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- Modernising welfare
- Governing for the many
- A vibrant democracy
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IRELAND

Unionists and government put the squeeze on IRA

The IRA are being set up as the wreckers of the Irish peace process.

As we go to press the de Chastelain Commission is about to report to Tony Blair that no IRA weapons have been handed over. The Ulster Unionists, in an arbitrary move without any basis in the Good Friday peace deal, have set 12 February as the deadline for the start of the weapons' handover.

Peter Mandelson is ready to suspend the infant Northern Ireland Executive and restore direct rule. Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams has warned that if this happens the IRA will cease all co-operation with the de Chastelain Commission and will surrender no arms.

Whatever the outcome of these latest manoeuvres, they demonstrate the problems at the very heart of the Irish peace process.

It is a peace without justice and therefore it is a peace under permanent strain.

The Unionists are determined to force surrender on the Irish republican movement. Their insistence on decommissioning and the February deadline is designed to achieve just that. It is to be their pay-off for countenancing power-sharing with nationalists.

For them, power-sharing can only be on the basis of victory over the

republican enemy. That is why the IRA must not hand over a single weapon.

It is Unionist intransigence which stands in the way of peace, not IRA weapons.

The Unionists, who can only speak in the language of hatred and bigotry, complain that they have, as one leader put it, "been steamrollered and walked over time and time again".

Blair and Mandelson take this sort of talk seriously because they share the Unionists' goal of forcing an IRA surrender. They will insist on the Unionists' 12 February deadline even though it lacks the slightest legitimacy in terms of the agreements signed up to by all

parties.

Far from being steamrollered the Unionists are getting it all their own way:

- a built-in majority in the assembly
- a veto over the constitutional future of Northern Ireland
- a police force that, despite cosmetic reforms, defends the Protestant ascendancy
- a built-in set of privileges in the labour and housing markets
- a guarantee of their security by the occupying British army.

Compare this to the "concessions" to republicanism - cross-border bodies on tourism, a minority space at the

table of local government, and a handful of minor social and political reforms that do not take them one step nearer a united Ireland.

Whether the peace process founders or totters on from this latest crisis towards a new one come the summer marching season, one thing is clear. Real peace can only come with real justice which means:

- Disband the RUC and RIR
- British troops out of Northern Ireland now
- For the right of Ireland as a whole to determine its future
- Forward to a 32-county workers' republic.

IN BRIEF

Police in Leeds quickly identified one brutal attack as racially motivated last month. In the early hours of 16 January a 19-year-old Asian student, **Surfraz Najieb**, suffered serious injuries including a shattered eye socket, broken leg, nose and ribs. The injuries came after a group of eight white men, shouting racist abuse, chased him and two mates through the city centre before pinning him down and kicking him repeatedly. Police made several arrests for this racist assault, including two stars of the Leeds United football team. **Lee Bowyer**, who had previously faced a violent disorder charge after rampaging through a McDonald's on the Isle of Dogs, faced questioning along with **Jonathan Woodgate**, an England under-21 international. The pair have not yet been charged but are due to appear at a local police station in March. The case against them looks damning. Since the incident Leeds manager, **David O'Leary**, clearly urged by the club's board, has used both players. If the Professional Footballers' Association is to make any contribution to eradicating racism among football supporters, it should be demanding the suspension of both players until the case is resolved.

Two leading trade unionists were arrested in late January by armed police in the African state of Togo. **Tetevi Norbert Gbkpi-Benissan**, general secretary of **UNSI**, the country's independent union federation, and **Pierre Allaga-Kodegui**, head of the **Togolese Teachers' Federation**, have been detained on trumped-up charges of orchestrating "an international plot against the Togolese state." The arrests stem from a strike by the nation's secondary school teachers beginning last October that culminated in the December murder of a high school student after her arrest during a student protest in support of the teachers' demands. The teachers' union and **UNSI** had convened a "people's trial" of the Togolese authorities in connection with the student's death. Protest faxes, demanding their immediate release to: **Mr Etienne Gnassingbe Eyadema**, President of Togo, Lome Togo, 00 228 21 1898/3204.

Britain's chief prison inspector, **Sir David Ramsbotham**, has issued a damning report about filthy, sub-human conditions inside **Kent's Rochester prison**. **Ramsbotham** voiced strongest "concern at the poor treatment of asylum seekers, immigration detainees and other foreign nationals who form almost half the prison population." Racist "jokes" from screws, blood-stained wash basins and 23-hour lock-ups formed the routine for men convicted of no crime. Release the Rochester detainees. Close down all immigration detention centres!

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JACK STRAW

JACK STRAW fought for months to try and water down the government's new anti-racist bill.

The Home Secretary went right up to the wire in his efforts to exempt the police and the prison service from the race relations (amendment) bill. Only when the bill got to the House of Lords – where black and Asian peers threatened a damaging rebellion – did Straw back down.

JACK STRAW is pressing ahead with plans to send more than 6,000 Kurds back to Turkey after campaigners failed to convince the Court of Appeal to overturn his decision to deport **Abdullah Turgut**, who has been in Britain since 1993.

Three judges said Straw had acted within his powers, despite hearing appalling evidence of torture and repression of Kurdish oppositionists. **Turgut** fled Turkey when he was called up for the military.

He said he did not want to be forced to fire on his fellow Kurds. Kurds refusing conscription face three years in jail followed by a term of military service.

But keeping NATO member Turkey happy and cutting the costs of caring for refugees were more important to Jack Straw than defending human rights or protecting victims of tyranny.

Friend of racists ...

Nearly seven years since the murder of **Stephen Lawrence**, after the Lawrence family's long campaign to expose institutional racism in the police,

Straw wanted to exclude key government services from the new laws against indirect discrimination. This would have allowed endemic racism to continue unchallenged in the police as well as other public organisations like the prisons, the probation service, the NHS and the department of social security.

Since the Macpherson report into the Lawrence scandal exposed institutional racism, the police have been running a subtle backlash campaign in the media. The report, police spokesmen say, has "confused" officers so much that they no longer feel "confident" about using their stop and search powers. The conclusion we are meant to draw is sim-

ple, and shows how little police attitudes have really changed. If the police are not allowed to discriminate against black people, the line goes, then crime will rise.

Straw's attempted get-out from the new bill would have gone a long way towards soothing the police chiefs and their indignant, racist rank and file. But that's not all it would have done. It would've protected key institutions of the state from criticism for racist discrimination.

Now Straw's exclusion clause has been dropped, the establishment will have to find some other way to protect themselves. As ever, Jack will be on hand to help.

... enemy of justice

JACK STRAW'S bill restricting jury trials strips away one of our most important democratic safeguards. Around 20,000 defendants every year will be denied the right to be tried by ordinary people. Instead, a magistrate will decide if they are guilty or not.

The government's own research admits that this will mean black people are more likely to be convicted in court.

The magistrates will be unchecked by a jury in a whole range of "middle-ranking" offences, including theft. Appointed overwhelmingly from the business classes and the legal profession, they treat the poor with suspicion and tend to be biased in favour of people in authority. Research shows magistrates give much greater weight to evidence from the police than juries do.

Once Jack Straw knew all of this. When the last Tory government suggested cutting back on jury trials, Straw stood up in the Commons and attacked them for undermining freedom. Now he is implementing Tory policy.

The rich and powerful feel a natur-

al hatred for the jury system because it allows ordinary people a say in the judicial process. Much more reliable, they think, to leave the job to their privileged friends in the unelected judiciary. Straw's changes will be welcomed in high places – and at the Treasury, where they will save over £100 million.

But Straw has gone so far that even within the establishment he is meeting opposition. Blairite barrister **Helena Kennedy** QC has denounced the new restrictions.

The Law Society complained bitterly that Straw was not prepared to listen to argument, and responded to his opponents with abuse (calling them "woolly Hampstead liberals").

But from the trade unions there has been an extraordinary silence over a Labour Home Secretary stripping away one of our oldest freedoms. The union leaders' non-aggression pact with Blair means Straw's injustices go largely unchallenged within the labour movement:

- restore full rights to jury trial
- elect all judges and magistrates.

A blood-thirsty dictator gets treated with kid gloves because of his age and infirmity. Meanwhile, in Droitwich, Worcestershire, magistrates sent 81-year-old **Ellen Copson** to prison for two weeks. Her crime? Non-payment of £13 a week rates. **Copson** had fallen into arrears of £2,700, and said she couldn't pay it off from her £87 a week income. A fine example of Jack Straw's fast-track justice system!

TELFORD

Police ignore racist terror

EVIDENCE HAS emerged of the racist lynchings of two men on the outskirts of Telford in Shropshire – an area where less than three per cent of the population comes from visible minority groups.

Errol McGowan, who worked part-time as a doorman at the Charlton Arms nightclub, and his 20-year-old nephew, **Jason**, died within six months of each other in 1999. Both were found hanged: **Errol** in his home, **Jason** from a park railing at a busy crossroads on New Year's Eve.

West Mercia police swiftly decided both **Errol** and **Jason**, who had married that autumn, had committed suicide in what could only have been a remarkable coincidence. Surviving family members were far from convinced, not least because they knew that **Errol** had been the target of a systematic, two-year campaign of racist abuse after he had barred a group of local white men from the nightclub at the management's request. His name figured on a hitlist

devised by the Nazi thugs of **Combat 18**.

Only a month before his death on 2 July, **Errol** had been the victim, along with two black friends, of a serious assault by up to 15 whites. The response of the police to that incident had been to arrest the three black men and spray them with CS gas.

As in the case of his uncle, **Jason McGowan** left no suicide note; there is no evidence that either man had talked about taking their own lives. Nor was there any history of depression. In fact, threats against the McGowan family persisted after **Errol's** death as the family refused to accept the police explanation of suicide.

The coroner who has since taken over the inquest into the first death has expressed the view that something appeared to have gone seriously wrong with the police investigation. The family justifiably point to the core problem in the investigation – the refusal of the police to recognise the racist dimension to the killings. Less than a



Straw's law means rough justice for the many, but special treatment for the few. He wants to let torturer and former Chilean dictator **Augusto Pinochet** avoid standing trial in Europe, claiming that he is too ill to do so.

But Straw has refused to let the prosecutors and the Spanish government see the medical evidence. Professor **Grimley Evans** of the medical team has given contradictory statements about how fit **Pinochet** really is.

One minute his friend **Margaret Thatcher** was telling

the press how fit and determined **Pinochet** was, the next we were told he is suffering from senile dementia.

Anti-Pinochet campaigners, including many relatives and friends of the thousands he tortured, killed and "disappeared", feel cruelly let down by Straw. He has caved in to establishment pressure.

And if Straw ever had any intention that **Pinochet** be brought to justice, why did he refuse Spanish requests for a full statement to be taken from the accused?

year after the Macpherson report into the death of black London teenager **Stephen Lawrence** condemned the "institutional racism" of the Metropolitan Police, yet another police force is revealing its true colours.

Errol's brother, **Clifton**, is scathing in his description of how the police conducted the initial investigation. He told a *Guardian* journalist that "it was more like a PR exercise to make them look good. They didn't actually tell us anything. They were treating us worse than five-year-olds. I wish now we had recorded some of these conversations."

A very defensive revised statement from the West Mercia force, issued after the *Independent* revealed that Lawrence family barrister **Mike Mansfield** had agreed to take on the McGowans' case, suggested that they had interviewed six white men about harassment of **Errol McGowan** but that the Crown Prosecution Service had concluded that there was insufficient evidence to bring charges.

The circumstances of the McGowan deaths are only too similar to those surrounding the lynching last April of a black African man resident in Surrey, **Akofi Hodasi**. His body was discovered hanging from a tree only two days after he had been the victim of a racist attack.

Combined with reports of repeated stops and searches by police of **Bishop John Sentamu**, himself a member of the Macpherson panel, there is abundant evidence that nothing has changed in the 12 months since the Lawrence inquiry panel issued its findings and recommendations. The police in Britain remain racist to the core along with the social order of exploitation and oppression they defend.

These sickening lynchings, along with every other racist attack, need to be met not only by demands for justice and the sackings of racist police officers but by militant organised self-defence to smash the racists into the ground.

LONDON MAYOR

BY JEREMY DEWAR

Will Livingstone give Blair a bloody nose?

BALLOT PAPERS for the selection of Labour's London mayoral candidate are going out as the race enters its final month. Despite the best efforts of the New Labour party machine Blair's chosen candidate, Frank Dobson is far from certain of victory. Ken Livingstone's challenge could win. This alone reveals the discontent and growing impatience with Blair among large numbers of workers.

The electoral college guaranteed Dobson a head-start. Where MPs have had the decency to ballot their constituency party members (Tooting, Romford and Hornchurch) the returns have overwhelmingly endorsed Livingstone. Yet 43 MPs, and all the MEPs and GLA candidates have lined up behind Dobson; only 10 are with Livingstone. Similarly, some unions, like the AEEU, cast their block vote for Dobson without consulting their members. Those unions that have balloted have returned massive support for Livingstone (86% in the TGWU).

So, on the eve of the final party members' ballot, Livingstone will need to win two-thirds of the votes to secure the nomination.

The leadership's tactic of weighting the selection procedure and campaigning rules blatantly in Dobson's favour has clearly backfired, incensing Labour Party and affiliated union members.

Dobson's team had sole use of the London membership list for the first three months of the campaign. While Dobson has freely issued five circulars, the others were eventually allowed to use the lists for just two mailshots at a cost of £6,000 each! Also, the MPs' ballot will not be secret, allowing Millbank to check on their loyalty to the leadership, a procedure which breaches Labour Party rules.

Blair – accompanied variously by Neil Kinnock, John Prescott and Gordon Brown – has been holding mass rallies throughout the capital, ostensibly as a question-and-answer exercise but in reality as a platform to denounce Livingstone. Despite attempts to hand-pick the audiences, these rallies started to

backfire, with party members hissing and booing whenever an answer was turned into an attack on Livingstone.

Even Frank Dobson tried to distance himself from Blair. In a *New Statesman* interview he said, "Some people are voting for Ken because they are upset at the unfairness of the process in this contest. All I can say is that, if anyone feels upset, they should try me." He claimed that he was hurt by the rumour that he was depressed. But the shine of "honest Dobbo" has rubbed off. How can he complain about procedures that he has continued to use to his advantage? How can he cry over being labelled "depressed" when his campaign leaflets carried the sentence, "Red Ken is Red Scum"?

But these gaffes only begin to explain why Dobson is in danger of losing. The groundswell of support for Livingstone is based on a clear class divide in the campaign. Livingstone is viewed by mil-

lions of workers inside and outside the Labour Party as the candidate who will defend their interests against big business. This has turned Ken's campaign into a potential rallying point for workers fed up with New Labour's pro-business policies.

Take two key issues, transport and the police:

- Dobson promises to partially privatise the tube, while offering the sop of free bus passes to under-18 year olds

- Livingstone promises no tube sell-off and a four year fare freeze

- Dobson promises to appoint a named police officer to act as mentor for every Londoner

- Livingstone promises to "root out" racism and corruption from the Met.

Such differences – plus Livingstone's record of reducing fares and pioneering anti-racist and anti-homophobic policies when he was in charge of the now defunct GLC – is why tens

of thousands of workers are voting for him and millions of others are hoping Blair gets a bloody nose in the selection battle.

Workers Power supporters been organising to maximise support for Livingstone's candidature. Not because we think Ken is the best thing since Lenin – he clearly isn't – but because we recognise the importance of the battle going on inside the Labour Party. Despite Blair's leadership, Labour remains a capitalist workers' party: that is, pro-big business in its policies, but reliant on, and tied to the working class for its base support.

The Labour Party, unlike the Tories or Liberal Democrats, remains a site of struggles between the leadership – including career politicians, trade union bureaucrats and bosses like Lords Simon, MacDonald and Sainsbury – on one side and rank and file workers on the other. Revolutionaries should not stand aloof in this situation but fight alongside workers to expose the capitalist nature of the Labour Party and win the arguments for a new kind of party, a revolutionary party.

Should Livingstone win, the balance of forces within the labour movement will shift to the left and the struggle to win workers away from Labour and reformism will be taken forward.

