world order. We will not put our names to air strike diplomacy. We will stand by the victims of genocide, even when their allies are our enemies. But we will rejoice at the defeat and disarray of the world's imperialist powers.

## Socialists and war

MOST PEOPLE are horrified at what is going on in the Balkans. Their horror would intensify if their TV screens could really show what is going on.

There is mass terror in Kosova at the hands of the Serb armed forces and fascist auxiliaries. There is terror among ordinary Serbs and Montenegrins as Nato rains down its 1000lb "smart" bombs, killing civilians and disrupting everyday life.

And there is fear gripping the whole region. In Macedonia there could be ethnic strife. Greece and Turkey could be drawn in to war.

Even as Europe's courts prosecute the last few living Nazi murderers from the last war in Europe, their world of mass murder rape and torture is being reborn, two and a half hours flight from Gatwick Airport.

So what can be done? According to

Tony Blair, we have to "stand firm against aggression" to avoid a much bigger war in south-east Europe. We have to "degrade" the Yugoslav Army. What this means is that, in your name, civilians are being killed by British bombs. Despite the laser-guided bomb run replays and the gung-ho tabloid coverage, most people realise this. That is why 66% of people responding to a BBC poll on the day the bombing started were against the intervention.

There are other reasons why support for the bombing is shaky: as we explain (above) the Tory right has been traditionally pro-Serb, as have the generals.

And there is a difference between Milosevic and Saddam Hussein. Saddam's Iraq was an ally of convenience for the USA when Iran was the main enemy. But today the USA wants to top-

ple Saddam, even kill him. Milosevic however, was only yesterday seen as one of the key guarantors of the new world order in the Balkans.

Why else did Tory ex-foreign secretary Douglas Hurd run straight to Belgrade to advise the Milosevic regime on its financial affairs as soon as he left office? If Milosevic were to cave in tomorrow, he would be welcomed back to the tables of imperialist diplomacy with open arms.

Unless Nato changes tack and commits ground troops, its air war can have only one aim: a co-operative Milosevic regime.

As the war drags on more and more working class people will ask why we have to risk soldiers' lives and spend millions of pounds on this onslaught. But indifference is no answer.

The only way to stop war is to destroy

the system that creates it – capitalism. While socialists oppose the chaos, waste and human misery of war we recognise people's right to resist unjust oppression.

That is why we have fought consistently for solidarity with Kosova against Serb oppression. And that is why, by the same principles, we defend Serbia's right to resist Nato's onslaught in Serbia and Montenegro.

But in neither case does a purely military solution apply. War is a different means of conducting politics. The politics of the imperialists are clear: subordinate the Balkans to their new world order. The politics of the Serb regime are clear: subordinate Kosova to Serbian rule.

Against these reactionary goals the working class needs its own political objectives. We are for the defeat of impe-

rialism because that will weaken and undermine its oppressive new world order. We are for the KLA's victory since that creates the possibility of ending Serb oppression in Kosova.

But these objectives need to be tied to a fight for working class independence throughout the Balkans. In both Serbia and Kosova only a revolutionary workers' government can guarantee full national rights for ethnic minorities and remove the running sore of nationalism and genocide from the Balkans.

Socialists must do all they can to build independent organisations of the workers and the oppressed that can prosecute the fight against imperialism, against the bosses and bureaucrats who rule throughout the Balkans, and that can lay the basis for working class rule.

# Japanese bosses in need of a miracle

It has just chalked up seven straight years of stagnation or outright decline. It is mired in its longest and deepest post-war recession. But were not talking about Russia or any other crisis-wracked ex-Stalinist country. We are referring to that once renowned "miracle economy" – Japan. *Keith Harvey* explains the background to Japan's economic crisis.

JAPAN WAS LONG hailed as the model of post-war Asian development, a technologically adept state that rose from the ashes of post-war defeat to become the second largest economy in the world. In the 1980s it bought huge chunks of USA real estate and Hollywood. It overwhelmed Uncle Sam's car industry with better and cheaper imports and its banks lent the Reagan government billions to keep the US economy booming.

How the mighty fall.

During the last three months of 1998 Japan's economy shrank at an annualised rate of 3.2 per cent, the fifth quarterly decline in a row. For last year as a whole Japan contracted by nearly 3 per cent, the worst year on record since the depression of the 1930s and following hard on a fall of nearly 1 per cent in 1997. Japan's GDP has never fallen for two years in a row since the end of the second world war. So who drained the petrol from the tank?

After all, the country has not been "ruined" by a high-spending, anti-market socialist government during the 1990s. The same staunchly pro-business political parties, and even personalities, remain at the helm of state; the same powerful Japanese business corporations (keiretsu) dominate the economy.

The answer to Japan's fall, to paraphrase Bill Clinton, "is capitalism, stupid". More particularly, the form of capitalism pursued by Japan's bosses for several decades with great success has now become a fetter on the country's further development. Japanese capitalism was marked by two crucial features:

- a defeated working class after world war two which was then incorporated into a pro-business ethos and company unions. A lack of militancy and strong company loyalty rendered up high productivity and restrained wage growth. This was rewarded by a degree of job security for white collar workers and the top layers of the manual working class;

- a strong relationship between the state, the banks and the major firms. Crucially, the state ensured low interest rates and hence cheap capital for investment; the banks extended cheap credit over the long term for favoured companies; and the huge conglomerates such as Mitsubishi, Sony and others ensured that losses made in one subsidiary were covered by profits made elsewhere. A system of interlocking share-holding between firms within a keiretsu and restrictions on foreign investment ensured that they were immune from the pressures of "shareholder value" or "corporate raiders" from abroad.

With these advantages Japanese capitalists placed a premium on high

rates of investment, which fuelled the expansion of industrial capacity and with it major economies of scale. The large firms went for market share and a growth in the mass of profits rather than high rates of return on each unit of capital invested. This in turn forced Japanese capitalism to adopt a global strategy.

The nemesis of this form of capital accumulation came in the 1980s. Investment in new plant and equipment reached new heights, expanding capacity massively in most industrial sectors. The boom in the stock market made the companies and banks flush with capital, which in turn fuelled an unprecedented rush to invest in property and land, the prices of which tripled and quadrupled in the late 1980s.

By 1989 Japan was saddled with 11 vehicle manufacturers, five integrated steel makers, ten semi-conductor companies and seventeen major banks; over-capacity writ large.

With this level of over-accumulation and over-capacity a sharp fall in demand created a profit crisis for many firms. In 1989 the stock market plummeted in recognition of the vastly inflated market valuations of companies with poor earnings potential. The Nikkei stock market index lost two-thirds of its value during the next four years.

The collapse in sales, real estate prices and company valuations left the main banks with huge losses on their books. Only now, with some greater openness having been forced upon the banks, is it becoming clear what the scale of the problem is. It is estimated that the banks were saddled with in excess of US\$200 billion non-performing or irredeemable loans!

In these circumstances banks cut back massively on the issuing of new credit prompting the ensuing stagnation between 1992 and 1996. But things only got worse. Most major firms chose to invest their way out of difficulties, borrowing more capital at more expensive rates and adding to capacity rather than cutting back. *The Financial Times* noted last December that:

"Japanese non-financial groups in the Nikkei 300 have collectively failed to achieve a return above their cost of capital since 1990. Since that date they have destroyed value of Y3,000 billion [\$23 billion] a year, a cumulative Y21,000 [\$161 billion] by investing in projects and plants that generated negative returns."

Company profits collapsed by 25 per cent during the first half of 1998. Even those still making money were accepting very low rates of return; the profits of Mitsubishi companies averaged around 4 per cent in 1998 compared to the US company average of 20 per cent.

The result was to turn stagnation into

## THE TIMETABLE OF A CRISIS

- The 1980's saw a massive expansion of loans and capital with costs spiralling upwards and the value of companies and land becoming over-inflated.
- In 1989 the stock market plummeted because of the vastly inflated market. The Nikkei stock market index lost two-thirds of its value during the next four years.
- Since 1990, in an attempt to cut their losses by making more investments, Japanese firms have destroyed value of Y3,000 billion [\$23 billion] a year, a cumulative Y21,000 [\$161 billion] by investing in projects and plants that have generated negative returns.
- The result was to turn stagnation into a recession. Company profits collapsed by 25 per cent during the first half of 1998.
- From late 1997 to late last year capital spending collapsed by 17 per cent.

a full-blown recession during 1997, as investment finally dried up. From late 1997 to late last year capital spending collapsed by 17 per cent.

The sheer length of the downswing in this economic cycle is a result of the way in which government and big business have chosen to deal with the crisis. Their critics in Europe and the USA have long urged resolute action to close down failed banks and firms, encourage mergers, end the job security guarantees for workers and shed labour big time. Naturally they have also demanded that Japanese firms open themselves up to foreign competition and takeover.

But the Japanese government and major firms to date have not been listening. Their chosen strategy has consisted, at different times in the last six years, of currency devaluation since 1995 to boost exports and restore growth this way; lower interest rates so that the cost of capital for firms is now virtually negative, thereby encouraging an "invest your way out of the crisis" mentality; several huge injections of public funds into the economy (tax breaks, infrastructure building) which has even included giving all adults around \$160 to spend and a day off to spend it; effectively nationalising some of the banks most threatened by their bad loan portfolio to keep them afloat and, more recently, injecting government money into the banks to allow them to write off their debts.