But this does not mean that we should act as uncritical cheerleaders for Livingstone. Quite the opposite. Ken's record as leader of the GLC from 1981 to 1986 and as an MP since 1987, as well as the way he has conducted his campaign, all point to the fact that he will betray workers' hopes in him at crucial moments. Workers cannot rely on him.

The famous "fare's fair" policy, which cut tube and bus ticket prices, only lasted six months. When it was declared illegal in the courts, tube workers were willing to strike in its defence. But "Red" Ken told them to go back to work and rely on the House of Lords to overturn the High Court (which, of course, they didn't).

In the fight against rate-capping – Thatcher's means of forcing Labour councils to implement Tory cuts – Livingstone broke ranks with a left wing alliance and set a legal, cuts budget. The battle to save the GLC stopped at the level of a publicity campaign; Livingstone refused to consider the idea of mobilising the working class – through a London-wide general strike – and accepted the GLC's demise.

There is a pattern to this record. Livingstone believes that a left Labour administration can use the existing democratic channels – parliament, councils, the mayor's office – to improve workers' lives gradually, bit by bit. But only if the administration does not fall into the "trap" of entering into a

full-on confrontation with the state. In practice this means never entering into such a confrontation and always retreating when push comes to shove. It is classic left reformism and does not advance the struggle for socialism one jot.

Retreats and climb-downs do not leave the working class unscathed and fit to fight another day. The defeats of the early 1980s led to the decimation of jobs and inner-city environments and facilities. They led to a collapse in workers' fighting organisations, their unions, their shop steward committees. They also paved the way for the rise of Blairism in the Labour Party.

The whole history of capitalism reveals that workers cannot hold onto their gains or even maintain their relative position in society by relying on the bosses' democratic institutions and gradual, peaceful reforms. The NHS, quality comprehensive education, job security have all been eroded. The wealth gap in Britain is greater at the turn of this century than it was at the turn of the last. Preparing politically and organisationally for a head-on confrontation with the state, ensuring that the huge majority of workers are ready for battle at the decisive moment is the only way to win meaningful reforms and protect old ones.

But Livingstone does not prepare for this. He does the opposite. He deliberately confuses and points both ways. He is against tube privatisation but says, "If Railtrack wanted to build something new we'd all be over the moon". He stands as the candidate who is independent from Blair, but pledges his loyalty by offering Dobson, Jackson and various academics and businessmen places in his "cabinet". He identifies himself with the Seattle protesters, then passes it off as a joke.

This is why Workers Power says, "Vote Livingstone, but organise to fight!" We will have to organise to put the maximum pressure on Livingstone to deliver pro-working class measures. And we will have to fight when he eventually lines up with the establishment every time there is a really decisive class conflict.



LONDON SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Left unites for London elections

THE LONDON Socialist Alliance (LSA) intends to stand a full slate of candidates for the Greater London Assembly (GLA).

The LSA includes the Socialist Workers Party, Workers Power, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, the Communist Party of Great Britain as well as individual left wingers. So far, the LSA has selected seven candidates, including Kate

Ford, a supporter of Workers Power.

Workers Power believes that it is possible to use the elections to help build opposition to New Labour in London and take forward the struggle of workers fighting the effects of Blair's policies.

The LSA itself has adopted a muddled programme which, while to the left of Ken Livingstone, does not provide a clear strategy for the class struggle in

London. For instance, the LSA rightly calls for the disarming of the police, but makes no mention of the organisation of workers' self-defence that is needed in the here and now against racist, fascist and police attacks.

Crucially, the LSA fails to point out that workers will have to organise themselves and fight in order to achieve any of the demands it lists, nor that this will inevitably lead to a head-on con-

AT AN LSA meeting the Socialist Party (SP), having lost a vote proposing that the LSA not stand in the list section against the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP) candidates, declared that while they would support the LSA in constituencies they were reserving judgement in the list elections.

The LSA, correctly, allows the different organisations in its ranks to raise their own politics and criticise the politics of others, so the SP are well within their rights. But the motivation for their proposals was disturbing.

In line with their wrong belief that the Labour

Party has now become an open bosses' party with no meaningful connection with the working class, they are actually saying that there is no difference between Livingstone and Dobson, no class divide reflected through their contest and that we should simply stand aside from it.

Quite why this should mean automatic support for the CATP when the CATP itself is still discussing its plans is not clear. But the muddle the SP are getting themselves into could become a serious problem if Livingstone wins and the LSA agrees – as we think it should – to support him in the mayoral elections.

For Workers Power's election material and campaign details, contact us directly by e mail at wp@workerspower.com or by phone on 0181 981 0602.

For more information on the LSA and how to join, visit the website (www.londonsocialistalliance.org.uk) or write to Greg Tucker, 3 Blades House, London SE11.

frontation with the capitalist state, a confrontation demanding a revolutionary struggle to smash this state by the whole British working class.

Despite these criticisms of the programme adopted this is not the be-all-and-end-all of the LSA. It is a positive development precisely because it offers the opportunity to build on and extend the hostility to Blair that has been revealed in London by the support for Ken Livingstone. It offers the opportunity to turn a drab local election into the means of organising active resistance.

To achieve this we will use every possible opportunity to make the LSA relevant and useful to workers in struggle, turn its candidates into candidates of

struggle. In the Homerton firefighters' dispute, on the picket lines at Wandsworth Council, where workers are fighting against privatisation or the selling off of council estates – the LSA must put its resources at the disposal of workers. Our aim must not be a cynical vote-grabbing exercise, but to build a fighting campaign that can strengthen workers in the battles to come, who ever becomes mayor.

We will also continue to fight for a revolutionary answer to the problems facing Londoners. Armed with an action programme for London which clearly links demands with revolutionary methods of achieving them, we will take to the streets, the workplaces and the communities.

CONNEX

Victory for striking train drivers

IT TOOK a two week overtime ban and a 24 hour strike by 1,500 ASLEF drivers to bring the private rail firm Connex to its knees and agree to the workers' demand for a 35 hour week. This victory proves what trade union militants have been arguing for a long time – strikes win.

Since Connex took over the franchise to run the South East rail network two years ago, they have shown nothing but contempt for the staff and passengers. Despite promises to introduce a 35 hour week drivers were forced to work their rest days, some working 10 hour shifts 13 days in a row. The extent of mismanagement was revealed when the drivers, sick of being treated like dogs, refused to work on their rest days. This overtime ban led to 500 train cancellations a day!

Connex tried to frighten the drivers into submission by threatening any who joined the strike with the sack. But this had the opposite effect. Not only did 60 new drivers join the union in the week before, but the 24 hour strike on 25 January was 100% solid. In order to

provide a skeleton service, Connex had to drag in their managers, who in some cases hadn't driven a train in years.

The first in a series of one day strikes had the management on their knees. One day they were behaving like arrogant overlords. The next they were desperately pleading for negotiations.

The drivers' action hit Connex where it hurt – they lost an estimated £1 million on the strike day alone. Connex

quickly agreed to introduce a 36 hour week by 31 October this year and reduce this to 35 hours by the following October. They have also signed a deal to phase in 100% pensionable pay no later than May 2003 and work towards improving industrial relations with ASLEF.

This dispute has exposed the effects of rail privatisation. Connex cannot be trusted to run the South East rail network. Fatigue is one of the most com-

mon causes of driver error and yet Connex have been prepared to put drivers and passengers at risk for a quick profit.

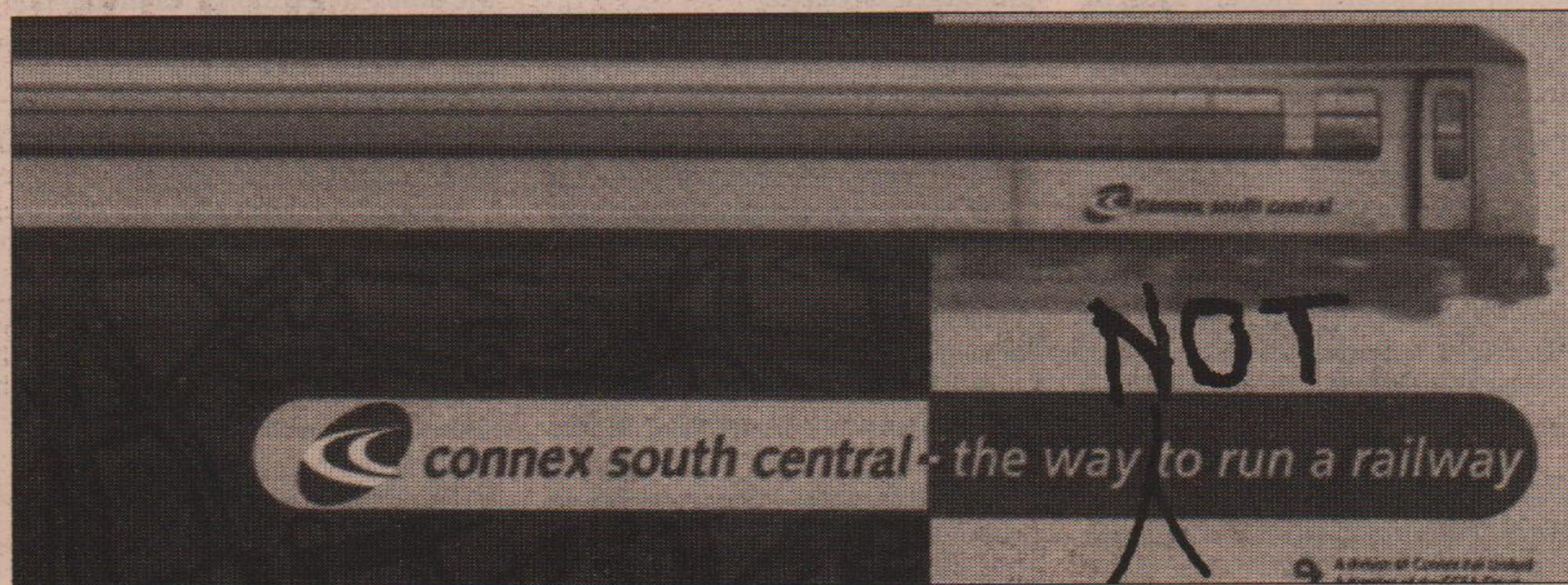
Connex are desperate to renew their franchise for the next twenty years and have promised to invest over £1 billion in the network. These words ring hollow after two years of under-investment and appalling services.

Not only should the Labour gov-

ernment refuse Connex the franchise, they should do what the public have been demanding since the Paddington Rail tragedy: nationalise the entire rail network and put it in the hands of those who can be trusted to run it – rail workers in collaboration with committees of the mainly working class passengers who use the system day in, day out.

Connex workers should be at the fore of such a campaign. They have shown the will and the means to get things done on the rail. They should use this victory to build confidence among other rail workers to take on the fat cat rail operators.

Connex may have caved in, but for the drivers the overtime ban still holds – they intend to take the rest days they are entitled to. The planned strikes in February and March have been suspended, not called off. Rank and file drivers must be vigilant. Connex have broken promises before and they will break them again. If there is any hint of dirty tricks by the Connex management, drivers must respond swiftly with immediate indefinite strike action.



DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Support Derbyshire Home Helps

THE HOME helps dispute in Derbyshire over "electronic tagging" has reached a critical point. Last November 1650 members of Derbyshire County Unison branch voted overwhelmingly to boycott the introduction of telephone timesheets but the County Council responded with a vicious move to dock the pay of these already low paid workers.

The home helps now face a choice. They could carry on with the boycott and see the action slip as cash-strapped workers are forced to accept the new time sheets.

Or they can escalate the action. The first option means they will lose. They must step up the fight.

Workers have been solid so far in rejecting the new timesheets which will

require them to log into a computerised call centre up to ten times a day, including at the start and finish of every visit. The home helps are disgusted that they are being asked to prioritise a complicated and time consuming phone call before the needs of the people they care for.

At a recent mass meeting organised by the branch, one home help told of an incident in the week before the boycott started. She had visited the home of a terminally ill man to find him in considerable discomfort and distress. What was she to do – make the phone call or assist the man? Needless to say she didn't make the phone call.

Workers are angry that the introduction of the electronic timesheets implies that they cannot be trusted.

Already, time allotted to each service user is far below the amount of time needed and it is only because of the "goodwill" time put in by the home helps that the service survives at all.

The County Council have been quick to use every tactic they can think of to threaten and intimidate the home helps into accepting the new system – they are desperate to save face, they had signed up to a £200,000 contract with BT months ago!

The Council claims the electronic timesheets are essential to stop the service being sold off to the private sector but when it doesn't get its way, the first threat it comes up with is privatisation. The home helps are constantly being warned that their jobs could easily be done by someone else as 14 per

cent of the service is already in private hands.

Now management has started to dock 15 per cent of the workers' pay unless they sign pledging to work "normally" – the fact that the home helps are still filling out paper time sheets apparently doesn't count! This will mean a £20-£25 cut from an already disgracefully low wage.

So far the branch has put out a hardship appeal, started the lengthy process of a legal challenge, and organised an indicative ballot on whether to escalate the action to a work to rule or strike action. It's now vitally important that the home helps stand firm – that they vote yes in the indicative ballot to strike action and yes again in the official ballot that Unison's East Midlands region must be

made to organise immediately.

A strike would take careful organisation and many home helps would need a lot of convincing before they took action that might affect service users; but a strike, backed by solidarity action built for in other sections of the council workforce, is really the only way to see off the threat of electronic tagging once and for all.

Other workers must raise the plight of the home helps and their service, ask for speakers and contribute to the hardship fund.

Send messages of support and donations to:
Derbyshire County Unison, c/o
County Hall, Matlock, Derbyshire
DE4 3AG, Fax: 01629 580322

CARDIFF COUNCIL

Goodway exhausts goodwill

IN NOVEMBER'S Workers Power we reported on a council strike in Cardiff against job cuts. The villain of the piece was Labour mayor Russell Goodway, who had bypassed agreed procedures to impose a new "modernisation" package.

We described Goodway as "increasingly notorious". We were not wrong. Since announcing the sackings, this tin pot tsar of the Taff has awarded himself a new salary – a modest £58,000. Not bad for a three-day week, but still a few grand shy of the £76,000 now earned by the council's six "corporate managers", each of whom oversees a range of services. That is not to forget the £56,000 earned by the sixteen heads of services, or the £38,000 earned by leading councillors, many of whom do little more than a day's work a week.

Set against the continuing cutbacks in council services (supposedly to save money), these sums are outrageous. They reflect just how far "New" Labour's grandees have set themselves apart from the workers they represent. But this is no accident.

By rewarding councillors and council officers so lavishly, Goodway's machine is ensuring their loyalty in the face of the massive unpopularity their policies will face.

The November one-day strike reflected the growing fury of the council workforce. That is nothing to the mood that exists now. Goodway's "modernisation" package, pushed through in the name of efficiency, has been a recipe for chaos.

Jobs which had been axed in social services, for example, are now being re-advertised under different titles in order to prevent services falling apart. With the council facing a £2 million deficit this year, however, it is a sure bet that further cuts are in the pipeline.

The danger, however, is that this present mood of militancy will be wasted. Since the strike, Unison officials have limited themselves to negotiations, with no further industrial action planned. The arguments over Goodway's salary have instead been taken up by MPs such as Paul Flynn and Rhodri Morgan, who fear an anti-Labour backlash, and

insist that Goodway limits his earnings to the £20,000 recommended by the Welsh Assembly. Any compromise they stitch up, however, will do nothing to stop the destruction of council jobs and services.

Unison claims that up to forty jobs have been saved as a result of the one-day action. What better argument could there be for stepping it up? The opportunity for all-out mass action is there. If Cardiff is to be the test-case for a dictatorial "cabinet" system of local government, then it can also be the test-case for a fightback which unites workers and local residents in a bid to win back control over their city.

DEFEND CANDY UDWIN AND DAVE CARR
STOP THE UNISON WITCH-HUNT
FUND THE NHS!

Assemble: UCLH, Mortimer Street, London W1
(Nearest tube: Goodge Street)

Tuesday 8 February, 5.30pm

Called by UCLH Unison branch

WANDSWORTH

Fighting off the sickness scheme

UNISON MEMBERS in the Tory flagship borough of Wandsworth have voted overwhelmingly to continue their campaign of strike action against the council's vicious attack on sick pay.

Nearly 80% of the 1,000-strong branch voted for more strikes after Wandsworth refused to withdraw their proposal to claw back money from workers who are off sick for more than six days during a rolling 12-month period.

Despite some minor concessions

after the first strike on 24 November, workers were not about to stomach management's version of divide and rule, with the sickness scheme initially imposed only on new employees.

On 26 January Unison members succeeded in closing libraries and leisure centres across the borough. Further strikes were set to take place on 2 and 3 February.

Unison branch chair Dion D'Silva described support from Unison's regional and national officials as "pretty laughable". He contrasted "the recent caution of activists with the anger and determination among the membership at large."

Messages of support, donations etc. to: Wandsworth Unison, Second Floor, Wandsworth Town Hall, High Street, London SW18 2PU.

Colleges in conflict

AFTER MORE than five years of attacks by employers and both the Tory and Labour governments, there are signs of renewed resistance in the colleges.

Strikes by Natfhe members have taken place recently in Hendon, City and Islington and Sheffield colleges while action is planned in others such as Gwent and Croydon. The causes are various: new contracts, the introduction of lower paid "Instructor" posts and the casualisation of the workforce.

The basic issue is the same. Further education is hopelessly underfunded and the system of individual corporations competing with each other leads to continual attempts to squeeze more out of both lecturers and administrative staff.

Blunkett's promised cash injections turn out to be dependent on following ever tighter regimes. The people who pay the price for mismanagement are of course ordinary college staff, not the top dogs who get paid off with fat cheques.

Later this year sees the advent of the new Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) with the power to allocate training to the private sector as well as to insist on college mergers.

Gwent Tertiary College is the biggest college in Wales. In recent months the college has been in the local news because of allegations of mismanagement. The recently departed Principal left with a £50,000 handshake.

The new Principal, David Mason, came in and promptly proposed a cut of 14 per cent in the pay of part-time lecturers!

On 22 December 1999 the Principal issued contracts to teaching staff which were to be imposed from 1 January 2000. While this contract offered 5 per cent plus a £1,000 sweetener it was also a serious attack on working conditions including a reduction in holidays and a massive increase in teaching (and so preparation and marking) hours.

This term union meetings have been held with up to 100 per cent turnouts. The vast majority of contracts were returned to management on the due date – in the form of 22 sacks of shredded rubbish! A 300 strong meeting passed a unanimous motion of no confidence in the management.

So far the union branch strategy is to talk to MPs and AMs (Assembly Ministers) and to maintain a work to rule. But this is unlikely to be enough to win.

Despite many press releases, the local papers have printed nothing from the union. All local press coverage has been in support of management – not surprising when we learn that the Chair of Governors is also the Managing Director of Argos Newspapers, the local press.

And the experience of other colleges is that management have stopped lecturers' pay on the basis of "partial performance", if they are determined to break sanctions.

Students and staff need a quick resolution to the dispute. This might mean indefinite strike action. But this would face management with a real threat, especially if it was backed by support from Wales Region of Natfhe.

Meanwhile in another giant college,

Sheffield, lecturers held a one day strike in December against the introduction of cost-cutting "Instructors".

Then the branch returned after Christmas to find the crisis had deepened – their college had been put under "direct rule" with the FEFC taking control.

A new principal approved by Blunkett has been appointed and has already tried to put the frighteners on staff with talk of redundancy.

The best response to this is to make trouble for Blunkett in his Sheffield back yard. If the new management is not prepared to make concessions, then members will have to take further action.

Meanwhile at Croydon College, the branch has voted to start a ballot for action against the introduction of the cheap-rate Education Lecturer Service (ELS) agency which is a way the employers get round the new laws protecting part time workers.

All these cases show the necessity of a proper national strategy. A Sector Conference this month will debate the way forward. The proposals from the NEC promise more of the same – talking to the employers and the government and trying to persuade them to sign up to better conditions and more funding.

Instead we need a renewed push for a national fight back with national action. At the same time we have to build action and co-ordinating committees on the ground to support struggles where they are taking place and to resist the new job cutting merger plans of the Learning and Skills Councils.

workers POWER

BCM BOX 7750 LONDON WC1N 3XX ★ 0181 981 0602

COMMENT

Mike Tyson, racism and violence against women

ALL THE old filthy racist clichés were wheeled out for Mike Tyson's recent visit to Britain. The media rushed to report every move of "animal" Tyson and his "menacing" entourage. The crush of fans at Heathrow airport became a "frightening melee". The welcoming crowd at Brixton was a "frenzied mob".

Jack Straw added to the general atmosphere of prejudice, making the most of his supposedly serious consideration of whether Tyson should be allowed into the country because of his previous rape conviction. Of course Straw didn't ban Tyson: there was too much money hanging on the whole affair. Straw's pretence that he was concerned about the fans and small businesses fooled few people. His real concern was the millions at stake for the promoters and even more the big TV companies and sponsors.

What a contrast to Straw's exclusion of ordinary black workers and asylum seekers at Fortress Britain's unwelcoming points of entry every day of the week. Straw and New Labour boast of the number of asylum seekers they have turned away, the workers they have deported, the families they have split up.

The truth is that the immigration controls are racist and always have been. They are designed to restrict the entry of poor people and black people – when it suits the British state. Their very existence implies that social problems are somehow the fault of migrants instead of being caused by the profit system.

Racism divides workers one from another, and the threat of deportation additionally creates a very cheap and vulnerable set of workers.

That is why we fight for an end to all immigration controls. Capitalism moves jobs and investment where it pleases, putting up barriers only in the interests of profit. We stand for the right of workers to move where they need to and to organise and fight wherever they are.

For these reasons we think that those, like the Justice for Women campaigners, who argued for Tyson's exclusion were wrong. We do not concede the right of exclusion to the capitalist state. And in any case, excluding Tyson would have been straightforward racist hypocrisy. Rich white criminals move in and out of the country unheeded. Mass murderer General Pinochet got VIP treatment whenever he arrived in Britain. Even after his arrest he was detained in comfort. Compare that to the rancid detention centres most asylum seekers are banged away in.

But does our insistence that Tyson should have been allowed in mean we should be silent on the issue of violence against women; does it mean we join in welcoming Tyson as a hero? No.

Tyson has certainly been the victim of racism all his life. As a boy and young man in Brooklyn, Tyson faced the same problems as other young black men in the US. Expelled from school and sent to reform school, he found his way out through his boxing talents. His promoters played on his violent image – helped by a series of incidents outside as well as inside the ring, including Tyson's violence against his first wife.

Tyson's backers were happy to make money from the fights and the hype. As Tyson himself put it, "I've been taken advantage of all my life. I've been dehumanised and I've been betrayed".

In 1991, Miss Black America contestant Desiree Washington accused him of rape and Tyson was subsequently jailed for six years. Tyson and his supporters maintain his innocence, pointing out that he was convicted by an all-white jury.

Tyson's treatment was certainly in sharp contrast to that given to Kennedy clan member, William Kennedy Smith, who in the same year was acquitted of a "date rape" charge.

We can see the same double standards at work in Britain as well. We only have to compare the British press's demonising of Tyson with its much more tolerant approach towards "our lads" Paul Gascoigne and even Stan Collymore who are told to go off and get counselling for their violent behaviour towards women. It's in stark contrast too, to the attitude to the Leeds players, implicated in an alleged racist attack, who are allowed to carry on playing in the premiership.

Not just hypocrisy but short memories were also in evidence. Sickeningly the press contrasted Tyson with a "real" hero Mohammed Ali, quietly forgetting how they taunted Ali for his arrogance, anti-racism and principled opposition to the Vietnam War.

But none of this – Tyson's deprived and violent upbringing or bourgeois hypocrisy and racism – makes Tyson necessarily innocent. Desiree Washington had a right to seek justice just as she had a right to say "No". That is why many women campaigners in both the USA and here in Britain, have insisted that Tyson is no hero.

As one young woman commented after seeing the recent furore, "Just because the people against Tyson are wrong, it doesn't make Tyson right". We fight against the racist comments against Tyson and the immigration controls that were being considered as a means of stopping him coming to Britain. But this doesn't mean we should play down the issue of rape or violence against women. One form of oppression cannot be used to excuse another.

STUDENTS

Occupations against fees

"WHAT DO we want?" – "Free education!"

"How're we gonna get it?" – "Occupation!"

These were the militant chants of students at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) as they occupied the main administration office on campus, paralysing the university at the end of last month.

The action, which has official NUS backing, came as college management issued threatening letters to students who had not paid their tuition fees. The management responded to the sit-in with heavy threats and the bailiffs, but even if the college succeeds with its threats, the courageous actions of the SOAS students has already served a useful purpose: it has acted as a lightning rod for other students facing cuts or fee-grabbing administrations.

The University College of London has already held three meetings to discuss

an occupation. Their management have reneged on a promise after last year's sit-in and suspended at least one student for non-payment. Goldsmiths, Sussex and Oxford students are also planning actions, while the University of East London students have organised a rent strike.

This wave of occupations follows on the news that Scottish students will not have to pay their fees up front (see page 8).

At the same time, university appli-

cations in Britain as a whole have seen another fall, with less well-off and mature students particularly hard hit. While Blunkett has now made a few concessions, the vast majority of working class students will still find themselves faced with paying towards fees and having to take out loans.

A wave of occupations is the only way to ensure this scandalous policy is smashed. All students should raise solidarity and prepare for similar actions on their own campuses.

TEACHERS SAY "NO" TO PERFORMANCE-RELATED PAY March and rally

University of London Union, Malet Street, W1
(nearest tubes: Euston Square; Russell Square)

Saturday 12 February, assemble 12 noon

Called by STOPP (School Teachers Opposed to Performance-related Pay)

FBU

Homerton firefighters

LONDON FIRE Brigade bosses at the Homerton station have sparked a bitter row with FBU members with their crude effort at breaking the union's long-standing overtime ban.

Eleven fire-fighters were suspended on 1 January after they refused to work alongside "volunteers for overtime" who had broken a 25-year union policy. To cover for ongoing cuts in staffing levels management wanted to push fire-fighters into increased overtime working.

At meetings across London stations FBU members have voiced their outrage at management's move. A strike ballot may yet take place, but so far the FBU leadership has focused on petitioning and a 4 February demonstration through the streets of Hackney. Even this, however, has frightened management into lifting the suspensions, through they have not withdrawn the threat of disciplinary action against the 11.

London-wide strike action may

well be needed to win the FBU's demand for unconditional reinstatement of the 11 and to ward off further attacks on working hours and conditions. Strikes will definitely be essential in defending staffing and funding levels longer term.

Messages of support to: Homerton 11, c/o London FBU, John Horner Mews, off Frome Street, London N1 8PD. Fax: 0171 359 3686.

Labour's lack of vision

Paul Morris takes the tube to Greenwich and finds the Millennium Dome like a very large corporate tent

I VISITED the Dome early last month when the Tory press was still fuming about its "political correctness" and "populism" – so my first reaction was to look for a reason to like it. I couldn't find one.

The Millennium Dome is New Labour's ideology projected into the soul-less space of a trade fair. It combines all the tacky insincerity of Blairism with all the shoddy showmanship of the UK private sector and its failing, second rate "brands".

In theory the exhibits celebrate different aspects of living in Britain today: faith, the environment, travel, time and so on. In practice the actual content has been designed under the control of the sponsoring capitalist corporations, moderated only by the heavy hand of Labour's former spin chief Peter Mandelson.

Ford's "Journey Zone" is an excellent example of the blatant ideological pedantry at work in the Dome. It is meant to chronicle the history of travel and look at the alternatives for the future. The same lack of design imagination that produced the Ford Mondeo has been at work in the Journey Zone. The story of the first few thousand years is told in writing stuck to the wall. Then you come to the first of many TV screens where a video shows about 12 actors simulating life aboard a replica Roman galley. Further up there is another video where the same 12 actors simulate a Viking raid – and so on.

The first real exhibit is – a Ford Model T. My problem with this was not so much the shameless self-promotion of Ford: the Model T was, after all the car that gave us the production line and thus some of the finest wildcat walkouts in the history of trade unionism. No – my problem is that the car is suspended 15 feet above the visitors, meaning that no one can touch it, get inside it.

Things get worse. After a replica of Stephenson's Rocket (behind glass, don't touch) you soon come to "the future". To simulate the future, Ford has commissioned students from various universities to design futuristic integrated transport schemes. What would have been really innovative was to have actually built one, but instead they are portrayed as models, behind glass. Now the strange thing about every one of these future transport schemes, whether monorail, chemical powered or computerised traffic flow, is that they involve a small metal shell that takes about four people to an individual destination. Or a car, as it is currently termed. Public transport? Dream on.

Coincidentally, on the day the Journey Zone opened Labour transport minister, Lord Gus McDonald stood next to the chief executive of Ford UK on the steps of the exhibit, saying: "This puts paid to the idea that Labour is anti-car".

It's the same deal wherever you go. The Environment Zone, instead of being about how to save the Brazilian rainforest, takes you on a tour of a tacky English seaside resort. There is a Punch and Judy man who tells you to avoid dropping litter, signs of fake broken toilets tell you to report vandals to the police, fake arcade games encourage you to recycle things. There is no game encouraging you to re-plan the earth's economy to stop environmental destruction, because that would mean nationalising Ford, Boots, Tesco, Marks and Spencer and all the other household names that have funded the exhibits.

As for the rest of the "experience" it is an insult to our intelligence as well. There is only one real restaurant – and that's so expensive that it has become an exclusive retreat for the corporate types who are paying for the whole jam-



New Labour's big top

boree. For the rest it's Upper Crust, McDonalds and all the other fast food outlets you find on an identikit British high street or railway station concourse.

If the Dome is meant to be a "symbol of our times", as it's not-very-good web site proclaims, what does it symbolise?

First and foremost the relationship between New Labour and its private sector paymasters. Private sector money has paid for the Dome, but even under capitalism that is no reason to turn it into one big marketing mall. Coronation Street is funded by private sector advertising but nobody at Granada is stupid enough to make Emily Nugent stop mid sentence, turn to camera and

say "Wella – because I'm worth it".

Labour has allowed the Dome's sponsors to indulge in relentless "product placement" and branding because it dares not and cannot ever try to lead the ruling class. In the Tories, the ruling class has a confident political cadre that thinks in "centuries and continents" – and is often prepared to be at odds with public opinion. Labour – which governs for the ruling class but still has roots in the working class – always has to follow or guess ruling class opinion: it can never lead, never go out on a limb and, as the Dome shows, never say no to a private sector marketing executive in a suit.

Because Labour cannot project a

vision other than what it thinks the bosses will accept it is obliged to look for the lowest common denominator. Blair and Mandelson have managed to turn what could have been a good but pointless capitalist exhibition into a very bad one. That, presumably, is why the right wing press is on Labour's back about the Dome as well as the traditional left.

But in addition to what it reveals about Labour's relationship with the ruling class, the Dome also shows the ideological emptiness of modern capitalism. The Great Exhibition of the 1860s, and the 1951 Festival of Britain each had in common the belief in capitalist expansion. The theme of the Dome's Work Zone is "no skills and flexibility, no job" – what a great future to inspire young children with!

Certainly there has been great culture produced in the last 50 years of modern capitalism – but whether it's the paintings of Aboriginal artists, the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe or the films of Martin Scorsese – all modern culture teems with criticism of the way things are. It vibrates with the creativity of young people and working class people. That is why there is no place for it amid the Dome's plastic seating and fluorescent lights.

In the Dome, despite its "faith zone", there is only one god and it is profit. Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Boots, de Beers, Ford have constructed their exhibits like the rich family chapels in medieval cathedrals – ostentatious symbols of wealth and power.

But unlike medieval peasants, modern workers are not impressed. That's why the Dome is losing money and popularity in equal measure. It's no reflection on the workers who built it – or those who wear the yellow uniform of the Dome "hosts" – but the Dome is rubbish. Don't go.

MEGAPHONE

■ G R McColl reviews two recent cinematic depictions of New York

Looking into the Big Apple's rotten core

CINEMA'S SECOND century began with some promise for British filmgoers as new productions from Martin Scorsese (*Bringing out the Dead*) and Spike Lee (*Summer of Sam*) hit the screens. Two of the most important US directors of the last 25 years have returned to their youthful stomping grounds in New York City.