All this has had only a limited effect to date and failed to prevent 1998 turning out to be the worst year for Japanese capitalism since the second world war.

The ruling party for much of the post-war period remains in charge and it is tied to the banks and the big construction companies as well as a disproportionately influential rural population. Hence the financial rescue packages the government has put together were, in the main, designed to please these forces.

But, despite the huge injections of public money to expand demand, the

economy has crashed proving once and for all that the problem is not a lack of demand in the economy but a lack of profitability. The banks are running too heavy losses to expand credit; profit margins are too small for the main companies to invest and hence kick start the economy. Even so private consumption has also fallen away as worried workers fear for their jobs and have to defer consumption today so as to save for a future when they may lose their income and be forced to fall back on their own resources because of the absence of a meaningful system of state benefits.

To date, the bail-out of the banks by the government has fallen far short of what most analysts consider necessary. Despite the \$60 billion injected to clear bad loans, at least twice as much again is necessary to clear the debts sufficiently to restore balance sheets enough to resume commercial lending on the scale necessary for a serious upturn to begin.

But the key problem remains the failure of business and government to undertake the brutal restructuring of industry that is needed if their profit margins are to be increased sufficiently to relaunch investments that will make profits rather than destroy value.

Most major firms have resisted mass sackings. That is why unemployment – although at a post-war high today – remains at only 4.4 per cent in the middle of a serious recession, (a level similar to that in the USA at the peak of its 1990s boom). The US magazine *Business Week* was clear what holds big business back:

"... the 7 million surplus workers economists figure large companies are carrying, are destroying Japan Inc.'s profitability."

In other words job queues need to double, at least. Workers' livelihoods need to be sacrificed on the altar of profit. Wages have fallen steadily during 1997 and 1998 by as much as 4 per cent, indicating the lack of trade union militan-

cy and independence of the working class. But to some degree they have traded wage improvement against job security. As the *Financial Times* said:

"Job losses normally involve pushing people into subsidiaries, some early retirement and halting of graduate recruitment."

Compulsory redundancies tend to "affect so called 'office-ladies' – poorly paid female employees who make tea and photocopies." It goes on to complain:

"Japanese companies will do almost anything they can to protect male, unionised full-time employees."

But full-scale mass sackings requires ripping up the whole structure of class compromise and social peace that has underpinned the Japanese model of capital accumulation for the last forty years.

In addition, the big firms have to accept that parts of their conglomerates will have to go to the wall. Although companies like Mitsubishi have started to put in place elements of this and some sell-offs have taken place, it has only scratched the surface.

What does the future hold?

Japan remains the world's second largest economy, an imperialist nation with huge financial reserves built up from years of trade, financial speculation and repatriated profits. These reserves have given the government and industry the luxury of riding out a major economic crisis while not confronting the class barriers that lie in the path of its resolution. There is no doubt that the government could effectively nationalise all the bank debts, for example. But will they summon up the political will to redraw the map of post-war Japan?

If they do not then Japanese capitalism faces further stagnation or low growth in the decade ahead. If they listen to the advice of US and British officials they will liberalise their capital markets, expose themselves to winds of competition and the pressure of "shareholder value" (i.e. squeezing the last drop of profit out of the workforce); they will close excess capacity, press down on wages and double unemployment.

In this case huge confrontations lie ahead; anxiety will give way to resentment among those effected by closures and mass sackings. Resentment can and must turn into action and militancy. Japanese workers will have the opportunity to destroy social peace on their own terms, by rebuilding independent class organisations that fight the company bosses instead of pledging loyalty to them. In turn, a sharpening of the class struggle along these lines will create the best conditions for building a revolutionary socialist party committed to solving Japan's crisis, its worst since world war two, by destroying the capitalist system that has caused it.

# Commission of corruption

THE EUROPEAN Commission, one of the most powerful bodies within the European Union's (EU) towering bureaucratic edifice, is a cesspit of corruption and nepotism.

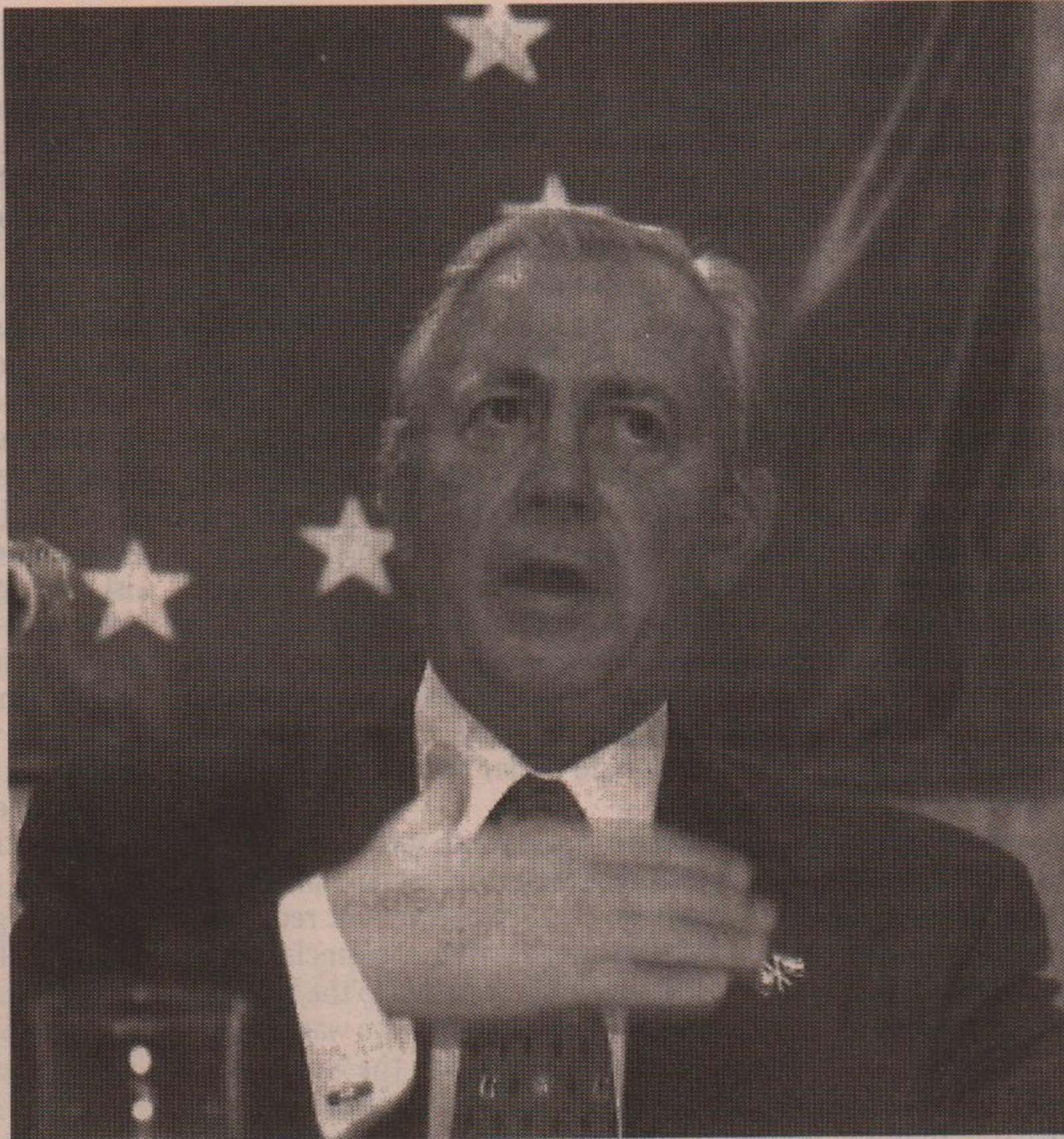
In March the crisis within the Brussels' bureaucracy finally came to a head after a report was published charging the Commission with "fraud, nepotism and mismanagement." The Commission finally resigned.

The scale of this corruption – the report specifically criticised Edith Cresson and Commission President Jacques Santer – is staggering. The Commission has a budget of \$100 billion a year. Some of this money, it now transpires, is being doled out by commissioners to old friends as they got appointed to bogus jobs. Some of it was used by Santer to turn the Commission's security service into what the *Economist* called a "loutish private club for retired Belgian policemen".

But even such "personal" indiscretions pale beside charges of embezzlement on a wider scale. A \$50 million dollar tourist action plan, initiated in 1989 by Santer's predecessor, Delors, was plundered to the tune of millions. There are currently 76 criminal or Commission inquiries underway concerning this mass robbery.

All of this comes from the body that oversees the massive attacks on the working class across Europe that were called for by the Maastricht Treaty "convergence criteria" to prepare the way for the launch of the single currency. While the Euro bosses are busily attacking us, their paid agents in the Commission are busy feathering their own and their friends' nests – covering up for each other lest the scale of corruption is found out.

Over and above the corruption, the



Jacques Santer: "Hand on heart I didn't take a thing"

most startling thing about this affair was that the Commission was virtually untouchable, despite the revelations in the report. Santer initially declared that he was "whiter than white" and refused to resign. Political pressure – and probably the promise that he would escape criminal proceedings – eventually led to all of the Commissioners resigning, whether they were named in the report or not. But the point was not

lost – these men and women who rule over millions of European workers' lives, were entirely unaccountable. Once appointed by the European heads of government they could, literally, do what they liked.