Both have challenged and shaped my perceptions of the USA's biggest metropolis, the city that embodied the "American century" as a showcase for imperialist capitalism's achievements and a backdrop for its unrelieved squalor.

Scorsese teamed up with long-time collaborator Paul Schrader (*Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*) to adapt an impressive first novel by former ambulance worker, Joe Connelly. The Manhattan setting is Hell's Kitchen, long synonymous with poverty, despair and self-destruction. Scorsese grew up on its edge. The film takes place "some time in the early 1990s": the US economy in steep recession, the Reagan-Bush years nearly over and the curtain falling on the administration of the city's first African-American mayor, David Dinkins, at the height of the crack trade with more than 3,000 homicides a year.

The chronological setting also precedes the Big Apple's supposed rebirth under Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the ruthless champion of "zero tolerance" policing. Hell's Kitchen has changed over the past decade, though not beyond recognition. Giuliani's policy of pissing on the poorest of the poor from a great height has displaced them from mid-town Manhattan but not made them or their problems disappear.

The world of *Bringing out the Dead* is quite literally mad, populated by every sort of casualty imaginable, and filtered through the increasingly blurred vision of ambulance worker Frank Pierce. Frank is slowly combusting on a diet of alcohol, caffeine and nicotine as he dresses wounds, shocks, intubates and carts to a Catholic charity hospital an assortment of street homeless, overdoses and victims of pimps and drug dealers' turf wars. There is undeniably an element of surreal exaggeration, but it captures an essential truth about a decaying urban capitalism.

Lazy critics have pointed to superficial similarities with *Taxi Driver*. But Frank is a far cry from Travis Bickle, the sociopath turned vigilante hero. The psychological conditions of both arise largely from their material circumstances, though Frank's inner demons feed on his sense of hopelessness in a job where resources are stretched beyond breaking point. Almost incidentally, but with graphic force, the film documents the reality of healthcare for millions of Americans without private insurance. The movie's budget probably equalled the price tag of a new hospital, but in spite of a cast with several Hollywood stars, *Bringing out the Dead* is committed cinema, both howlingly funny and harrowing.

In the late 1980s Spike Lee delivered *Do the Right Thing*, arguably his best movie and an angry depiction of racism in contemporary New York, focusing on tensions between African and Italian-Americans. With *Summer of Sam*, he delves back to 1977 and his beloved Brooklyn, with Italian and Irish ethnics dominating this take on an a

particular historical episode.

That year saw my own first visit to the New York borough, a place I had been encouraged to fear but proved a fascinating patchwork of diverse ethnic neighbourhoods. A few months later, however, Brooklyn would be gripped by fear – a serial killer with the moniker "Son of Sam" terrorised its neighbourhoods, blasting away couples in parked cars and penning bizarre missives to a newspaper columnist.

The heat and humidity bordered on the tropical. Electricity failures were frequent. Only the year before New York City had technically gone bankrupt and the media fed an apocalyptic foreboding.

Lee's film captures something of that period yet perversely conveys dynamism and hope, though it is a lesser work than Scorsese's. Combined, these two films are cinematic bookends: *Summer of Sam* punctuating the end of a period of heightened activism, working class self-confidence and sexual experimentation. It serves as a harbinger for the ensuing decade of reaction, despair and ever more obscene inequality that culminates in the nightmarish vision of ambulance worker Frank Pierce.

marxism THE BASICS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

Lenin's last fight

The bosses like to argue that Lenin led to Stalin. But, as *Kate Foster* explains, not only did Lenin not lead to Stalin but he actively opposed the rise of Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy

THE IDEA that Lenin led to Stalin has been the subject of many a school history essay. Stalin certainly succeeded Lenin as leader of the Russian Communist Party. But is there something within Leninism which led inexorably to the horrors of Stalinism?

Did the politics which led to the victory of the Russian workers in the October Revolution of 1917, have within them the seeds of a brutal dictatorship which still blights workers across Eastern Europe, Russia and beyond?

The answer is no.

Lenin led the Russian workers to victory in 1917 against the will of many a "revolutionary", even some within his own party. Some argued that Russia, a less developed capitalist country, was not economically strong enough to withstand the turmoil of a workers' revolution; others that the Russian working class were not numerically and politically strong enough to lead that revolution and to ensure that it became an international revolution.

Both of these factors did become crucial in the years following the revolution. But Lenin recognised in 1917 that the Russian workers were going to fight to the death even if some "learned socialists" did not fancy the odds. What is the role of a revolutionary in such a situation? To stand to one side muttering about bad omens or to fight alongside the workers and try and secure a victory that would inspire workers across the globe? Lenin was clear where the Bolsheviks should be.

And the omens were far from bad. The revolutionary situation which gripped Russia was not an isolated one. The 1914-18 war led to human slaughter on an unprecedented scale and workers across Europe rose up against it. And of course the 1917 Revolution itself became a factor in events.

Inspired by October, British workers defied their bosses and refused to allow arms to be shipped to the White Russians fighting against the workers' revolution. German and Austrian workers and soldiers embarked on a series of revolutionary struggles only to be betrayed by cowardly reformist leaders. Workers and peasants in the colonies rose against their imperialist oppressors.

As Lenin foresaw, Russia was the opening shot in the world revolution. When the workers seized power in 1917 they expected the European revolution would triumph within years, if not months. The most immediate tasks were to defend the revolution at home and build the revolution internationally.

In the context of the civil war that followed the revolution, the Bolsheviks took steps which some, anarchists for example, see as the first signs of the descent into bureaucratic dictatorship. The Bolsheviks subordinated many aspects of their long term programme for socialist democracy to the needs of winning the civil war and ensuring the workers' state survived. Among the measures taken other parties were deemed illegal, the Kronstadt rising in 1921 was suppressed and, in the same year, factions within the party were banned.

Some of these measures were absolutely necessary, others, like the banning of factions, were serious errors. But either way Lenin and other revolutionary leaders like Trotsky were united on one vital issue – such measures were absolutely temporary and emergency measures carried through because no other options were open. They were not "norms", not goals socialists wished to inscribe into their programme.

The gulf separating Lenin from Stalin can be seen in what became known as the "Georgian affair". At the end of the civil war, as the Bolsheviks set about constructing the Union of Soviet Republics, they met with opposition within some of the republics in the Caucasus. Stalin declared that the decisions of the federal government in Russia were binding on all republics, betraying his tendency towards Great Russian chauvinism and his hostility towards the democratic rights of the oppressed.

It was this position which alerted Lenin to the danger of Stalin. Lenin went to the Politburo and denounced Stalin, arguing for self-determination for all peoples and

IN BRIEF

■ **The Bolsheviks expected the revolution in Russia to be followed quickly by revolutions across Europe – it wasn't and revolutionary Russia became terribly isolated.**

■ **The civil war decimated the vanguard of the Russian working class, seriously weakening the soviets as organs of workers' democracy.**

■ **Within the Bolshevik party itself a bureaucratic wing emerged, around Stalin, which filled the administrative vacuum created by the decline in active soviet democracy. This wing secured for itself material privileges in the context of terrible poverty in Russia, and gradually hardened into the Stalinist bureaucracy.**

■ **The bureaucracy had to destroy workers' democracy within the Bolshevik party in order to be able to consolidate its power of Russia. It did this, following the defeat of the international revolution in the mid-1920s, by smashing the revolutionary wing of the party, the Left Opposition led by Trotsky.**

a free union of Soviet Republics not one imposed bureaucratically from above. As the revolution was no longer in immediate danger, for Lenin political persuasion was what was required not force.

Lenin wrote that Stalin's methods were "the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant", adding that "Stalin's haste and his infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious 'nationalist-socialism', played a fatal role here."

Thus began Lenin's last struggle – against Stalin and the rising bureaucracy, a struggle cut short by his death but eventually taken up by Trotsky and the Left Opposition.

The objective situation, however, was beginning to work to the Stalin faction's advantage. The economic consequences of the civil war and the imperialist encirclement soon began to bite. By the end of the civil war, in 1922 industrial production was at only 25% of pre-war levels.

The Bolsheviks were forced to retreat at the economic level and the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1921. Lenin recognised that this was a backward step, allowing the laws of the free market to dominate within certain sectors of the economy in an attempt to encourage the peasantry to produce more and address serious food shortages.

But NEP did not resolve and in fact exacerbated a fundamental problem within the revolutionary Russian economy: the scissors crisis. As industrial production collapsed, industrial costs and prices were rising steeply. The success of the liberalisation of NEP meant that at the same time agricultural prices were plummeting. As industrial prices grew, agricultural prices fell.

Leon Trotsky was one of the first of the Bolsheviks to address the economic problems facing Russia with a conscious strategy of socialist planning. A minority on the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks at the time argued for a massive increase in state subsidised, and planned, industrial development. Trotsky published his "Theses on Industry" in April 1923 and in October of that year formed an official opposition with 46 other party members. The opposition was not simply around the economy but also against the bureaucratisation of the party, which had flourished under NEP.

During this same period the decimation of the working class itself in the civil war and the low level of literacy in Russia meant that the Bolsheviks could not run the state without some of the old Tsarist bureaucracy remaining in place. These state functionaries prospered under NEP and were a political danger to the revolution. It was precisely such time-servers who were to form the political power base of Stalin.

Lenin identified the threat posed by this bureaucracy as early as 1921:

"We do have a bureaucratic ulcer, it has been diagnosed and has to be treated in earnest."

He called for measures to be taken against the bureaucracy including making them subject to election and recall and having wages no higher than workers. Lenin also hoped that rejuvenated soviets would keep a check on the bureaucracy.

But the Russian working class and its party the Bolshevik Party were, like the economy, scarred by the civil war. The revolutionary workers of Petrograd and Moscow were the first to volunteer for the Red Army and many were lost.

The party grew significantly despite these losses, but many of the newer members were careerists who saw the party as a means to develop their own fortune. This fundamental shift within the class character of the party was consolidated following the death of Lenin in 1924 when the doors to the party were opened up to the Lenin Levy – a quarter of a million new members at one time.

The rise of the bureaucracy mirrored the rise of the Stalin faction. Under their influence the party regime became increasingly hostile to any opposition.

The degeneration of the party can be graphically seen in the differing fates of the two oppositions organised by

Trotsky. In 1923 the Platform of the 46 was widely discussed within the party. Stalin did move against them – dismissing the entire leadership of the youth section, the Communist Youth, of the party who were sympathetic to Trotsky – but within a few months the Politburo had agreed the New Course resolution presented by the opposition.

Three years later, the United Opposition was formed in 1926. When they attempted to hold debates meetings were cancelled or physically attacked, the leaders were shot at and arrested. Police methods replaced party discussions and the bureaucracy established its grip on the throat of democracy.

Did Lenin fail to recognise the danger posed by Stalin and Stalinism? No, he wanted to defeat him. Prior to his death Lenin was preparing for a full scale offensive against Stalin at the 12th Congress but he suffered a stroke and Trotsky felt unable to carry on with the attack.

This encouraged Stalin to press ahead, not simply by attacking party democracy but by betraying the core internationalist principles of Bolshevism. Following the defeat of the Bulgarian and German uprisings in 1923 Stalin first published the theory of "Socialism in One Country" in 1924. Russia's isolation increased the popularity of this theory, the idea that it was possible to create a revolution and maintain it within just one country.

Within the Communist International (CI) the Stalinists moved against those who supported Trotsky in arguing the centrality of internationalising the revolution. International defeats – especially the defeat of the British General Strike of 1926 and the Chinese revolution of 1927 – despite being, to a large extent, caused by Stalin's political errors, actually served to strengthen the national-centred Stalin faction. Trotsky described how the influence of Stalinism within the CI affected the international situation:

"The leaders of the bureaucracy promoted the proletarian defeats; the defeats promoted the rise of the bureaucracy."

Stalin's defeat of Trotsky in the CI was rapidly followed by Trotsky expulsion from the party and eventual deportation from Russia in 1929. Grotesquely twisting certain of the opposition's proposals for economic development, Stalin instituted the First Five Year Plan in 1928, which included the forcible collectivisation of the peasantry. Bureaucratic, not democratic, planning led to famine, over-production in some sectors, underproduction in others and ultimately to the labour camps.

Stalinism's grip on the party tightened. Murders and expulsions became commonplace, culminating in the grotesque charade of the show trials and the Great Purges launched in 1936. Every link between Stalin's Soviet Union and the revolutionary tradition of Bolshevism was severed. Every human link was either killed or sent to the camps. The reaction swept through the whole of society with many of the post-revolutionary gains in social policy – divorce, abortion on demand, legalisation of homosexuality – being taken away.

Lenin did not lead to Stalin. Stalin smashed Leninism in the USSR. This bureaucratic victory was not inevitable. The isolation of the Russian revolution was not god-given. It came courtesy of the west European reformist leaders who either derailed or drowned in blood (Germany) the revolutions which erupted after 1917.

Lenin split with these leaders. Stalin – in the 1930s – made peace with them setting up Popular Fronts with the reformist parties, and even with the open parties of the class enemy. Lenin united the leaders of Bolshevism around a revolutionary programme in an inclusive central committee of the party. Trotsky, commenting in 1939 on the fact that every single member of Lenin's central committee had been either killed, ousted or exiled drew the conclusion:

"Stalinism had to exterminate first politically and then physically the leading cadres of Bolshevism in order to become what it is now: an apparatus of the privileged, a brake upon historical progress, an agency of world imperialism. Stalinism and Bolshevism are mortal enemies."

Tony's north of the border nightmare

The Edinburgh parliament is proving troublesome for Tony Blair and his operatives in Scotland. The New Labour-dominated coalition has so far faced problems on three principal issues: student fees; aspects of Jack Straw's racist asylum legislation; and the notoriously homophobic Section 28. *Rachel Thomas reports*

SCOTTISH LABOUR scraped home in the May 1999 poll as the single largest party in the 129-seat legislature, but was unable to form a majority in control of the executive. The scenario of a coalition administration with the Liberal Democrats actually fitted with Millbank's long-term game plan, even if the price to be paid for the participation of Jim Wallace's MSPs would be some concessions around the imposition of tuition fees on university students.

True to form, the Liberal Democrats under Wallace's leadership cut a shoddy deal with Labour's Donald Dewar for a few seats around the executive table. The coalition pact, of course, fell far short of the Liberal Democrats' campaign pledge to scrap tuition fees. Instead, Dewar and Wallace turned to a commission of inquiry, chaired by a technocrat, Andrew Cubie, who had previously worked for the biggest bosses' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

Despite his impeccable credentials Cubie's report gave a rude shock to both the Scottish executive and Millbank on its publication in December. Though it stopped short of recommending the complete abolition of fees, both the tone and the recommendations were acutely embarrassing for New Labour. Cubie described the current system of fees as "broadly discredited", not least because of the "burden and inequity" the Government had imposed. He even spoke of distressing accounts of student poverty heard during the course of the inquiry's investigation.

Cubie proposed that from 2001 Scottish students would no longer have to pay any fees during their university courses. In addition, the report strongly recommended the restoration of a means-tested student grant of £4,100

available to those coming from households with annual incomes of £15,000 or less.

Predictably, there was a catch: the introduction of a de facto "graduate tax", with those graduates making £25,000 or more a year required to pay back a sum of £3,075 – the equivalent of three years in fees at the present rate.

While Cubie did not embrace the principle of free access to higher education, the implementation of his proposals would have marked a humiliating climbdown for New Labour. It would have also fuelled the widespread discontent among undergraduates in England and Wales, still faced with the full "burden and inequity" of tuition fees.

At this stage, Dewar and Wallace brokered another deal in late January that significantly dilutes the Cubie recommendations, though on the issue of "up-front" fees New Labour in Edinburgh has had to beat a retreat. Government sources at Westminster had strongly hinted that such a move would collapse in the face of the perverse threat of legal action by the European Union. Not surprisingly, this threat proved grossly exaggerated.

Scottish students enrolled at universities at England and Wales, however, will not benefit from the concessions that will take effect from this autumn. The level of fees repayable will be less than Cubie proposed, just over £2,000, but graduates become liable for this "tax" with an annual income as low as £10,000. In addition, the package with an official price tag of less than £30 million – as opposed to Cubie's estimate of an extra £71 million – has placed even more severe restrictions on eligibility for any student grant.