The European Parliament could report on these villains. But it had no control over them. The parliament is powerless. It is a charade. In fact, given the expense accounts and perks

its members enjoy, it could well be part and parcel of the network of budget fund robbery that is clearly a hallmark of the EU.

The unaccountability of these European overlords was underlined at the EU Berlin summit. The summit simply appointed a new head of the Commission, Italy's former prime minister Romano Prodi – fresh from his recent attempts to impose austerity packages on the Italian working class. No election, no proposals for making the Commission accountable, no reforms, nothing. Next business.

The European workers cannot let this pass. The resignation of 20 commissioners, only to be replaced by another 20 individuals within the same system will not change anything.

The European working class should not use the current crisis to encourage anti-European nationalism in individual countries. But we can use it to demonstrate the importance of uniting the European working class against their common enemy – the Euro bosses and their corrupt agents in Brussels.

Part of that unity needs to be a fight against the anti-democratic character of the embryonic "federal state" that is the EU. Consistent democracy dictates that every institution in the EU should be subject to accountability. A major step towards this is the fight for a real Constituent Assembly in Europe, elected by all Europeans over the age of 16 and with full powers over the EU institutions and budget. When the bourgeois heads of government lecture us about "democracy", we should demand such an assembly in Europe and point to their rotten hypocrisy when they refuse to countenance it.

The reason they will not countenance it is because they want a capitalist Europe that can carry through attacks on the working class without having to worry one jot about accountability. And that is why even a constituent assembly will not be enough. We need a European workers' revolution, a socialist united states of Europe, not a capitalist EU of corruption.

On 29 May in Cologne a massive demonstration is being organised by workers across Europe. The demonstration is planned just before the heads of Government Summit of the EU. The demands of the demonstration are for jobs for all and a reduction in working hours. The demonstration follows the mass demo in 1997 in Amsterdam. It is important that trade unionists in Britain raise support for this demonstration and ensure as many workers as possible attend. The demonstration gives us a chance to show the bosses what we think of their Europe and to build real links with other European workers in the struggle for a workers' Europe.

## Cologne 99

Europe-wide Demonstration

Cologne 29 May

against  
unemployment, job insecurity,  
social exclusion and racism

Details from:  
Andy Robertson, Euromarch Liaison  
Committee, Tel: 0191 2220299,  
e-mail: euromuk@aol.com

## GERMANY

# Why Oskar was pushed

Markus Lehner in Berlin reports on the ousting of Oskar Lafontaine

THE SCENE couldn't have been more revealing. As soon as Germany's so-called left-wing finance minister, Oskar Lafontaine, announced his resignation, the bosses were on television, drinking champagne and giving victory salutes. The euro and the German stock market leapt upwards.

Even more amazing, on Wall Street the Stock Exchange broke into wild cheering and the British gutter press had front page headlines hailing the downfall of the man they had dubbed "Red Oskar" and "the most dangerous man in Europe".

This resignation came just two days after an armada of Mercedes limousines packed with top executives from the energy industry headed for the office of Chancellor Schroeder to complain about the exorbitant taxes they would have to pay on their massive reserve funds. This was the high-point of a campaign by German bosses which included threats to leave the country, to slash jobs in industry and to halt all talks with the government if there was not an immediate turnaround in financial policy.

The very next day, Schroeder publicly denounced any "anti-business policy". This was rightly seen as a direct attack on Lafontaine who resigned the next day.

The situation was summed up accurately by an SPD official, in a TV con-

frontation with the head of the industrialists, when he asked the bosses to take over the government directly, thereby relieving the German people of the farce of elections.

So what was the "deadly threat" represented by Lafontaine's policy? The increase in taxes on energy was compensated for by cuts in the employers' payments to the pension funds. The threat to introduce social insurance for "cheap labour" (jobs with a monthly wage below 630 DM, £830) had already been watered down after a ferocious campaign by the bosses. The re-instatement of 100 per cent sick-pay was just a legal formality recognising what the workers had won in action against the bosses and the Kohl government two years ago.

So the bosses' anger was caused by Lafontaine's decision to tax their reserve funds. His mild variant of Keynesianism, trying to boost consumer demand by small increases in income for the workers and boosting investment by a modest lowering of interest rates and the euro, was always combined with a readiness to make compromises in the interest of the "supply side", i.e. the bosses.

Trying to explain a slight turn to the interests of the masses as something the bosses should see as a policy in their interest, ended in a zigzag-policy that was untenable for any length of time. Lafontaine was unable to see that even

this mild turn would have needed a mobilisation of the workers in the SPD and the trade unions to overcome the massive resistance of the bosses.

But this was far beyond the horizon of this reformist leader, despite the undoubted support he had as leader of the SPD and despite the fact that the majority of trade union leaders saw him as "their man" in the government.

The surrender of Lafontaine without any attempt to fight shows the total bankruptcy of contemporary reformism. Deeply shocked by the unwillingness of capital to concede even the mildest of reforms, the one idea that totally fails to enter their minds is to wage a fight against capital and the "interests of business". Even those leaders, like Lafontaine, who shrink from becoming simply the bosses' puppets can do nothing more than complain at the sheer ingratitude of capital. Lafontaine's main "political" statement after his resignation was truly pathetic:

"The heart cannot be traded on the stock market, it beats on the left side".

The rest of the SPD leaders have no problems about becoming the bosses' darlings, of course "in the interest of creating new jobs".

Lafontaine's abject resignation led immediately to a shift to the right within the SPD. This became clear in announcements that financial policy would favour the bosses, e.g. by reduc-

ing the top bands of taxation for large scale enterprises. Since the government is committed to maintaining the "stability criteria" on public spending, this must mean a new wave of attacks on the German working class, especially in the public sector, through massive cuts in public spending and tax increases for the mass of the population.

However, the ousting of Lafontaine could turn out to be a pyrrhic victory for the SPD's right wing. It has considerably weakened the integration of both the trade unions and the bulk of party activists into government policy. An open turn to neo-liberal attacks on the workers will, therefore, lead to more transparent tensions both within the SPD and with the trade unions than would have been likely with the backing of the "left" Lafontaine.

As a result, Schroeder, now party leader as well as chancellor, will not simply copy Blair's policy in Germany. This is not so much because of his different ideological background, as because the German working class during the Kohl era experienced nothing approaching the cumulative defeats of British workers under Thatcher.

The contradiction between the bosses' demands that Germany has to "follow the British example" and the pressure from a still combative working class, which is the essential base of his own party, is a guarantee of coming

political conflicts for Schroeder and the SPD.

However, German workers must learn from the Lafontaine debacle that, in the current period of capitalism, the mildest of reforms in their favour will be faced with fierce resistance from the bosses. Confronted with even the reformist demand to claw back some taxes from businesses' sizeable reserve funds, they ousted an elected, seemingly "powerful" finance minister.

Obviously, it is insufficient to elect a government that decides in a cabinet meeting to tax the rich. They have to be forced to cough up by mass action, by opening the books of the major companies and banks to workers' control, to stringent checks on all payments, financial investments and the flow of capital. Only thus can their threats of evasion, investment strikes and mass sackings be check-mated.

What is true for this demand is true of every substantial measure intended for the improvement of the living conditions for workers, youth, women, immigrants, etc. The present policy of reformism, whether of a Schroeder or a Lafontaine, cannot simply be replaced by a more consistent or courageous substitute type of reformism, but only by a revolutionary class struggle and the building of a revolutionary party on the basis of a transitional programme for working class revolution.

# Youth and the fig

The youth are the future: socialists know that and so do the bosses. That's why they spend huge resources on brainwashing young people into thinking that this is the only system that will work, that there is no alternative. In a three page special on youth and revolution, *Jeremy Dewar* surveys the history of socialist youth movements and *Andy Donovan* looks at the tasks facing socialist youth today.

**I**N EVERY revolution, from the French revolution in the late 18th century through the revolutionary struggles against apartheid in the 1980s to the recent student revolt that overthrew Suharto in Indonesia, youth lead the way.

This is why laws have been created to bar young people from political activity or education. In Britain today, under-18s are denied the right to vote and teachers are not allowed to teach revolutionary politics to school students. Young people who fight back against oppression and exploitation are told to "grow up".

Marxists, in contrast, have always stressed the need to organise young people, defend them from the specific oppression they face, and guarantee them maximum control over their own lives and struggles. Young people rebel against injustice precisely because their outlook has not been tainted by years or decades of disappointment and defeat. They do not accept that bureaucratism, routinism and piecemeal reform is the best that can be achieved. They are not weighed down by family responsibilities that discourage them from giving everything in the fight for justice.

Revolutionary parties have always been overwhelmingly young. In 1907 60 per cent of the Bolsheviks were under 25 and a fifth of them teenagers, while only one third of the Mensheviks were under 25 years old and 5 per cent of them teenagers. Defending his party against the charge that the Bolsheviks had no experience in its ranks, Lenin quoted Frederick Engels:

"Is it not natural that youth should predominate in our party, the revolutionary party? We are the party of the future and the future belongs to the youth. We are the party of innovators, and it is always the youth that most eagerly follows the innovators. We are a party that is waging a self-sacrificing struggle against the old rottenness, and youth is always the first to undertake a self-sacrificing struggle."