Whatever the eventual outcome of the tuition fees controversy in Scotland, it has exposed the fundamentally reformist character of the Scottish

Socialist Party (SSP). While the party's MSP, Tommy Sheridan, forged his long-term credibility around his defiant opposition to the Poll Tax, the SSP has so far failed to mount a non-payment of fees campaign across Scotland. The party's leadership, still very much dominated by members of the former Scottish Militant, has appeared keen to placate the more right-wing elements in the organisation such as former MEP Hugh Kerr.

The SSP's heavy emphasis on win-

ning elections has led it to squander a golden opportunity to launch extra-parliamentary resistance to the fees through non-payment and campus occupations that would have extracted far greater concessions from the Scottish executive and reignited the battle for free education elsewhere in Britain.

Student activists and workers in Scotland who have looked to the SSP for a lead in the fight against the tattered version of New Labour need to learn

from this recent experience. While it remains crucial to place demands on both Tommy Sheridan and the SSP's locally elected councillors, this is not the party to pose a real challenge to New Labour's control of Holyrood, much less capitalist exploitation and oppression across Scotland. Student action – occupations and demos – will prove decisive in building on the partial climbdown and taking the fight for free education one stage further.

SCOTTISH BIGOTS ON THE ATTACK OVER SECTION 28

Wendy Alexander, the Communities Minister in the Scottish executive, announced late last year that the executive would act to scrap the notorious homophobic Section 28 (2a in Scotland), introduced in 1988 under the Thatcher regime to effectively block any enlightened discussion of homosexuality in state schools.

Alexander's statement came a month before the announcement in the Queen's Speech of still another local government bill that finally contained a clause to scrap the Section (see article below).

Initially, it appeared that the Holyrood administration would be the first to erase Section 28 from the statute book. But a reactionary backlash confronts the executive now. The backlash is inspired by Cardinal Thomas Winning, a man who would be Pope, and funded by the born-again Christian capitalist, Brian Souter, the boss of Stagecoach.

Souter has thrown £1 million of his estimated £600 million fortune behind a campaign to oppose repeal. The campaign was initially run by the Scottish School Boards Association, which has since backed away, though it is clearly trying to extract behind-the-scenes concessions from Dewar. Souter's media mouthpieces have been *Daily Record* editor, Martin Clarke, and tabloid editor turned PR guru, Jack Irvine.

Cardinal Winning spent mid-January branding homosexuality as a "perversion" and identifying "a militant homosexual lobby" that threatened the future of the family. His example has emboldened the leader of Liverpool's Anglican flock, James Jones, to leap out of the bigots' cupboard and declare his support for Section 28.

Ironically, there has been virtually no opposition to repeal within the Scottish Parliament itself. But with Winning on the warpath will Donald Dewar crumble?

Dewar, a supremely spineless politician, has so far refused a radio debate with Brian Souter. The conflicting signals from the row around the repeal of Section 28 in the Scots parliament have highlighted the urgent need to confront and fight back against this highly orchestrated, well-funded chorus of bigotry.

Lesbian and gay organisations should take to the streets of Edinburgh and Glasgow to press the demand for immediate, unconditional repeal of the section. In so doing they should call on the labour movement, including the SSP and Independent Labour MSP Dennis Canavan, the STUC as a whole and especially unions such as the FBU, MSF and Unison with half-decent policies on lesbian and gay rights, to join them in facing down the bigots and putting the pressure on Labour MSPs and the Scottish executive to honour the commitment to repeal

HOMOPHOBIA

Stop Labour's compromise on Section 28

NEW LABOUR pledged to remove Section 28 from the statute book nearly four months prior to its resounding general election victory in 1997.

The party leadership was not prepared to promise any legislation against homophobic discrimination to its allies around the supremely moderate Stonewall organisation. Though mildly disappointed, the Stonewall leadership held back from pressing for the implementation of its own modest agenda for lesbian and gay equality.

As the Blair government entered its third year it had still not moved to scrap Section 28 and even Stonewall felt compelled to launch a lobbying campaign. Its director, Angela Mason, publicly admitted that her patience with the Blairites had begun to wear thin. Finally

ly, last November's Queens' Speech included a brief clause within the massive Local Government Bill to repeal the 12-year-old ban on the "promotion" of homosexuality by local authorities.

But by late January New Labour looked set to perform another classic U-turn to placate bigoted opposition. Tory Baroness Young had promised to repeat her performance around the age of consent for gay sex in the House of Lords. As the noisy chorus of homophobia mounted in the Scottish media, Liverpool's Anglican archbishop and then England's chief rabbi jumped on the bigots' bandwagon. Millbank flew into a blind panic.

Initially, the spin doctors signalled that Tony Blair would assent to the call from arch right-wing Labour MP, Stu-

art Bell, and allow a "free" vote over Section 28, only to trigger a demand for a three-line whip on the issue from across the ideological spectrum of the parliamentary party, including all three candidates for London mayor.

The subsequent cabinet meeting produced a filthy "compromise" that would nominally scrap Section 28, only to retain much of its intended effect through guidance from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The author of this formula is David Blunkett, DfEE secretary and a consistent opponent of the equalisation of the age of consent. Blunkett told the 27 January cabinet meeting that "people do not want proselytising in favour of gay lifestyles."

Last summer the DfEE had already indicated that it would emphasise the

importance of "marriage and family life" in developing a new curriculum for personal, social and health education.

A *Guardian* journalist asked a DfEE staffer whether the forthcoming legislation would effectively retain the ban of "promotion of homosexuality", the answer was "yes, the document will guide on the same lines." There was no reference at all to the widespread reality of homophobic bullying in schools.

The recent furor around Section 28 attests both to the powerful influence of religious reaction within the British establishment and the spineless hypocrisy of the Blairites when confronted by the slightest right-wing challenge to its supposed vision of a "modern, tolerant" Britain.

Crucially, it also confirms the inad-

equacy of Stonewall's timid tactics. Instead of polite lobbying and candle-lit vigils, lesbian and gay activists need to take to the streets with the same spirit of anger that hundreds displayed last May Day in Soho in the immediate aftermath of the bombing of the Admiral Duncan pub. They should demand the support of the unions and all Labour Party members around calls to:

- Scrap Section 28 without Blunkett's strings;
- Real equalisation of the age of consent; and
- Positive legislation to outlaw homophobic discrimination at the workplace and in society at large, including full pension rights for same sex and unmarried heterosexual couples.

THIRD WORLD DEBT

After Seattle: cancel it all

ONCE IN a while Gordon Brown likes to relax his "Iron Chancellor" image and pose as the friend of the poor.

He celebrated the millennium with an announcement that Britain will cancel debt owed from some of the Heavily Indebted Poorest Countries (HIPC). He called on other G7 countries to follow suit. A few weeks later he shared a platform with opponents of the arms trade and Jubilee 2000 campaigners and announced further curbs on arms sales.

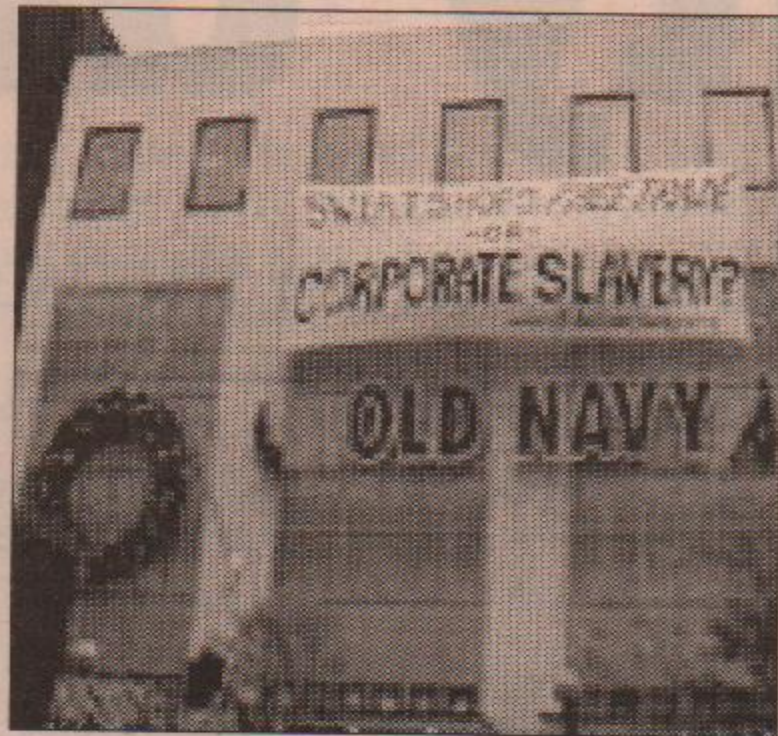
Has the Chancellor experienced a sudden attack of conscience? No. A careful examination of the measures shows that they will make only a small dent in the debt mountain and will still leave the poorest countries at the mercy of the rich.

The mass worldwide campaign which so spectacularly shook the capitalist bigwigs at Seattle last year has undoubtedly had an impact. Besides the respectable church campaigners who lead Jubilee 2000, thousands of young people have joined in protests, from Seattle to Tokyo, from school students in Britain to child workers in Peru.

The scandal of the poorest countries paying more than twice in debt service than they receive in aid, the fact that African countries have to pay four times more on debt payments than on health care – these issues have galvanised hundreds of thousands into global action.

The campaign has forced the various international bodies and the G7 countries to announce a speed-up in debt relief. In September, the World Bank announced a new package which would in theory lead to £60bn being cut from the debt burden of the 41 most indebted countries. The additional measures announced by Britain and France mean that debts owed to these governments will also be scrapped.

But as the *Economist* pointed out in the wake of the Chancellor's announce-

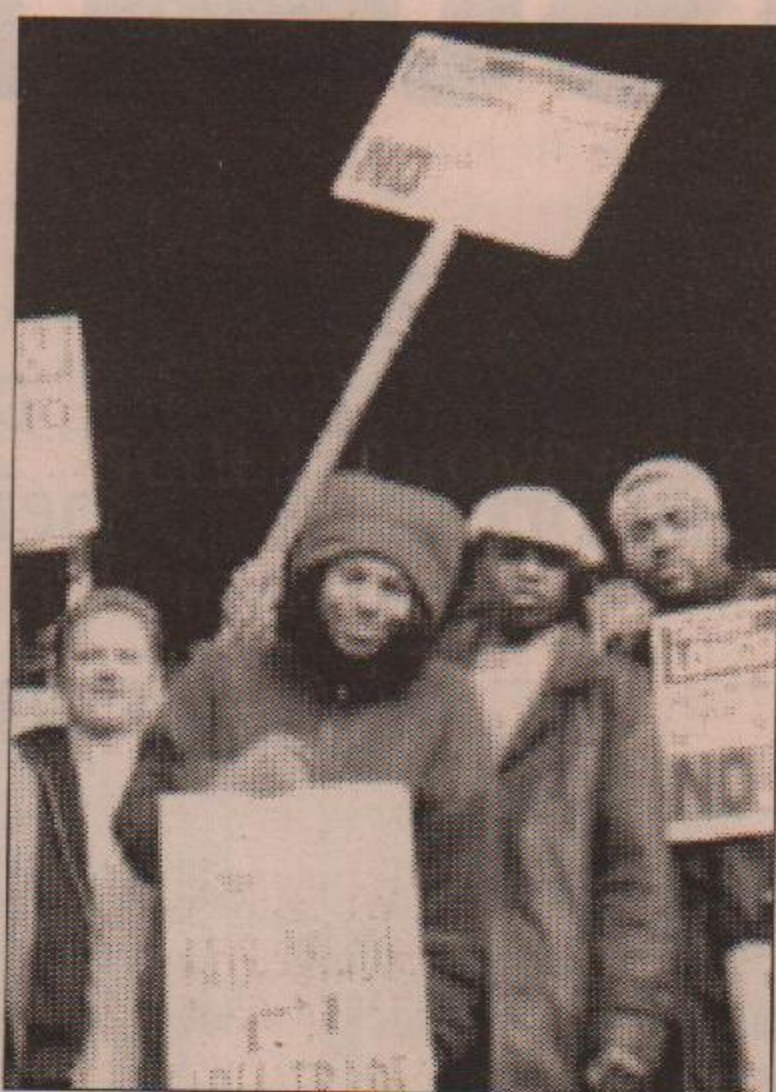


ment, these offers are not as generous as they seem. The international debt relief initiative reallocates debt among creditors. If the big international institutions forgive debt repayments, the debtor countries are then supposed to be able to pay back some of their other debts.

The British initiative is also misleading. Much of the debt that Britain is cancelling is related to trade credits, so called "export-credit guarantees" brilliantly exposed by Mark Thomas on television. This is where the British government extended credit to countries so that they could buy British goods! As the *Economist* put it "these were originally subsidies not just to the impoverished buyer but also to the rich-world seller".

And there are other strings to the debt relief. To qualify, countries still have to pass stringent tests. To listen to Gordon Brown, you would think this is all about spending money on good causes like education, instead of arms. Particularly ironic, because the main part of the IMF and World Bank's conditions are that the countries should follow the stringent economic demands of the IMF, cutting education and social welfare budgets.

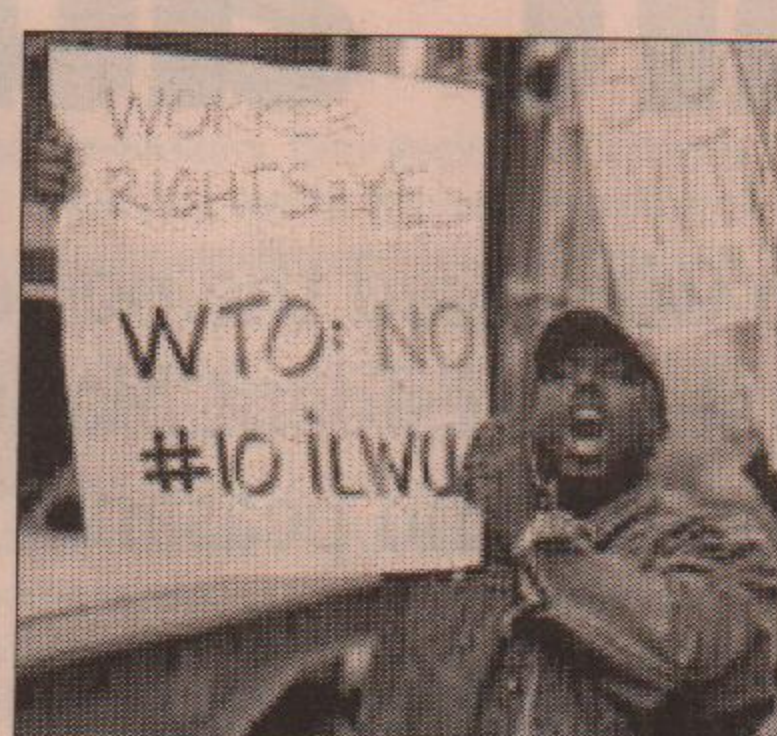
The IMF's structural adjustment policies, including wholesale privatisation



and swingeing cuts in public spending, have thrown thousands out of work and slashed education and health programmes. For example, in Zambia half of the companies sold off in the mass privatisation drive are now bankrupt. For the majority, hospital care means little more than a bed to die in. Medicines, food, syringes all have to be paid for.

In the last two decades of economic "liberalisation", the gap between the richest and poorest has grown both within and between countries. The income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth living in the poorest countries jumped from 30:1 in 1960 to 74:1 in 1997. At the same time in the US the top one per cent of households have doubled their share of the national wealth. So just a handful of the very richest families are benefiting from the way the global economy now works.

Currently, every child in Peru is born owing \$1,200. A large part of the Peruvian anti-debt campaign is actually run



by young people in the Movement of Working Children, who experience most sharply the lack of basic educational opportunities.

The current debt relief initiatives leave the IMF programmes intact. Countries are supposed to follow the rules for a set time before they qualify for relief – recent changes have merely reduced this period from six to three years.

The apologists for this strict code explain that otherwise there would be a danger of "moral hazard". They mean that if debt was cancelled "profligate" countries might just run up further debts. The hypocrisy of this is mind-boggling given it was the big banks and imperialist countries who fell over themselves to lend money in the first place, and presumably would do so again if there were profits to be made.