**T**he first socialist youth organisation, Young Guard, was founded in Ghent, Belgium in 1886. While Young Guard was formally independent of the Socialist Party, members of the latter took the lead in setting it up and giving it material and moral support. Over the next 20 years, socialist youth organisations blossomed all over Europe: in Holland, Austria, Hungary, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Germany and elsewhere.

As capitalism spread into every sphere of life, youth were drawn, in ever greater numbers, into production. Through the apprentice system, youth became a source of cheap labour, undercutting the wages of "adult" workers.

The capitalist states developed secondary and university education, teaching working class and middle class students to read, write, do basic maths, and consequently formulate and express ideas. A vanguard of critically thinking youth emerged.

The nation state rapidly transformed itself with a huge military and repressive apparatus to fight its interests in the struggle for raw materials, market share and territory against rival bourgeois nation states. The standing armies also played a powerful disciplining role on the working class. Youth suffered particularly badly when conscripted into military service.

The economic struggle to protect young workers, the education of youth in socialist ideas so they could further the fight for political rights and battle against militarism, formed the basic diet of the early socialist youth organisations. And in these activities, the youth showed characteristic courage, imagination and energy.

The Belgian Young Guard developed a number of weekly, monthly and quarterly papers and magazines aimed at different groups. The *Conscript* and *Barracks* were both aimed at young army recruits and sold about 60,000 copies each, in both French and Flemish. Vanguard was directed at a student audience, while *Socialist Youth and Youth is the Future* were more general journals and enjoyed circulations of around 5,000.

Anti-militarist propaganda was systematically mailed to every recruit and handed out in streets, bars and cafes - wherever soldiers fre-

quented. Postcards with anti-army discipline jokes were sent off, along with songbooks and a pamphlet called *The Soldier's Catechism*, which on its own sold 100,000 copies in France and Belgium.

But they did not just want young people to read about socialism: they wanted to start a fight for it. Although they campaigned against conscription, the Belgian Young Guards did not refuse to join the army. The organisation maintained contact with its members once they were called up and helped them organise soldiers' unions.

At the height of this work, 15 separate but federated unions existed in the army, sometimes having up to two-thirds of the soldiers in a unit in their ranks. These unions campaigned against the brutal system of army discipline and called on soldiers to refuse to fire on strikers or protesters when they were ordered to. As they were marched off into the army, demonstrations and rallies were held under the slogan, "You will not shoot!"

The Czech socialist youth staged mock funeral processions - with the support of the soldiers' mothers - headed by symbolic red coffins to remind the young recruits of their class background before they were posted to the barracks. The Swedish young socialists also waged a successful joint campaign with the Norwegians against the threatened war to annex Norway by calling on soldiers "to ignore mobilisation orders, if such are issued, and should they have to use arms, to desist from turning them on the Norwegian people".

The success of this work can be measured by the following. First, the authorities were very harsh in handing out sentences to anti-militarist agitators. Some received sentences of up to three years' jail. Soldiers found guilty of anti-militarism were so badly punished that the duty of administering the torture was itself used as a deterrent for officers who stepped out of line. On the other hand, officers trying to prevent young socialists from handing out leaflets in the streets were also sometimes set upon by older workers.

Secondly, the socialist youth organisations did have a huge effect on army morale and discipline. In his famous pamphlet, *Militarism and Anti-militarism*, (which earned him 18 months in prison in 1907-8) the German socialist Karl Liebknecht wrote:

"On 3 May 1905, 61 men of the 10th Company of the 32nd Infantry Regiment simply left the barracks for a place nearby because of bad food and ill-treatment. In September 1906, the soldiers arranged a demonstration in connection with a suicide of a reservist in the Compiègne garrison, sang the 'Internationale' and insulted the officers. NCOs leaving the infantry school at Saint-Maixent expressed anti-militarist ideas [to the French War Minister!] and explained that they were remaining in the army in order to win over adherents to their ideas. Above all we must draw attention to a number of strikes - for example at Dunkirk, Le Creusot, Longwy and Montceau-les-Mines - when the soldiers called in to intervene declared their solidarity with the strikers."

Finally and most importantly, the anti-militarist campaigns won the socialist youth enormous support from the working class as a whole, and led to a huge influx of youth into their ranks.

The youth did not just echo the political line of the Social-Democratic parties; they joined in the debates. The Russian Revolution of 1905 had a lightening effect on the youth, drawing their organisations to the left. Crucially, they also fought for their right to independence and to form their own socialist youth international. Twenty delegates from the socialist youth organisations of 13 countries founded the International Union of Socialist Youth Organisations (IUSYO) in Stuttgart, Germany in March 1907.

**T**he fight for independence was not so easy. The German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) was the most influential party in the Second International. But it was engaged in a battle between left and right.

A powerful right-wing, led by Eduard Bernstein, took revolution off the "socialist" agenda

and began the fight to turn the SPD into a reformist party. These reformists were particularly strong in the trade unions.

The left, led by Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin, fought the right-wing - over reformism, work among women, the general strike, the fight against the impending world war. The "centre", around party leader Karl Kautsky, often sided with the left at conferences but invariably acted with the right in practice.

German socialist youth organisations faced even more draconian anti-socialist laws than the SPD itself. In 1904 Liebknecht first called for a German youth organisation. By 1906 two socialist youth groups were formed: the Association of Male and Female Workers of Germany (Prussia) and the Union of Free Youth Organisations of Germany or ZJD (Bavaria). Under Prussian law, under-18s were not allowed to join political organisations at all, while Bavaria strictly limited them to "non-political" activities.

Nevertheless, both organisations carried out energetic and fruitful activity in the workplace that brought in many working class members, who were then educated in Marxist politics. Eventually these activities brought the youth organisations into conflict with the bureaucratic trade union leaders and the state.

At the founding conference of the IUSYO, Ludwig Frank from the ZJD and Karl Liebknecht himself were elected onto the International Youth Bureau. A year later in 1908 the Prussian laws were extended across Germany, thus outlawing the ZJD. What would the SPD do?

Robert Schmidt, a right-wing trade union leader, was not going to wait to find out. Eight weeks after the passing of the law, he spoke at a union congress against the need for a separate youth organisation. Schmidt argued that youth should spend their time "eating good sausages" not reading "bad magazines"! If nothing else, the youth learned that the right wing will co-operate with the capitalist state to stitch you up.

While he was in prison Liebknecht penned a defence for the youth, *Working Youth*. But it was to no avail. The SPD conference closed down the ZJD and replaced it with "local youth organisations of an apolitical nature that are run with the agreement of adults". Membership naturally stagnated, then fell. Two years later, the SPD withdrew support for the IUSYO, having manoeuvred the Kautsky supporter Robert Dannenberg into the youth leadership.

**A**longside the Western European socialist youth organisations, young people were entering the fray in Tsarist Russia - but in very different circumstances. Effective socialist and trade union activity was illegal. The youth, as ever, were more repressed than most. However, the Bolsheviks did not sideline youth work. Far from it. The party directly participated in the IUSYO and organised young workers and students in struggle - recruiting the best and swiftly placing them in positions of responsibility. In 1917, the majority of the St Petersburg leadership of the party were under 30 but, as one commentator pointed out, collectively they "had been arrested a total of 44 times and exiled 11 times - proof that they were experienced revolutionary leaders."

Nevertheless, no separate youth organisation was set up. As a student in 1907, Nicolai Bukharin did attempt to build one, but police repression ended the experiment quickly. Throughout this period though, according to historian Pierre Broué, Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya "hoped to see an organisation of young revolutionaries directed by youths themselves, that could risk committing its own errors, which she saw as preferable to seeing it strangled under the tutelage of well-intentioned 'adults'."

At first sight, Lenin's approach to special work among youth appears contradictory. On the one hand, he says to a new group of school students:

"Concentrate your efforts on self-education as the main purpose of your organisation, in order to develop into convinced, steadfast and consistent Social-Democrats. Draw the strictest possible line of demarcation between this extreme-

# ht for revolution

ly important and essential preparatory work and direct political activity."

Lenin also argued that university students - who were often the first section of society to launch militant political protest against Tsarism - should not ignore the differences on the left. In advice which could still act as a guide to students today he wrote:

"[Students] are the most responsive section of the intelligentsia, and the intelligentsia is so called just because they most consciously, most resolutely and most accurately reflect and express the development of class interests and political groupings in society as a whole. Students cannot be an exception to society as a whole - however unselfish, pure, idealistic, they may be - and the task of the socialist is not to gloss over this difference but, on the contrary, to explain it as widely as possible and to embody it in a political organisation."

On the other hand, Lenin was also aware of the special role that youth would play in a revolution: a vanguard role. During the 1905 revolution, he urged the Bolsheviks to discard "propaganda circle" methods of party work and go directly to the newly active youth:

"All we have to do is to recruit young people more widely and boldly...without fearing them. This is a time of war. The youth - the students and still more so the young workers - will decide the issue of the whole struggle...Do not fear their lack of training, do not tremble at their inexperience and lack of development...events themselves will teach them in our spirit."

In particular, Lenin ordered the Bolsheviks not to limit themselves to organising young party members. The natural instinct of youth to take the boldest line of advance in revolutionary upheavals meant that they had to be drawn into the revolutionary movement as quickly as possible:

"Their mood of protest and their sympathy for the cause of international revolutionary social-democracy in themselves suffice, provided the social-democrats work effectively among them."

Whereas the SPD leaders feared that the youth would bring the workers' movement into a violent confrontation with the state machinery, Lenin saw them as essential for this reason. Even an experienced revolutionary party like the Bolshevik Party could hesitate when the moment for insurrectionary activity approached. The 1905 revolution was sparked by a massacre in January that year. Lenin wrote despairingly to party organisers in October:

"It horrifies me - I give you my word - it horrifies me to find that there has been talk about bombs for over six months, and yet not one has been made! And it is the most learned people who are doing the talking...Go to the youth, gentlemen!...Let them arm themselves at once as best they can, be it with a revolver, a knife, a rag soaked in kerosene for starting fires, etc."

The Bolsheviks' specific contribution to socialist youth work can be summed up in these three strictures.

- First, concentrate on Marxist education and involve the youth in all the main political debates of the day, including the disputes between the various tendencies on the left.

- Second, do not restrict youth work to the minority who will all at once accept the party's programme, but seek out a path to the masses.

- Finally, allow events to teach the youth by encouraging them to take the boldest actions against the class enemy - actions which older revolutionaries might shrink from.

The outbreak of war in 1914, the collapse of the Second International and the 1917 Russian Revolution were to fuse these methods with the tradition of mass youth organisations in the west and lay the basis for a new kind of revolutionary youth movement.

The socialist youth organisations were the first to reorganise after the historic betrayal of August 1914, when nearly all the socialist parties of the belligerent countries voted to support "their own" side in the first world war. In April 1915 the IUSYO held an interna-



Karl Leibknecht addresses a youth rally against the war

*The anti-militarist campaigns won the socialist youth enormous support from the working class as a whole, and led to a huge influx of youth into their ranks*

tional conference in Bern, Switzerland. Fourteen delegates from nine countries, representing 34,000 members, attended.

The main debate at Bern was over tactics against the imperialist slaughter. Led by the delegates from Switzerland and Scandinavia, where the adult parties had taken a pacifist stance, the conference voted to campaign for "recognition of the demand for disarmament in the programme of the workers' movement of their countries". Only the Polish and Russian delegates voted against this, preferring the revolutionary defeatist position: turn the imperialist war into a civil war. As a compromise the final resolution aimed to "compel the ruling classes to conclude peace through the resumption of the class struggle by the working class".

The IUSYO also performed a valuable role in resurrecting the socialist movement. Eleven issues of its journal, *Youth International*, were produced before the end of the war, providing the main forum for all the left - including Lenin, Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky - to debate the main issues of the day. By the end of the war, the IUSYO had been won over to the revolutionary position on war, away from pacifism towards "revolutionary defeatism" and support for colonial uprisings.

Of equal importance, during this period the youth sections effectively became independent political organisations. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 spurred the youth across Europe to split from the Social-Democracy. In Austria, the Socialist Young Workers split and renamed themselves the Communist Young Proletarians. The French Committee for Autonomy, the left wing of the socialist youth, split and later formed the kernel of the Communist Party. The Italian Socialists refused to recognise their own Socialist Youth Federation (FGSI) after left winger Amadeo Bordiga had won it to a defeatist position. And in mid-1918 the German ZJD split, with the left wing becoming the Free Socialist Youth (FSJ). After the war, demobbed soldiers joined the FSJ in droves, many of them going on to found the German Communist Party (KPD) and play a leading role in the failed January 1919 insurrection.

At its first conference after the war (held in different locations across Berlin in November 1919 to avoid being broken up by the police), the IUSYO changed its name to the Communist Youth International (CYI) and affiliated to the Communist International (Comintern). As the Comintern itself recognised, the youth sections had "acted as the vanguard in the revolutionary struggle".

The early years of the CYI were marked by two big debates: one political, one organisational, but both intimately connected. Most of the youth had received their political education in revolutionary struggles. It was this which attracted them to the Bolsheviks and the Comintern in the first place. But as the revolutionary tide ebbed across Europe a new perspective and new tactics were needed.

At its Third Congress in July 1921, the Comintern called for a turn to the masses:

"The Communist youth organisations can no longer limit themselves to working in small propaganda circles...In conjunction with the Communist parties and the trade unions, they must organise the economic struggle."

Inevitably many of the best youth saw the turn to mass work as a retreat to reformism. They saw preparation for insurrection as always the order of the day. In 1920, for example, at the height of the Turin wave of factory occupations the FGSI had only two kinds of organisation: military squads and discussion circles. They had no trade union or workplace cells. That contributed to the communists' failure to win their strategy among the working class.

In March 1921 the German working class suffered an even greater defeat, when the mass of workers refused to heed the KPD's call for a revolutionary advance.

This debate, which Trotsky and the Comintern leaders eventually won, also had organisational

consequences for the CYI. The third congress of the Comintern set out the new, correct relationship between the youth and adult sections:

"[Youth] are more easily won to Communist ideas and are quicker to show enthusiasm for revolutionary struggle than adult workers. Nevertheless, the youth movement relinquishes to the Communist parties its vanguard role of organising independent activity and providing political leadership. The further existence of Young Communist organisations as politically independent and leading organisations would mean that two Communist parties existed, in competition with one another and differing only in the age of their membership."

However, the resolution also went on to stress that the youth were encouraged to "participate in the discussion of all political questions" and that "loss of political independence in no way implies loss of organisational independence which is essential for political education."

Over the next couple of years, the CYI sections involved themselves in a wide range of activities that ensured the French, Italian and German youth sections all led non-party youth in mass struggles. The French Young Communists (JC) even led a miners' strike in late 1922 and launched a mass campaign against the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. The FGSI was, though less successfully, at the forefront of the anti-fascist struggle.

Proof of the vitality of the internal life of the youth sections can be found in the Russian organisation, the Komsomol. While the Komsomol's main work was in the Red Army during the civil war, in mass educational and cultural work among the peasantry and the working class and in constructing the new society, the Komsomol also took a lead in protecting young workers' wages and conditions.

Consequently, the Komsomol was drawn into the struggle between the growing Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia and the Trotskyist opposition to it. In December 1923, Pravda reported a meeting of 400 party youth complaining against growing bureaucratisation that the "Party consisted of 40,000 members with hammers and 400,000 with briefcases". A month later, when nine members of the Komsomol leadership accused Trotsky of "dragging in the question of the youth by the hair" into the factional disputes, eight leading Komsomol youth publicly rallied to his defence.

Unfortunately, the CYI did not survive the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern. Tens of thousands of Trotskyist youth were expelled from the Komsomol in 1926. The youth sections - and even the Pioneers movement which organised 10-13 year olds - were ruthlessly used in the battle against "Trotskyism". In 1926, the Yugoslav Trotskyist sympathiser Vujo Vuyovitch was dismissed from his role as Secretary of the CYI and suspended from the party. The CYI became a Stalinist plaything.

Trotsky and the revolutionaries who went on to forge the Fourth International (FI) never lost sight of the importance of the youth. And in their efforts to build a youth movement - despite the terrible persecution and isolation they suffered - they handed on to our generation an understanding of the key things needed for success in this decisive sphere of revolutionary work:

- The need for adult socialists to consciously prioritise youth work, with special papers, tactics and organisations

- The need to allow youth to make their own mistakes and to decide their own practical priorities

- The need to educate young workers and students in socialist politics without patronising them or stifling their tendency to question everything

- The need for youth cadres who can take the party's politics into the wider layers of working class youth, explaining why not every compromise is a betrayal, why not every retreat is a disaster, and why winning a battle is not the same as winning a war.

# The tasks of the communist youth organisation today

If you asked most adults to name a youth organisation they'd probably list the boy scouts or girl guides, church youth groups, and sports clubs. At best these organisations are apolitical, more usually they are authoritarian, even abusive, teaching youth discipline and obedience, indoctrinating them in ideas of individualism, sexism, nationalism or religion. And they're certainly not run by youth!

Communist youth organisations (CYOs) exist precisely to politicise youth: to expose them to revolutionary ideas and organise them for action against the capitalist system, from school walk-outs over cuts all the way up to a revolution. They exist to channel the revolutionary tendencies of youth, their energy and idealism, into the fight to change society completely.

Wherever possible CYOs should be organisationally separate and independent from the party that sets them up. Youth should run the organisation themselves: lead it, edit its publications and make their own decisions on its actions and campaigns.

This is the kind of organisation Workers Power has set up with Revolution. We set out to create an organisation which was rooted in the real conditions youth live under today and related to the real aspirations of young people.

British capitalism still uses youth as a form of cheap, unorganised labour. The enormous growth in Higher and Further Education students has not put an end to the real problem of lower youth wages, as many students have to work their way through college. The fact that Labour can get away with setting a lower minimum wage for under-21s while excluding under-18s from any protection is a sign of the deep-seated nature of youth oppression: super-exploitation of young workers is accepted as a fact of life.