Equally hypocritical is the criticism made of many poor countries for spending money on arms. Of course it's a scandal that the arms companies are profiteering from the misery of war in Africa. But lectures from Blair, Brown or Clinton – chief warmongers in the Balkans and Middle East – are just sickening.

A significant proportion of the Third World debt arose as a result of the high military spending of the right-wing military governments backed by the

West in the Cold War. But these countries are still being made to pay even when their governments have changed. And Britain and others have carried on selling arms. The Zimbabwe air force has been bombing homes in the Congo, using British Hawks.

Gordon Brown has now announced an end to government support for arms sales to the poorest countries, but countries such as Indonesia and Turkey can still qualify for government cover under the Export Credit Guarantee Department. This will still guarantee loans given for arms purchases from Britain.

The answer to debt and the arms trade lies in building the global movement against capitalism which took to the streets of Seattle last year. This movement – increasingly anti-capitalist in content and militant in spirit – can harass the top dogs of world capitalism every time they try to meet. In September they are gathering in Prague for an IMF summit. We should start working now to turn Prague into Seattle and destroy the IMF.

**DESTROY THE IMF
TURN PRAGUE
INTO SEATTLE!**

**Protest against the
IMF and World Bank!**

September 2000

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INDONESIA

Economic crisis fuels ethnic strife

Pictures of tourists fleeing their four-star hotels on the island of Lombok in the Moluccas pushed Indonesia back into the headlines. *John McKee reports*

OVER THE last year the "Spice Islands", as they were called in colonial days, have been riven with communal violence. More than 2,000 people have been killed in attack and counter-attack by Muslims and Christians. Lombok, a growing tourist centre, had remained quiet until January when Christians and Chinese were targeted by mobs.

The Moluccas are not the only parts of Indonesia in the grip of violence. President Abdurrahman Wahid has been travelling from one trouble spot to another trying to quell growing protests and demands for separation.

At the beginning of January he was in West Papua apologising for previous human rights abuses and agreeing to change the name of the province from the hated "Irian Jaya" to Papua. At the same time he made clear to local leaders that there was no question of allowing a break away from Indonesia.

At the end of January he carried the same message to Aceh, a province where the Free Aceh Movement has been fighting for independence for decades. His flying visit, preceded by

clashes between military police and the rebels, lasted only two hours on an island in the north of the province – the capital was considered too insecure.

Despite the withdrawal of some of the most hated military units, there are almost daily reports of bodies being left on the roads or suspect villages being burnt by police and military units. Unrest is growing in other provinces such as Riau, close to Singapore, and East Kalimantan (Borneo).

There has been speculation in Jakarta about the hand of the military being behind the most recent outbreaks of violence in the Moluccas. There is an ongoing struggle between the newly elected government and the old guard of the army led by former Chief of Staff General Wiranto, now a government minister.

Wahid wants to slowly ease the army out of its dominant position in the government. The slaughter in East Timor following the vote for independence and the subsequent retreat of the army out of the province under international pressure, has given Wahid a power-

ful weapon.

A "Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Abuses in East Timor" was set up by the government. It has just issued a report which implicates Wiranto and other generals in the violence.

Wahid, while declaring Jakarta's complete opposition to a UN tribunal, is able to use this as a threat against Wiranto. Of course, whenever military figures have appeared before the courts, they have either been let off or given light sentences, but it would be enough to remove and discredit the old generals who were cronies of Suharto.

At the end of January the President drafted a decree that all military cabinet members, including Wiranto, had to resign their commissions. The US weighed in behind Wahid warning the military publicly not to mount a coup, while the British promised to lift the arms embargo because Indonesia "now had a democratic government".

The generals, with their links to business and Suharto's old party GOLKAR, will not be pushed aside without a fight. So it is not surprising that

reports suggest agents provocateurs were behind the riots in Moluccas, including figures from Kopassus, a crack repressive unit behind brutality in East Timor and Aceh.

But it also suits Wahid's government to talk about "dark forces" behind the riots and protests. Where there is grinding poverty and a daily struggle for survival there is always a ready audience to blame a scapegoat, the "wealthy" Chinese and Christians, or the "immigrant" Muslims who now outnumber the one-time majority Christians in Ambon, capital of Moluccas. It is also a stick to beat those who are putting forward legitimate demands for autonomy or separation.

Many of these areas, Aceh, West Papua, Kalimantan, Riau are rich in natural resources and yet the people live in dire poverty. In Bintan in Riau, for example, small farmers have blockaded the Bintan Beach International Resort where the rich come to play, in protest at being swindled out of their lands by the Suharto regime.

It is the economic crisis in Indonesia that underlies the growing threat

of national disintegration. A recent World Bank report pointed out that nearly 20 per cent of the population lived in absolute poverty, that is they did not have enough income to feed and clothe themselves; another 50 per cent of the population had a 50:50 chance of falling into this category.

Wahid's government is pinning its hopes on winning back the foreign investors who fled when Suharto's regime collapsed.

The banking system which collapsed has been "restructured" by the state taking over all debts. The budget envisages seeking a further \$4.5 billion loan this year and rescheduling another \$2.2 billion. While government debt amounted to 23 per cent of GDP in 1997 it is expected to rise to 90-100 per cent in 2000.

In return for the loans the IMF is demanding further cuts in subsidies on basic goods. While Suharto and his cronies are allowed to enjoy the riches gained from decades of corruption, once again it is the workers and peasants who are expected to pay the price of the crisis.

ECUADOR

Masses storm capital to halt austerity drive

Ecuador's capital Quito witnessed the power of the oppressed in January when thousands of people stormed parliament to stop President Mahuad's "dollarisation" of the economy. But having dealt with this IMF stooge, the workers and peasants must break from their military "allies", argues *Keith Harvey*

ON FRIDAY 21 January thousands of indigenous Indians stormed Ecuador's parliament building in the capital Quito.

A state of emergency was announced on 5 January to try to forestall planned strikes and demonstrations. But the mass of protesters ignored the government's decree. Sweeping aside the troops guarding the building they occupied the parliamentary chamber and demanded the resignation of the country's president, Jamil Mahuad.

Since the turn of the year the wave of opposition on the streets had been mounting. Transport workers from Guayaquil were on strike from early in the year. The oil workers called an all-out strike for 17 January. "Popular Parliaments" were springing up around the country. An "Ecuadorian People's Parliament" has been set up in Quito.

Mahuad had become isolated at the top of the pyramid of Ecuador's ruling class. He was presiding over the country's worst economic crisis since 1929 – output collapsed by 7 per cent in 1999 alone.

Since his election in August 1998, Mahuad has pushed through one attack after another. With each new austerity measure the suffering of Ecuador's people, especially the indigenous peoples who make up over half the population, grew more and more unbearable.

Thousands were thrown out of work; the official jobless total is near 20 per cent. Meanwhile, inflation of 70 per cent eats away at the value of wages and savings. The plight of most people is desperate. In a population of 12 million around five million are able to work; but four million of them earn less than \$100 a month. *El Comercio*, a leading business paper said:

"If you are one of these you should start thinking of leaving the country." Mahuad himself admitted at the turn of the year that seven out of ten people "don't earn enough to cover their basic needs".

The World Bank reports that five million live in poverty and two million in "extreme poverty". But the rich continue to prosper. Ecuadorian banks raked in \$576 million last year by speculating on the exchange rate; and this despite the fact that the government poured \$1.3 billion into the banks to save them from bankruptcy! Such benevolence towards the already rich should come as no surprise given one bank – Bank del Progreso – contributed \$3.1 million to Mahuad's election campaign.

Mahuad's plan, announced in early January, for the "dollarisation" of the economy in order to stem inflation was the last straw. Businesses put up their prices while others held back goods from the shops.

Soon the masses were banging on the gates of Congress demanding change. And the 30,000 troops sent out to the streets of Quito at the time "dollarisation" was announced failed to stop thousands of protesters getting into the city from the surrounding countryside.

The current crisis stems from Ecuador's weak semi-colonial condition



Mahuad denounces the attack on Congress. Protesters march through military barricades in Quito.



which forces it to depend upon a few export commodities for its income. The Asian financial crisis and regional economic slump of 1997-98 drastically reduced the demand for Ecuador's oil. Then the country's second biggest export earner – bananas – was hit by the European Union (EU) refusing to import them as a result of an ongoing trade war between US and European food multinationals.

The loss of 70 per cent of Ecuador's export income created a crisis of government revenues. But while money was quickly found to shore up the financial system the government dropped price controls on important basic foodstuffs and fuel, causing huge protests. And it added a raft of tax increase proposals just to fan the flames.

In addition Mahuad went cap in hand to the IMF for a \$250 million loan to bolster the currency (sucres). In return, the IMF demanded the privatisation of major industries, such as telecommunications, oil and electricity. This produced more anger among the mass of trade unionists because of the inevitable job losses.

The protests have shaken the country to its foundations. They show the willingness of the masses to fight against the poverty inflicted on them by the IMF overlords as well as the local capitalists in Ecuador.

Yet at the moment this movement is threatened by its dependency upon junior officers within the army to provide the leadership. The fact that the mass of protesters got into Congress was due to the unwillingness of the army to stop them.

Latin America has a long history of army colonels who conspire against their senior officers to oust corrupt and discredited governments such as the current President of Venezuela, Antonio Chavaz, who began his political career in a failed coup attempt in 1992.

In such cases the motives of the military are a million miles away from those of the masses. In each case they deceive the masses with false promises of reform only to go on to serve the very same capitalists who they claimed to oppose.

What the military "reformers" real-

ly want is firm government to prevent the masses from spreading their protests and threatening real social revolution. In Ecuador, the military at first supported Mahuad's use of repression to crush the protests. But they gradually realised that Mahuad would never get his policies through. In addition the military were disillusioned with him after he cut their budget when Ecuador and Peru finally signed a peace treaty to settle their long-running border dispute.

Since at least last October the Patriotic Front (PF) has organised a coalition of trade union, peasant and business forces which has been urging the military to depose Mahuad. Big business itself has become more and more divided. The pro-IMF wing, predominantly around the finance and banking sector, wanted

fight against corruption."

The determination and heroism of the masses was not in doubt which is more than can be said for the Colonel and his two fellow members of his Junta of National Salvation. Within 24 hours, after threats of "political and economic isolation" from the State Department in Washington and a series of denunciations of their actions by neighbouring reactionary leaders such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru, the army pretenders relented and the country's vice-president Gustavo Noboa was sworn in as Mahuad's replacement – the country's sixth president in four years.

The masses had been used to remove a discredited figure and have him replaced by a new face committed to the same policies. Noboa has repeated the

and rejected by the masses.

No better has been the record of the Maoist Communist Party-led Popular Front, which has sought a government embracing the church, the army and sections of the "progressive bourgeoisie".

To make sure that the next wave of protests succeeds in bringing about real and lasting change the mass of workers and the 40 per cent of the population who work the land need to fight for direct political power for themselves, for a real workers' revolution. The lessons of the past show that any alliance with representatives of the business community or the military is a dead end, since these people will always limit the scope and the demands of the mass movement to whatever is acceptable within the framework of their system.

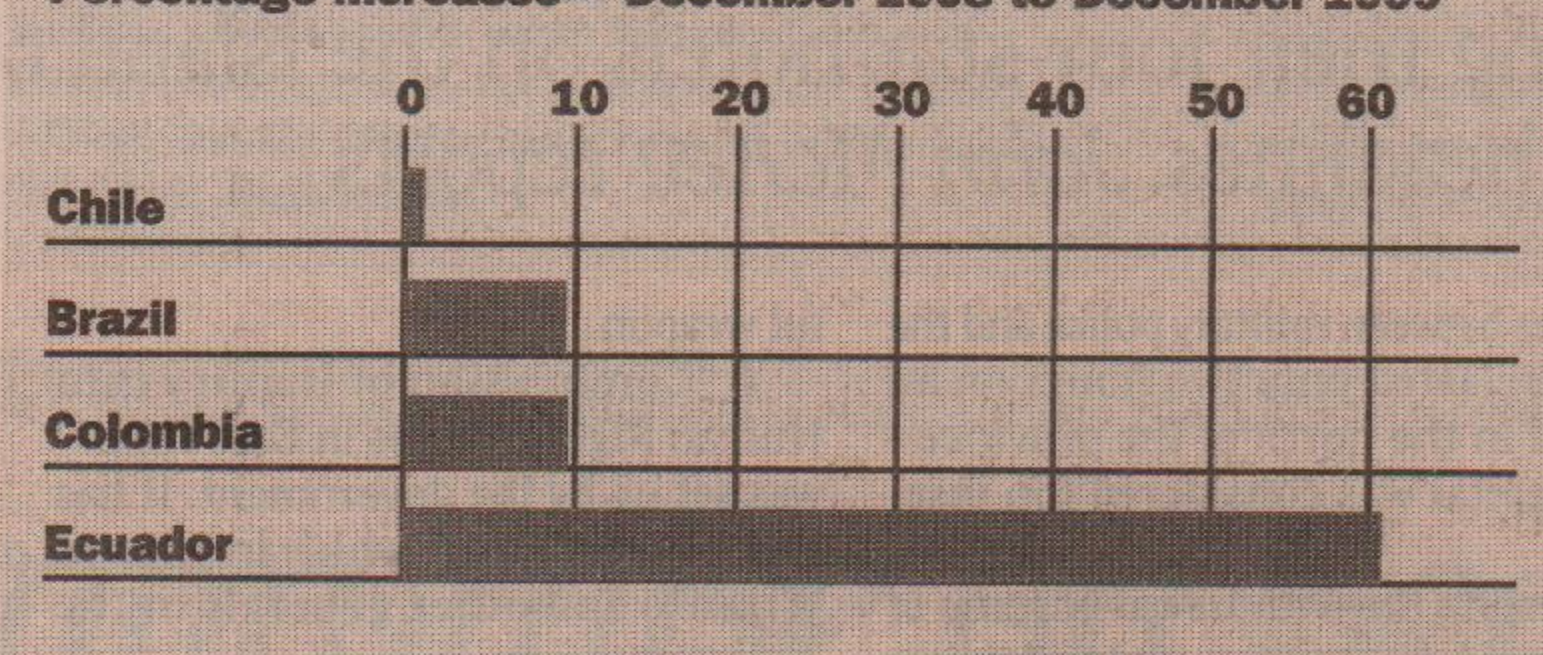
A programme of demands must be drawn up and debated by the popular assemblies that have sprung up around the country. These bodies should become broader based within the workplaces and countryside, made up of elected and accountable delegates of the poor and exploited. Some key immediate demands are:

- No to any privatisation; renationalisation without compensation of all those enterprises privatised to date. Put them under workers' control. For nationalisation of the banks and major industries, especially the agricultural plantations
- For a minimum wage of \$400 a month, indexed against retail price rises as determined by committees of workplace delegates and working class and poor peasant households. For social benefits to be set at the same level for all those out of work or unable to work through age, illness or infirmity
- For a massive programme of public works to absorb the mass of unemployed, paid for by the cancellation of all foreign debt payments, confiscation of speculative profits of the banks, repatriation of capital salted abroad and a massive wealth tax on profits of the multinationals
- For land seizures against big landowners; give the land to those who work it; for state credits for seed and equipment and co-operativisation of wholesale in agricultural goods
- No reliance upon the military! No to juntas of salvation! For rank and file soldiers' committees to elect officers
- For mass demonstrations and a general strike of all workers to overthrow the regime of President Noboa. For a constituent assembly made up of representatives of the poor and exploited. For a workers' and poor peasants' government based on and accountable to workers', soldiers' and poor peasants' councils and defended by a workers' militia.

In the struggles that lie ahead in Ecuador it is vital that a revolutionary party is built, one capable of fighting relentlessly for these demands and against all wings of the ruling class.

RISE IN CONSUMER PRICES

Percentage increases – December 1998 to December 1999



Mahuad to stand firm. But the big exporters were disillusioned; they saw no respite from collapsing markets and many have had their funds frozen in Ecuador's banks since last March.

The leader of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE), Antonio Vargas, placed his faith in a group of around 70 junior officers led by Colonel Lucio Gutierrez, calling on them to take action against the government. When they did, General Mendoza backed the revolt to preserve army unity and to block a coalition of trade unionists and peasants taking over the government.