The New Deal has also been aimed primarily at workers under 25 to force them off the dole and into the lowest paid jobs. Income Support is already denied to under-18s. So youth have a special position in society – new to the adult world of work, often still in education, financially dependent on their parents, if not still psychologically dependent on them.

Finally, most trade unions have conspicuously refused to launch a real campaign to recruit young workers. When the general union, the GMB, "launched" its Rage Over Age Rates (ROAR) campaign last year Revolution members turned up, delegated from their union branches, only to see the bureaucrats hurriedly close it all down rather than allow young workers to run the campaign themselves. Not a roar, but a whimper.

So Revolution launched its own campaign – Equalize! – to fight the youth rate. With theatre on the tubes, using costumes and a parody of the New Deal ad ("Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to tell you about a new government programme to address youth poverty..."), leaflet invasions of McDonalds and a lobby of Peter Mandelson, where a banner was dropped dubbing the DTI "Ministry for Low Pay". Equalize! is an in-your-face campaign sharply counterposed to the union leaders' quiet lobbying behind doors. As a result it attracted the support of young workers and school students.

It is important for the CYO to develop tactics that appeal to young people's imagination: one reason why youth do not bother to join unions or get active in them is that they are boring and bureaucratic. For example, in Manchester an employment agency was supplying scabs to break the Tameside careworkers strike, so Revolution members led an occupation of it in

order to pressure it into shutting off the tap of scab workers. Not only did it work, the strikers did the same and scared off another agency!

To underscore the economic discrimination and super-exploitation of the youth the state possesses an array of repressive laws. You can't vote if you're under 18. The sexual rights of youth, especially young women, lesbians and gays, are massively restricted. Access to abortion, contraception and sex education is denied to many under-16s through the two-doctor ruling and religious zealots in control of schools and health authorities. The age of consent outlaws sex for under-16s (and gay men under 18).

Youth – especially black youth – are harassed daily by the police, through stop-and-search, anti-drug and drinking age laws, and by the clamp-down on raves and free parties through the Criminal Justice Act. Fast-track sentencing, curfews, the development of youth prisons like Medway Detention Centre are all designed to cope with the increased numbers of young offenders criminalised by the alienating environment of New Labour's Millennial Britain.

Here too, the CYO needs to develop new tactics and campaigns to tap into the discontent in the schools and on the estates. Take the drugs issue, for example. By developing a worked out

security and cleaning committees, raising funds outside and writing an occupation bulletin.

The work that this involves also provides valuable education for the young comrades in the political differences between communism, centrism and reformism. Because the Revolution groups are leading their own campaigns – without the direct input of older comrades – mistakes can be made, but these are secondary to the experience gained and lessons learnt and remembered.

Unlike other student left wing campaigns and groups, Revolution actively encourages students, young workers and school students to work together and take up issues and campaigns of a wider political nature. A radical student may refuse to pay their fees, but if they are to become communists they need to be drawn into groups dominated by local working class youth, focusing on issues affecting the class as a whole.

As well as harnessing youth's energy and idealism in the day-to-day struggles of the working class and oppressed, the CYO also aims to win them to revolutionary politics. But many a sub-actively revolutionary youth does not want to

that stood for something besides ourselves, we launched its first national conference in November 1997. Over half those attending, debating and voting on policy proposals were not members of Workers Power, and most of those who weren't already Revolution members joined it. But this step forward had only become possible after two years of building up Revolution as an independent organisation. As Trotsky remarked in relation to youth work:

"We cannot establish with one blow or with one resolution the authority of the party. We cannot create the authority for the party with one resolution...if we approach the young comrades with a general conception such as this: 'Boys and girls, you acted very well against the Socialist Party because it was a bad party; but we are a good party. Don't forget it. You must not oppose us.' How can you convince them with such a general conception? It is very dangerous....Then they will answer, 'You are bureaucrats, no more, no less.'"

An important means of integrating more and more young members in Revolution was through the writing and production of the magazine. Production weekends provide a variety of jobs for youth at all levels of their political development, from writing and editing articles through to proof-reading and printing. Regular political meetings during the process ensures that decisions on what line to take (e.g. in a war) are discussed collectively.

The result is a magazine which is written by youth, for youth. The enthusiasm to sell it and put its ideas into practice is all the greater because of this, and its high sales are proof of this. Once the magazine was established in this way, flags, t-shirts, banners, posters and graffiti campaigns naturally follow as youthful creativity takes over.

Youth are also instinctively internationalist. Revolution recognised this from the word go. They launched a campaign against British Petroleum's support for death squads in Colombia, by sneaking into a BP-sponsored theatre competition in London, unfurling a banner and chanting "BP kills for oil!". Petrol stations, BP-sponsored events affecting youth, like school awards ceremonies where the head of BP was speaking – all were targets for action drawing in school students, young squatters and young workers. Besides putting pressure on BP, it was a great way of having an ongoing dialogue about imperialism, the power of the multinationals and the subordination of the third world. It also put Revolution members alongside militant trade unionists involved in the campaign like the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee and the oil workers' union of Colombia itself.

Revolution organised a coach to Amsterdam for the Euromarch in 1997 and met up with Revolution members from France and Austria (groups started up at the same time by Workers Power's sister organisations in the LRCI) and had a big vocal multilingual youth contingent, and partied away the night in a warehouse. This was followed up by a European camp in summer 1998 involving all the Revolution groups across Europe.

The next step is to build Revolution as an international youth organisation. With new Revolution groups set up in the Czech Republic and Germany and individual members in Sweden and Ireland, the opportunity to launch a World Revolution organisation clearly exists. Just as the 20th century began with revolutionary youth reaching out across the borders of Europe, so will it end.

Youth are the future and the future is red!

## REVOLUTION

### National Conference 1999

April 24-5, Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19

**Sessions include: Youth are the Future; Open the Doors: Immigration and the Fight Against Racism; Police and the British State; Dictators and Democrats: The Third World's Struggle Against Imperialism; Plus election of REVO's National Council;**

**Phone 0181 981 0602 or write to REVO at BCM 7750 London, WC1N 3XX or e-mail revo@workerspower.com**

position on recreational drugs – for the legalisation and a state monopoly of all drugs so the gangsters are driven out, for free and confidential medical help and treatment for dependants and for scientifically-based education and quality control – huge numbers of youth can be mobilised for a progressive cause.

By pointing out the hypocrisy which enables breweries and tobacco firms to make billions out of mind-altering and dangerous substances, a CYO can introduce this new audience to anti-capitalist ideas as well. On the mass demonstration in Hyde Park in 1998, organised by The Independent, Revolution put across this simple message at the rally and drew wide support, partly because it was the most radical speech of the day and partly because it was the only one delivered by a young person.

Revolution also consciously orientates towards young women, lesbians and gays, and black youth, all of whom suffer a double oppression. Through special campaigns, around the Stephen Lawrence inquiry for example, and special propaganda Revolution is reaching out to the youth who have least to lose.

One area where Revolution has been able to work with organised and semi-organised youth is in the colleges. In student struggles we've stressed occupations and campus action committees as opposed to the careerist-dominated politics of the NUS. Manchester Revolution took the lead in getting the various left groups to work together and plan joint actions – including a successful occupation. London Revolution followed up this success by taking part in the 16-day University of East London occupation, holding political meetings inside, volunteering for the

join a revolutionary party yet, is wary of the party being elitist or domineering, or may simply not be ready to submit to the discipline that comes with membership. We don't want to lose these young fighters for communism, so what do we do? Revolution set out from the beginning to build a CYO that could accommodate just such people. For that, Revolution needed to:

- educate youth in Marxism;
- be independent;
- allow young people to find their own level of commitment;
- provide lively social activities;
- provide regular actions – stunts, protests, paper sales and fly-posting, etc.

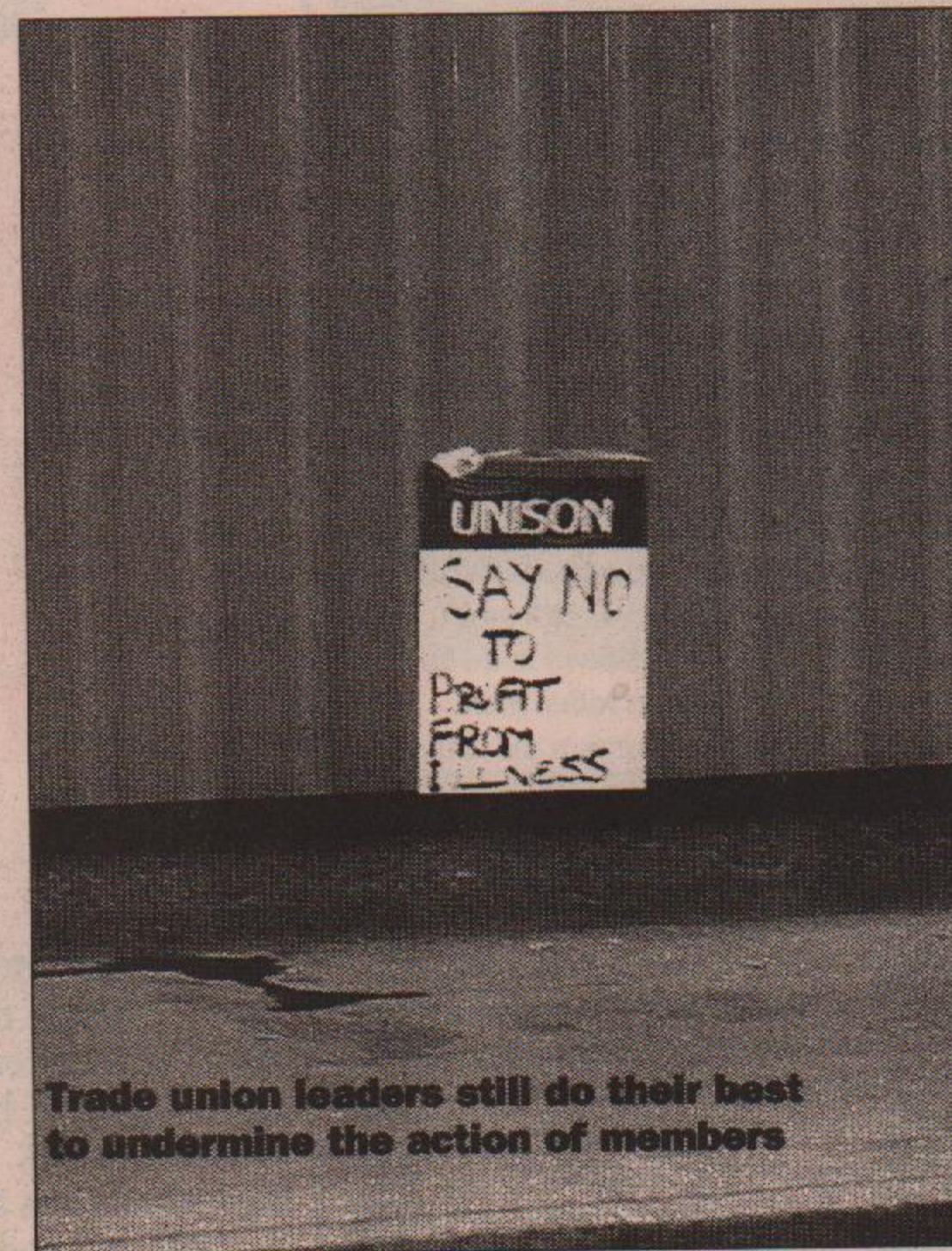
If we want to train up the next generation of leaders, the best way to do this is give them the experience of leading their own organisation: organising meetings and actions, writing and editing a paper, agitating and leading struggles. This demands organisational independence. As Lenin recognised:

"The middle aged and the aged often do not know how to approach the youth, for the youth must of necessity advance to socialism in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances than their fathers. Incidentally, that is why we must decidedly favour organisational independence of the Youth League, not only because the opportunists fear such independence, but because of the very nature of the case. For unless they have complete independence, the youth will be unable either to train good socialists from their midst or prepare themselves to lead socialism forward."

Once Revolution had attracted enough members to become a truly independent organisation

# The trouble with trade unions...

Have you ever felt that your union leaders were not quite with you? *Kate Foster* explains the roots of the bureaucracy and why it is so resistant to "political" trade unionism



**M**ANY WORKERS will recognise Karl Marx's description of unions as "schools of struggle" when they recall their first picket line: organising yourselves, attempting to cover all the entrances, arguing with other workers, learning who can be trusted, squaring up to the cops. No trade unionist forgets the first victory: seeing a hated manager silenced and cowed, workers going into work confident and looking forward to the next battle.

Yet the experience of organising a union can also be drab, frustrating and disheartening: union bureaucrats telling you your strike is over; endless small meetings, mired in routine and governed by petty rules; seeing the union leaders wolfing their meat and two veg at the poshest hotel in town at union conference.

The experience of trade unions reflects the nature of the unions in the class struggle: they are contradictory.

Unions can take the working class forward – they are an essential weapon in our armoury against the bosses. But they are also used to defuse struggles and restrict the fighting capacity of the class.

Throughout their history the unions have been faced with the dilemma of fighting within the system or fighting to smash it.

In many countries, even to this day, unions begin as illegal organisations. Historically in Europe they arose as workers realised that their strength lay in collective organisation. A single worker could not resist the demands of the bosses, but combining together with other workers gave them strength. In Britain, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these combinations were short, sporadic and illegal. Workers organised themselves around immediate demands on the bosses. As capitalism developed, so too did the unions.

By the mid-19th century the unions had become more sophisticated. Unions fought for the legal right to exist and became more permanent formations. Engels wrote: "As schools of war, the unions are unexcelled."

For Marx and Engels unions played an important part in the development of class consciousness. They argued that the working class because of its position in production, that of wage labourer, constituted a distinct social class. It was a class "in itself". However, workers did not automatically see their common interests. As wage labourers, receiving individually from the capitalist their own wage, they appear to be atomised. Yet to resist the bosses they must find collectivity, solidarity and political class consciousness – the working class must become a class "for itself". Organising in a union could be a step towards this, Marx and Engels said.

But the early revolutionary socialists were also aware of the limitations of trade unionism. Unions by their very nature tended to limit themselves to the economic class struggle. Based in the workplace, the spontaneous demands of the unions were around jobs, pay and conditions – economic rather than political demands. Limited to fighting against the individual capitalists and not fighting to get rid of capitalism itself, meant that the unions were constantly having to defend themselves as the capitalist's profits rose or fell.

As Rosa Luxemburg later wrote, limiting the struggle to economic demands meant the unions were condemned to repeat the Greek myth of "the labour of Sisyphus" – the man condemned for eternity to attempt to push a great boulder up the hill only to see it roll down again every evening. Anyone who has battled with management over

cuts or pay will recognise the analogy.

But there was another danger. Marx pointed out that unless the working class could be won to revolutionary politics the unions would become influenced by another kind of politics – the politics of the bourgeoisie. In particular, trade unionism's self proclaimed goal of fighting for "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" accepted the terms of the capitalist wages system. It did not seek to abolish that system.

Marx argued that it was not possible for unions to remain politically neutral. And as capitalism and the unions matured, he was proved correct.

The political ideas of "pure trade unionism", focused around economic demands, inevitably evolved into reformism. The belief that it is possible to reform capitalism, to make it more amenable to the working class, to fight the bosses for concessions but not to overthrow them, flows from limiting the class struggle to purely economic, and frequently merely sectional, demands.

Reformist politics were lodged in pure trade unionism. With the development in the late 19th century of a distinct "labour aristocracy" a material base for a reformist bureaucracy emerged in the unions, as well as reformist political parties linked to this bureaucracy.

As capitalism expanded in the newly industrialised nations of Europe and the United States, massive profits were made from exploiting the workers and the new markets of the under-developed countries. Imperialist capitalism was born. Colonial super-profits allowed capitalism to pay certain groups of skilled workers higher wages and grant them better conditions. Skilled labour shortages allowed some workers for push for and defend their relatively privileged status. The gap between the highest and the lowest paid workers grew rapidly, between the labour aristocracy and the masses.

In a letter to William Morris, Engels described the condition of certain workers as improving significantly since 1848:

"The best proof of this is the fact that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been with them but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final."

This development coincided with the creation of legal and more permanent trade unions, able to pay some officials to work specifically for the union. These union leaders and officials were to become the means by which bourgeois ideas and interests were introduced into the labour movement. This bureaucracy's very existence depended upon, and remains dependent upon, the continuation of capitalism. The bureaucrats become arbiters between capital and labour, but always accepting the terms of reference of capitalism itself.

By the time of their deaths Marx and Engels recognised that for the working class to move forward new types of unions would have to be built – class struggle unions:

"Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interests of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves, and acting as, the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look

carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the workers at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions."

Before such unions could be built the working class had to learn a bloody lesson. The German workers' movement grew rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century and soon overtook the British unions. Membership of the unions rose from a quarter of a million in the 1890s, to 2.6 million in 1912. But while formally committed to Marxist politics, the German unions became a breeding ground for reformism.

Rosa Luxemburg foresaw the danger but she was not able to avert it. Even Lenin later admitted that the rest of the revolutionary workers' movement had been slow to recognise the danger. The leadership of the unions and the German Social Democratic Party were to betray the whole working class. At the outbreak of the World War in 1914 they sided with the bosses in the war and millions of workers were sent to their deaths in defence of capitalism. The British unions and the Labour Party did the same. The reformist character of pure trade unionism revealed itself as a bloody defender of capitalist order. The need for the rank and file of the unions to organise themselves to overthrow the bureaucracy also became crystal clear.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, however, showed the alternative. It raised the real possibility of the revolutionary transformation of the unions on condition that a revolutionary workers party – fighting capitalism on every front, not just on economic questions – could be built and could win leadership inside the working class. As early as March 1920 one of the Bolshevik leaders, Zinoviev, was calling for a new international of trade unions to counter the rotten reformism of the old pre-war unions.

In Moscow in 1921 the First Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions took place. They agreed an action programme which still reads like a breath of fresh air to anyone stuck in the claustrophobic bureaucratic structures of a union today.