In the Congress chamber, after it was occupied, CONAIE leader Antonio Rivas issued a manifesto calling for new jobs and fair wages. Colonel Gutierrez urged the "Ecuadorian people to rise up and

pledge to "dollarise" the economy with IMF help. The price rises remain in force and the privatisation plans are still on the table.

Mahuad was only following in the footsteps of President Bucaram who was forced to resign in 1997 after mass protests and strikes. And Mahuad's successor can also be ousted.

But each time the mass movement has risen up an alliance of the reformist leaders of the main trade unions (especially health, oil and electricity unions), the centre left parties and CONAIE have channelled the protests into support for yet more talks with Mahuad or lined up another bourgeois leader to replace him. When Bucaram was brought down in 1997 these leaders put their weight behind the election of his successor, Alarcón, until he too was totally discredited

GERMANY

Kohlgate dents ring of confidence

For two decades, Helmut Kohl dominated European politics. Today, he faces criminal investigations. *Martin Suchanek* in Berlin explains why "Kohlgate" is about more than reputations

THE AVALANCHE that has buried Helmut Kohl began slowly - a minor financial scandal. An election win in Germany's second chamber and the developing conflicts between the Social Democratic (SPD) coalition and its own supporters, blinded Kohl and his Christian Democratic Union (CDU), to the danger.

The accusations and the evidence accumulated swiftly. Bribes for defence contracts and foreign financing of election campaigns were not just provincial affairs but pointed to the very top. The demand for explanations grew more urgent.

Protests from party officials that this would undermine the "great achievements of Helmut Kohl" were swept aside as parallels were drawn with the scandals that tore apart Italy's Christian Democrats and France's right. The old way of doing business has become dysfunctional for Germany's big bosses.

Although the CDU was always the big capitalists' party, during the Cold War it had to win hundreds of thousands of "ordinary" members. These came from the professional and white-collar "middle strata", civil servants, small businessmen and farmers. But the party also has an organised workers' section, largely drawn from the catholic regions.

The CDU reflected the general pattern of German politics in which the bosses made substantial concessions in order to underpin class collaboration. To hold it all together, while still doing the bosses' bidding, Kohl perfected a system based on loyal but generally mediocre party officials who ensured that potential opponents were bought off or neutralised.

But behind the official party there was also a secret "second organisation", a network through which big business channelled funds into the party. Companies such as Thyssen, Veba and Viag secretly pumped over DM100 million into the party. The CDU in the state of Hesse, for example, had access to DM18 million in a Liechtenstein bank account for electoral campaigns.

German imperialism made huge gains from the stability of its domestic political strategy under Kohl: capitalist unification of Germany, dominance of the Euro, overcoming post-war restrictions on its military capabilities. But now the bosses realise past victories are inadequate. They have new targets, above all, the system of class collaboration that served them so well but now seems an expensive burden.

That is the real reason for the Kohlgate scandal. Behind the scenes, a massive power struggle is taking place between the still dominant Kohl wing, who stand for "social partnership", and a neo-liberal wing who want to see policy dominated by "shareholder values".

Both wings were equally involved in the bribery and corruption that greased the wheels under Kohl. There is, therefore, a common interest in "limiting the damage to the CDU" and "protecting the stability and integrity of the political system as a whole".

Almost daily, more secretly stashed millions are discovered in Switzerland or Liechtenstein. The present CDU leadership, torn between covering up and preserving its own credibility, has committed itself to a "thorough investigation" - but could only muster a wafer-thin majority to suspend Kohl as honorary lifetime chairman of the party, until he reveals the donors' names to the party.

Nor has the other pillar of German politics, the governing SPD, been entirely immune from the scandal's fall-out. Their North Rhine-Westphalia treasurer has had to resign over financial irregularities.

The revelations from this episode hold fundamental lessons for the workers' movement. Clear demands need to flow from them.

The whole affair shows the intrinsic links between business and the supposedly neutral state. Whether or not particular donations are technically legal is beside the point. It is obvious that only very rich people and corporations can give millions to parties and politicians, and they do not do it from the goodness of their hearts.

This corruption strips away the facade of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and one person, one vote. Party personnel and senior state employees expect material privileges and are in a position to favour those who provide them. When politicians across the spectrum talk of the need to "defend the system", they speak for a whole caste who live off their roles as mediators and

power-brokers. Bourgeois democracy is a fraud in a world where a handful of magnates can buy and sell governments.

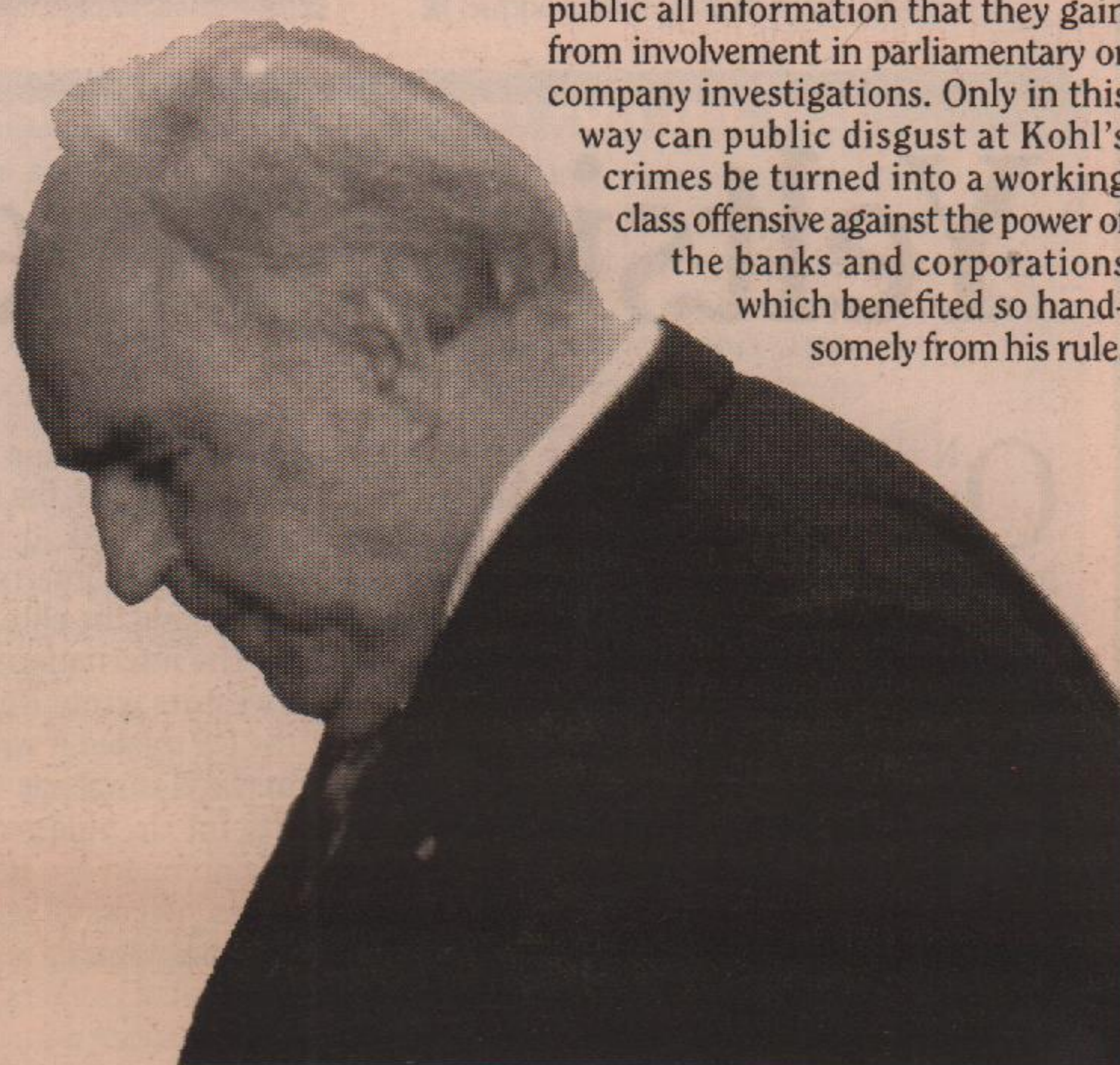
For all the talk of "bringing the truth into the open", all the parties are anxious to keep the scandal within narrowly defined limits. A few scapegoats can be sacrificed, even some famous ones and some foreign ones, like deceased French president Mitterrand, but their mutual interest is to draw a veil over the whole affair as soon as possible.

We need to exploit the ruling class' divisions, especially within the CDU.

This means mobilising the labour movement to demand public scrutiny of the CDU's accounts along with those of its affiliated organisations.

In all the firms and enterprises implicated to date, including the privatised East German industries, we demand: open the books and computers to workers' representatives - all bank and other financial accounts, the minutes of meetings with the privatisation authorities, etc.

The SPD, PDS and the trade unions must support these demands and make public all information that they gain from involvement in parliamentary or company investigations. Only in this way can public disgust at Kohl's crimes be turned into a working class offensive against the power of the banks and corporations which benefited so handsomely from his rule.



AUSTRIA

Haider's rise - a warning to the left

HE THINKS Hitler's SS was a "part of the German army which should be honoured". He thinks Hitler's employment policies were "orderly". He calls Auschwitz and Dachau "punishment camps". He is Jorg Haider, leader of Austria's Freedom Party (FOP)

He is about to take his party into a coalition with the country's conservatives, bringing the far right into power for the first time in almost 60 years.

Though Haider has pledged not to become a minister in the new coalition, the breakdown of "consensus politics" has sent shock waves through the Austrian workers' movement.

For 13 years the Austrian Socialist Party (SPO) has ruled in coalition with the conservatives. Because Austria's "mainstream" parties have carved up the public sector between them, while presiding over a faltering economy and growing poverty, more and more see mainstream politics as corrupt and useless.

Haider's FPO has had several false starts. But a recent boost in electoral support brought Haider to power as governor of Carinthia province and then gave the FPO second place in last year's general election. Unfortunately, a large part of that increased support has come from workers, including those in former pro-SPO housing estates, deceived by Haider's mixture of racism and populist promises.

Some within the Austrian workers' movement have written this off as a

"protest vote". This is extremely short-sighted. Haider is a Nazi sympathiser: his parents were Nazis; as a youth he practised fencing on a straw dummy with the name "Wiesenthal" (the famous Nazi-hunter) pinned to it.

The fact that millions of workers have voted for an open racist with barely concealed sympathies for the Austrian right's genocidal past is a massive warning that should sting Austrian socialists into action.

The FPO is one of many far-right European parties that avoids openly fascist methods and symbols. It has no

organised terror gangs and no proven links with Austria's known Nazi-terrorists - although Haider has refused to condemn murderous attacks on Roma.

But while media attention has focused on Haider's racism there has been less publicity about his neo-liberal economic policies. He favours welfare cuts and privatisation and supports the bosses eroding workers' rights at work.

A coalition between Haider's FPO and the conservatives will pave the way for major attacks on the working class along Thatcherite lines, but with an added far

right twist. Not only will Haider demand the "cleansing" of the public sector - including broadcasting and the arts - of all left-wing sympathisers, the new coalition will launch massive attacks on workers' rights and huge cuts in public spending. First in line, of course, will be Austria's migrant workers and refugees.

And that will only be the start. Haider wants to use the coalition as a stepping stone to the Austrian Chancellorship, from where he could inflict even harsher blows against workers and ethnic minorities.

Workers Power's sister organisation in Austria, Workers Standpoint (Ast), has been at the forefront of protests against the proposed coalition. Our comrades have organised rallies against Haider and helped disrupt his election campaign.

Now they are calling on the Austrian trade union federation to mount a wave of mass strikes if the far-right coalition goes ahead.

In the unions there is a hard battle being fought against the FPO, which has vocal fractions in many workplaces. In one large public sector workplace mass meeting Ast militants and sympathisers helped win workers away from the Haiderites and towards opposition to the coalition.

But traditional reformist and Communist Party arguments have proved ineffective. Workers want a radical answer to the real problems Haider highlights in order to stir up race hate. But the knee-jerk reaction of the reformists and Stalinists is to call for a grand coalition of all "progressive" parties. In reality, this is exactly what the workers have just rejected.

That is why the LRCI in Austria calls for:

- The Socialist Party to govern alone, with mass workers' mobilisations to defend and extend the welfare state and nationalised industries.
- Mass strikes and mass mobilisations to bring down the right-wing coalition.

SWEDEN

Smash Nazi terror

SWEDEN'S NEO-NAZIS struck early in the new year. Their victim was 19-year-old Salih Ozel, fatally beaten by a skinhead gang. His death, just months after the murder of Bjorn Soderberg and bomb attacks on journalists in Stockholm, confirms that the fascists are waging a campaign of terror against immigrants and political opponents.

Despite Sweden's image as a haven for refugees, the reality is increasing danger for many. Rising unemployment and cuts in social services have created the conditions

for fascist growth.

Government measures, such as the attempt to deport Kenneth Wamburi, the Secretary of the Kenyan Student Organisation in Sweden, give racism a respectable veneer.

Arbetarmakt, the LRCI's Swedish section, has campaigned vigorously for working class direct action to drive the fascists off the streets.

Against the arguments to leave it to the police or rely on the state to ban fascist organisations, they are demanding that working class mass organisations, the unions, parties and

youth groups, act:

- to mobilise mass counter-demos to stop the nazis whenever they try to meet or march
- close down any venue that allows fascist gatherings
- wreck every nazi concert and paper sale
- stop all postal deliveries of nazi literature
- organise self-defence in the communities
- drive all fascists and organised racists out of the unions and workplaces.

Russia gambles on

Much is at stake in Russia's bloody war against the Chechen people. The fate of the Russian government is as much on the line as the survival of the Chechen nation.

Dave Stockton explains why

FOR THE first two months of the Russian assault on Chechnya the war consisted of a massive aerial and artillery bombardment of cities, towns and even villages. This resulted in enormous casualties among Chechen civilians, creating over 200,000 refugees, but it kept Russian military casualties low.

Yeltsin and his new "strong man" prime minister and chosen successor, Vladimir Putin, could maintain that they were winning the war. It would be over by Christmas. Public support for the war was maintained by total control over the media and by Russian and foreign journalists out of Chechnya.

But in December, when the Russian forces began their assault on Grozny, things began to go wrong. Like First World War generals they submitted the city to a tremendous bombardment. Imagining that nothing could survive this, they then sent in the ground troops. But around

two thousand hardened Chechen guerrilla fighters emerged from their concrete bunkers and wasted the attacking forces with sniper fire, at times trapping whole columns. On 15 December a reconnaissance column was lured into an ambush in the strategically important Minutka Square, resulting in the loss of dozens of men and at least seven armoured vehicles.

The cessation of the Russian onslaught on Grozny in early January was clearly a forced retreat by a badly mauled attack force. Attempts to take this square have been repeatedly launched by Russian forces over the past six weeks resulting only in heavy casualties. Journalists report a severe slump in the morale of Russian forces coming back from the front. The mounting figures for casualties could seriously affect Russian public opinion during the weeks from now to the 26 March presidential election.

The defenders of Grozny are, according to

some sources, now killing a high number of Russian soldiers. The prestigious Mothers of Russian Soldiers organisation has calculated that 3,000 have been killed since the fighting began. Towards the end of January the army was forced to revise upward its casualty figures to approaching two thousand dead. The reason for this is the costly attempt to take Grozny street by street and square by square.

Yeltsin and Putin know that this huge bluff cannot be maintained indefinitely. When the body bags come home and when soldiers on leave spread reports of the horrors from the battle zone, the Russian population will start to question the official propaganda. If even the semblance of a victory begins to fade then demands for peace negotiations will begin. Putin's gamble must be that this will not happen before the end of March.

Meanwhile the refugee crisis is reaching disastrous proportions. Conditions in the refugee

Yeltsin leaves Russia in ruins and h

ON NEW Year's Eve Boris Yeltsin left power in the same manner as he had held it for eight years. The man who had pulled off a whole series of coups during his eight years in office – sacking vice-presidents and heads of the constitutional court, dissolving parliament and bombarding it with tanks – finally sacked himself. His resignation is yet another attempt to swindle the Russian people out of exercising the slightest democratic accountability and control.