The action programme calls for workers to come together into industrially based unions to overcome the craft divisions that might exist in one factory or workshop. They call for factory committees and for such committees to be truly representative of all workers. Despite the success of the Bolsheviks in leading the Russian Revolution they oppose attempts by any one party to monopolise control:

"The factory committee must be elected by the workers engaged in the given enterprise, independently of the political creed they profess. The task of the supporters of the Red International of Trade Unions is to involve all the workers of a given enterprise in the election of the representative organ. The attempt to elect the factory committee exclusively from adherents of the same party, and the casting aside of the broad, non-party rank and file workers, should be severely condemned."

The RILU issued a rallying call to the workers of the world for every factory to become "a citadel of revolution". Demands within the action programme were to oppose any job loss, to open the books of any employer claiming that they could not afford to keep people on and to occupy any factory threatened with closure. The RILU warned of the potential of the bosses

attacking any sign of militancy amongst workers and called for strike militias and self defence squads. Opposing all attempts to divide workers, the RILU called for full equality for women workers. Aware of the potential danger from the bureaucracy, they were for breaking any cosy collective agreement with the bosses. They called for workers' control, not collaboration. The Bolsheviks in the RILU warned against limiting the trade union struggle and pointed to the importance of political leadership:

"Every economic struggle is also a political one; that is a general class struggle. Such a struggle can only acquire a really revolutionary character, no matter how many workers it may involve, and be carried through for the greatest benefit of the entire working class, when the revolutionary trade unions act in perfect unity with the Communist Party in each respective country. To divide the theory and practice of the struggle of the working class into two distinct parts is extremely detrimental."

The experience of the Russian Revolution and the formation of the RILU had an electrifying effect upon the unions within Europe. In Britain the 1920s saw political strikes aimed at stopping the British intervention against the revolution in Russia, massive strikes in the mines and in engineering and the formation of the Communist Party-led Minority Movement, a rank and file movement initially launched to challenge the bureaucracy. The upsurge in the unions culminated with the General Strike of 1926. But by then the revolution had been undermined by the growing cancer of Stalinism and the CP delivered up the British workers to the leaders of the TUC who duly sold them out.

Any examination of the unions of today will reveal that we can still recognise the limitations highlighted by Marx, Engels, Luxemburg and Lenin. We are frequently told that politics should be kept out of the union. Unions intend to discipline any member caught with a political leaflet or placard on the minimum wage demo in Newcastle this month. Workers remain divided in separate unions in many workplaces. In schools it is a common occurrence for there to be five different unions. And union fat cats think nothing about sabotaging each other in the fight for single union "sweetheart" deals with management.

The bureaucracy still clings to our backs like a bloated leech. They try to sell us credit cards, rather than fight for our future. And our leaders continue to sell us out. The UCLH strike called off by the Unison leadership (see page 4) is just the most recent example.

The task of transforming the unions still confronts us today. But we can learn important lessons from the history of our movement. One of the key lessons is that such a transformation cannot take place without a political struggle. And while fighting, rank and file controlled unions would be an enormous step forward for the working class, they are no substitute for a revolutionary workers' party if they are to be able to play their part in the task of overthrowing capitalism.

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

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

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

OCTOBER 1917: The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.

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

**IMPERIALISM** is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

**WORKERS POWER** is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

As Unionists demand the IRA decommission its weapons, killings of nationalists show that:

# Security forces back loyalist death squads

**L**AST MONTH Rosemary Nelson, a prominent nationalist solicitor in Lurgan, was murdered by loyalist paramilitaries. She was blown up because she was an outspoken critic of the RUC and had outraged them time and again by her successful defence of anti-unionists who have been intimidated, arrested and tortured by Northern Ireland's prejudiced-soaked Protestant police force. Her death follows that of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane ten years ago.

Rosemary Nelson regularly received loyalist death threats. She was subject to harassment from the RUC and several of her clients had been told by police officers that she would be murdered. The bomb which killed Rosemary Nelson was far more sophisticated than anything previously produced by the loyalist Red Hand Defenders who claimed responsibility for her death.

Speaking at the local RUC barracks at the end of a protest march, Sinn Fein councillor John O'Dowd asked, "If you are looking for the answers to the murders of Rosemary and Pat Finucane, ask here".

Such is the suspicion of RUC involvement in her murder that police officers from the Kent police force have had to be brought in to investigate her death.

Nelson is the latest in a long line of anti-unionists who have been brutally dispatched by loyalist sectarian thugs who can only operate with open support of RUC officers.

The *Sunday Times* published a confession in March by ex-RUC Sergeant, John Weir, who admitted that the RUC were involved in the following incidents:

- a bomb attack on Tully's bar in Whitecross, Armagh
- an attempted bombing of Renaghan's bar in Clontibret
- killing two Catholics at the Step Inn in Keady
- passing (decommissioned) machine guns to the UDA and UVF
- killing John Francis Green near

- Castleblaney with UVF hit-men
- killing shopkeeper William Strathearn
- the Dublin/Monaghan bombings, which killed 33 people.

The same weekend, the *Sunday Tribune* and *Ireland on Sunday* revealed British forces colluded in 12 killings in Fermanagh, the killing of Councillor Patsy Kelly in Trillick, Co Tyrone and the killing and cover-up of Dundalk man, Seamus Ludlow.

In the recent BBC TV series on the Loyalists, Bobby Philpott, a senior member of the UDA, told BBC reporter Peter Taylor that he had received large amounts of secret documentation from the RUC, the British army and the Ulster Defence Regiment (now Royal Irish Regiment). The documents contained detailed information on suspects, including names, addresses, photographs, details of vehicles, "even the colour of their socks and jumpers". To date the RUC have admitted that over two thousand of their files containing the personal details of nationalists are "missing" and in the hands of loyalist death squads.

Nelson's murder came at a time when the battle between Unionists and Sinn Fein over IRA decommissioning is coming to a head. The Easter deadline for the elected Assembly to appoint its ruling Executive is being threatened by Unionist attempts to rewrite the Good Friday Agreement of last year and force the IRA to start handing over their weapons before Sinn Fein will be allowed into the Executive. David Trimble, the leader of the UUP, has a fragile hold over his party's Assembly members, a majority of whom will defect in practice to the Paisley DUP bigots who want to bring the Assembly down and carry on lording it over the nationalists as per usual. But as Sinn Fein has rightly said:

"The UUP demands on decommissioning are outside the agreement. Sinn Fein cannot meet these demands."

The last days of March witnessed a massive campaign from Blair, the Irish Prime Minister Aherne, and President Clinton to pressure Sinn Fein for some concession over weapons.

Even the SDLP leader John Hume called on the IRA to start disarming: "We spelt out very clearly that if a load of Semtex was left on a hillside... that would obviously be very helpful."

Sinn Fein/IRA are absolutely right not to surrender weapons to the RUC and British government. To do so would mark nationalist surrender to the sectarian six-county state in the north. The British couldn't get such a surrender by military means. They must certainly not be allowed to get it by political means.

Nelson's murder shows that the nationalist population will be picked off at will so long as the RUC, British army and loyalist paramilitaries continue to monopolise the bulk of armed power in the six counties. The real solution lies in disarming Unionism and loyalism. It lies in forcing the withdrawal of the British troops whose presence underwrites sectarian Unionist rule. It lies in giving Ireland as a whole real self-determination.

For most of this century, since the partition of Ireland by Britain and the Unionists, the Orange state has used its arms, paramilitaries and security forces to deny Catholics civil rights, treat them as an "enemy within", deny them jobs an decent housing. Only when the anti-Unionists said "enough!" and hit back in the 1960s and 1970s and fought fire with fire, have the British and Unionists even thought about making reforms.

As *An Phoblacht* notes: "The paramilitary RUC, and all the

crowns forces that colluded with loyalist death squads in the assassination of Pat Finucane, those that plotted and carried out Rosemary Nelson's murder and who killed hundreds of nationalist with their legally-held guns, must all be disbanded."

We have always opposed the disarming of the nationalist population for this reason. The apparatus of unionist power, privilege and patronage, backed by loyalist thugs and supervised by the RUC, is the problem; not the lack of IRA decommissioning.

However Nelson's death also shows that a guerrilla army picking off selected targets in the armed forces continues to be no substitute for a community that organises its own armed defence. Today this is not a matter of each nationalist household being armed to the teeth but of each estate and nationalist area having a permanently on guard, trained and visible militia that can prevent loyalists moving around planting bombs and the RUC giving cover and intelligence for it. If Sinn Fein and the IRA built such a permanent militia — accountable to the nationalist masses — there is no telling how many could have been saved from the death squads.

Unfortunately, Sinn Fein have no plans for this type of organisation. They call for the disbanding of the RUC; but in practice they await the report of Chris Patten on the RUC to be issued this summer. They place their hopes on a reformed and renamed RUC with many more nationalist recruits but which will still leave the region with a traditional police force, above and opposed to the local community.

As the marching season gets underway the Orange bigots will be taking to the streets, screaming their anti-Catholic songs, forcing themselves through Catholic neighbourhoods. They will, as usual, incite murder and mayhem against Catholics and under RUC cover they will strike once more at anti-unionists. Never has self-defence of the nationalist community been more necessary.

### WHAT WE CALL FOR:

- Disband the RUC and RIR!
- For mass self-defence of the nationalist community!
- British troops out now!

## FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 0181 981 0602

**Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International**

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_**

### JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
- Please send more details about Workers Power

**Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tel no: \_\_\_\_\_**