This method of governance is embodied in Yeltsin's 1993 constitution. It is based on the control of the media, on staging diversionary wars, presidential coups, replacements of governments, all without the check of a parliament or an independent judiciary. This is a classical plebiscitary bonapartist regime. Behind the facade of bourgeois democracy lies the squalid reality of traditional Russian despotism.

But it is a regime of permanent crisis. Under Yeltsin, especially after the crash of the rouble

and the suspension of foreign debt repayments in August 1998, the Russian ship of state seemed a pitiful wreck, driven by the storms of economic crisis, internal scandal and faction fighting among the elite.

The international financial institutions and investors wrote Russia off as a lost cause and the US treated it with scarcely veiled contempt in the Kosova war. Moreover, there were signs that the sleeping giant of the Russian people was beginning to stir. Reports of militant and sometimes successful strikes in enterprises both in European Russia and in the Kuzbass warned of a revival of workers' organisation.

The Yeltsin clan, led by the billionaire financier and industrialist Boris Berezovsky and supported by Yeltsin's daughter Tatyana, and another led by Anatoly Chubais, the utility magnate who headed the mass privatisation drives in 1993-4, represent an entire system of rule, an entire parasitic class who have expropriated the nationalised industries and services created by

the toil of generations of Russian workers.

During Yeltsin's eight-year reign billions of dollars, the proceeds from the privatisation of state assets and from IMF handouts, have made its way from Russia to the western bank accounts of private individuals. These parasites are hated by millions of Russians. By the autumn of 1999 Yeltsin's popularity stood at an all time low. It seemed certain that rival forces led by another corrupt clan leader, Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov tacitly supported by the Communists, might win a majority in parliament and mount a successful challenge for the presidency.

Clearly the personnel of the bonapartist clique had to be changed. The warring factions within it (Berezovsky and Chubais) had to be called to order or the parliamentary and presidential elections might be lost. The danger of humiliation galvanised the military leadership and the internal security forces into action. The windfall of high oil prices, which stabilised Russia's economy for a while, made a reassertion of Russia's



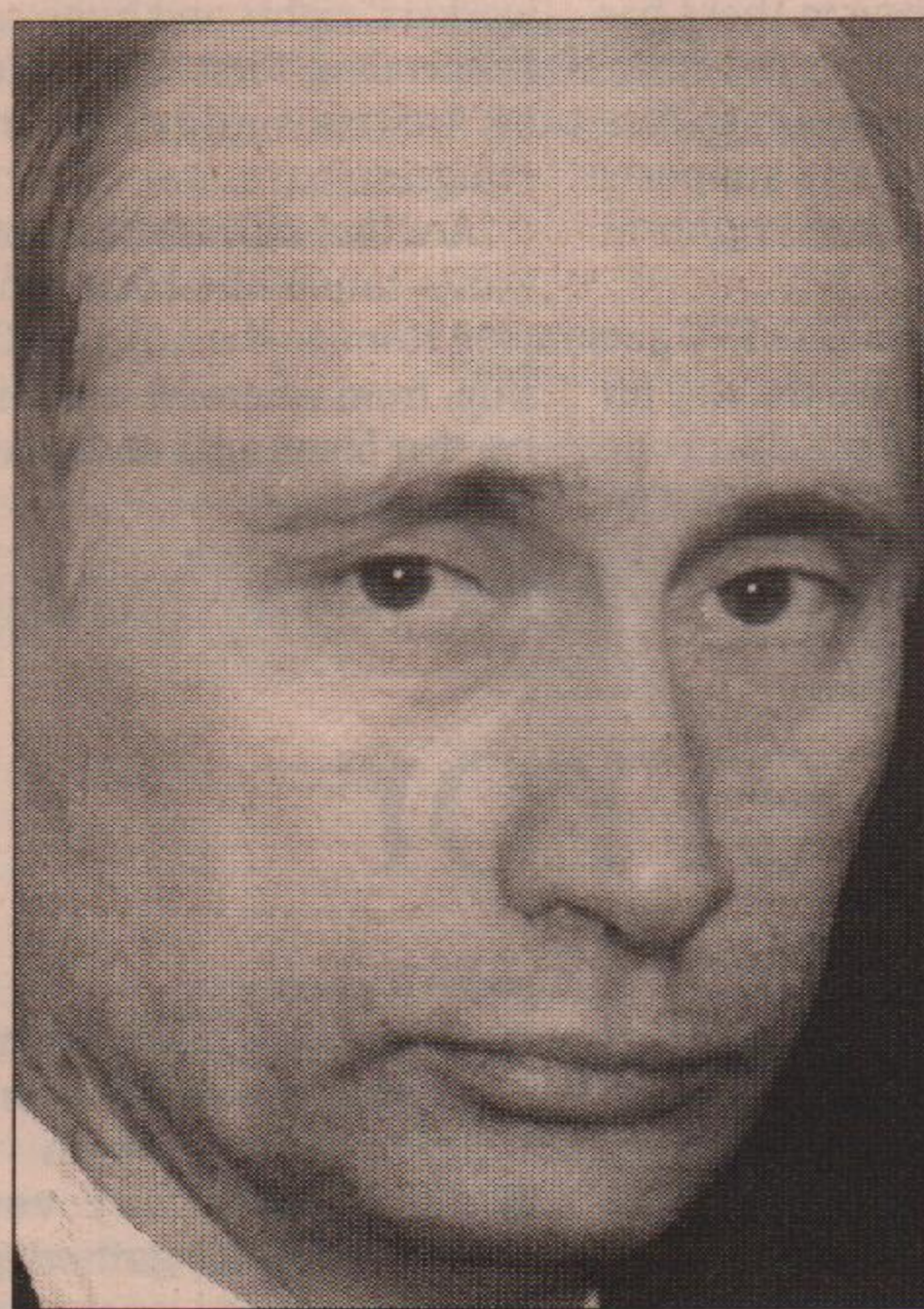
Vladimir Putin – the man behind the war?

PUTIN IS the subject of enormous speculation by the media. He is "mysterious", "grey", an "empty personality". This is typical and even advantageous for a bonapartist leader; in order to be a focus for the conflicting hopes of everyone, he must appear to belong to no one.

Will Putin be pro- or anti-Western? US and British financial journals have optimistically claimed that he will use his enhanced powers to get economic reform back on track. By appointing the pro-reform, Western-oriented finance minister Mikhail Kasyanov as first deputy prime minister he seemed to indicate his desire to appease the IMF. In effect Kasyanov will be acting premier until the elections and may then be confirmed in the post.

But Kasyanov is hardly optimistic about Russia's economy. In a recent interview referring to the effects of the crash in August 1998 he said: "Our economy is weak. According to our forecasts, unfortunately, it will take three to four years to restore the economy to the achievements of the market economy we managed to get in 1997."

In 1997 Russia showed its first small economic growth since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kasyanov said the rouble would only reverse its current decline and begin to appreciate against the dollar and other Western currencies "in five to seven years." In 1999 industrial output rose largely due to a major shift in demand from



imported to domestic goods. In 2000 and beyond, consumer demand will have to grow, not simply shift, if the economy is to make progress. For this to happen, real incomes (primarily wages and pensions) have to rise as fast as the economy in general.

Putin's economic policy is also likely to be characterised by greater state intervention, while not opposing the overall moves towards the restoration of capitalism.

Russia's economic state is beginning to look parlous once again. The rouble has declined 3.8 per cent in the past month. The central bank expanded the money supply by more than 34 billion roubles (\$1.2 billion) in December alone – 11 per cent of the total money supply. Without new international loans this can only fuel inflation. The central bank's gold and foreign currency reserves fell \$200 million to \$12.5 billion in the week ending 31 December.

Russia is due to pay about \$3 billion in debt repayments, and the International Monetary Fund has delayed the release of additional loans for more than four months. The fund is still considering a \$640 million loan instalment, which was expected last September. The IMF does not want its largest current debtor to default and Putin must seek to avoid becoming a global capital market pariah. In addition the strong oil price – which saved Russia in 1998 – is predicted to ease substantially in the Spring.

The unknown factor is whether, if Putin wins the elections in March, he will break his links with the old Yeltsin clique ("the family") which handed him power. He has dismissed Yeltsin's daughter Tatyana from her post as an adviser (the minimum possible act of self-assertion), but Boris

Berezovsky, the financier and industrialist, and Anatoly Chubais, who brought Putin into the Yeltsin circle in 1996, are still close to him.

Some commentators predict that he will get rid of Berezovsky shortly before the elections to convince the gullible at home and abroad that he is launching a drive against corruption – though in reality he will not harm Berezovsky who knows far too much to offend and live to tell the tale.

But the real difference between a Putin regime and a Yeltsin one is likely to lie in Russia's domestic and foreign policy. Russia's rulers – both the kleptocrat billionaires and the army and security chiefs have wised up to the fact that the USA has them firmly marked down for semi-colonial status. The economic triad (IMF/WB/WTG) expect nothing from Russia and it can expect nothing from them. Washington knows that the nuclear capability of the Russian Federation is degrading year on year.

Moscow on the other hand does not wish to join the Iraq or North Korea club. It has been enormously alarmed by the interventions of the US oil multinationals and the push to create a "security alliance" in the Caspian and Caucasian regions by their Turkish gendarme. The attempts by the Chechen nationalists and Wahabi Islamists to destabilise the north Caucasus provinces threatened to set in train further weakening of the Russian Federation.

Putin will try to force the USA and the EU to

victory in Chechnya



nsel much richer

power possible as well as necessary. Utilising the incursion last summer of a group of armed Islamist guerrillas into the neighbouring republic of Dagestan, the military chiefs imposed Putin (an agent in the FSB, successor to the KGB) as prime minister.

The final pretext for war was a series of explosions in Moscow and Volgograd resulting in nearly 300 casualties. Russian leaders immediately blamed Chechen terrorists. But no evidence was ever presented and most Russian analysts and political figures believe that the explosions were the work of the Russian security services.

In December's parliamentary elections, the war was used to bring about the first piece of electoral trickery. Yedinstvo (Unity), an instant political party whose only programme was worship of the new strong man Putin, surged from nowhere into second place. This war-hysteria election gave Putin a majority in the Duma – something that Yeltsin has never had.

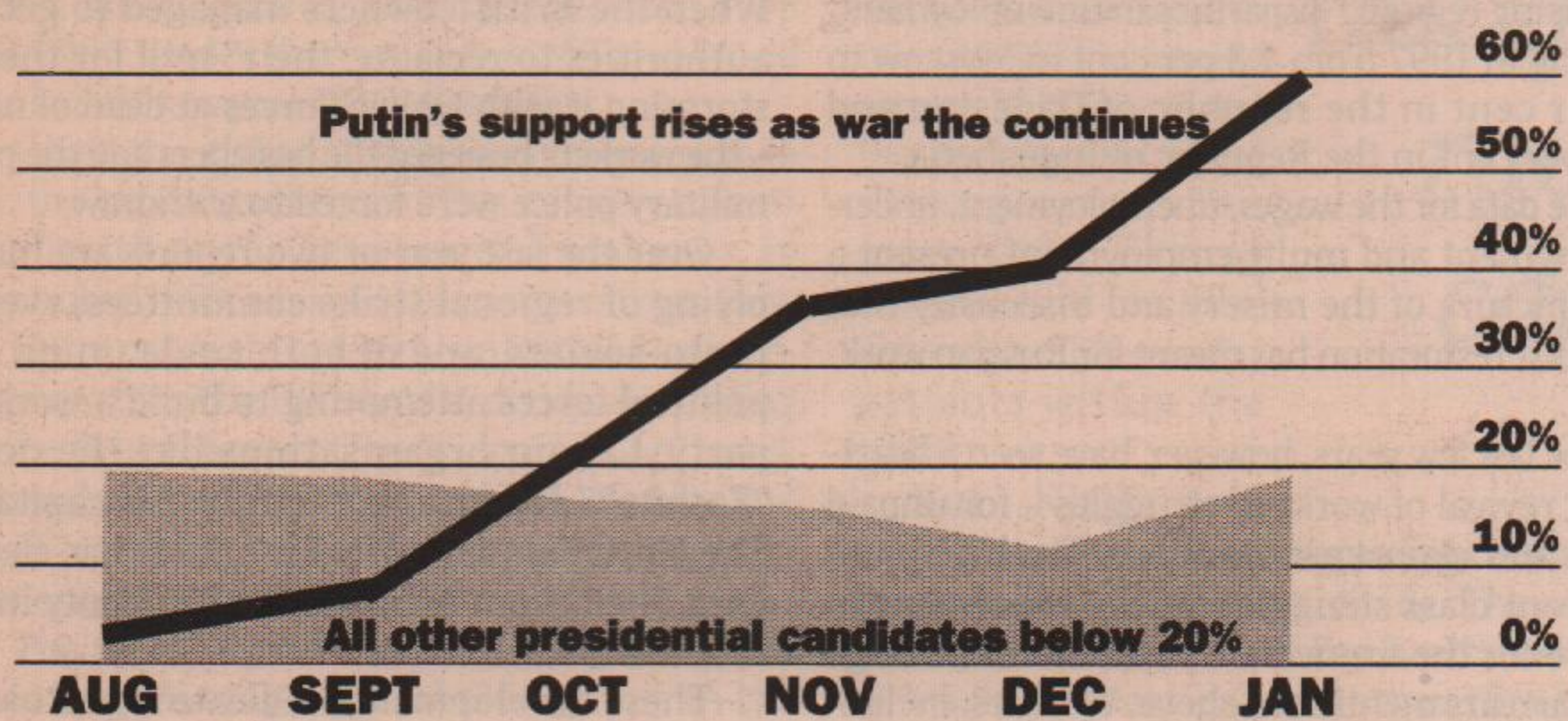
In December Yeltsin was threatened by crim-

inal prosecution, yet by passing his powers to his own nominee, Yeltsin and his family have escaped from prosecution for their looting of the public treasury. Nor can he be prosecuted for his unconstitutional acts.

So Yeltsin has not only covered up his own crimes and escaped being punished by the courts or at the ballot box, but also performed his last service to the class of kleptocrats. He has done his utmost to ensure that the system which safeguards their rule survives him and is, indeed, strengthened.

Yeltsin's last coup is aimed at depriving the Russian people of any real political choice during the presidential elections. The sudden bringing forward of the presidentials to 26 March is to ensure that Vladimir Putin can capitalise on his popularity rating – nearly 60 per cent – as a war leader and "strongman" to turn the election into a simple referendum for or against the war. Putin's election looks a near certainty – barring a military catastrophe in Chechnya.

PUTIN SURGES AHEAD IN IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE



recognise and accept that he is determined to preserve the federation intact and to reassert hegemony over the CIS states, especially those with valuable economic resources.

This means the threat of brutal wars, such as in Chechnya, should any minority, nationality or region step out of line. It means heavy pressure against states like Georgia or Azerbaijan if they try to enter Nato's orbit.

After Yeltsin's resignation, Putin published a mission statement that declared Russia's traditional differences with "the liberal traditions of England and the US," and affirmed its need for a "strong state... to guarantee order." Many commentators believe that the decisive elements of the great privatised corporations in oil and mineral extraction, allied to the military, are determined on a more independent policy vis-a-vis the

US banks and global financial institutions.

The FSB – the successor to the KGB – has grown much more assertive in the last few years. Putin plans to restore many of the departments and adjuncts which were severed from the old KGB by Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The instability of Russia will require the repeated use of this police and military apparatus. Step by step it can take Russia back towards a police state.

Putin's bonapartism will be more centred on the police-military than Yeltsin's. His presidency will be compelled into further military adventures and "reconquests" every time there is a serious social crisis.

Russia's workers will be the first victims "at home" of this regime. And for this reason, if no other, they should oppose the war in Chechnya and set as their goal the toppling of Putin.

campes are totally inadequate both for the numbers arriving and for the winter conditions. In Ingushetia 9,000 people are living in a camp built for 5,000. It is estimated that there are currently over 170,000 Chechen refugees.

Putin's control over the media seems to be slipping. NTV, Russia's largest commercial channel, is now "off message", regularly reporting reverses and questioning the casualty figures. Izvestiya, an important daily previously supportive of Putin and the war, devoted most of its front page on 10 January to a devastating critique of military incompetence and misleading government propaganda.

"The extremely difficult position of the federal forces is causing the war's attractiveness to voters to recede gradually."

Amazingly, given the unified voice of support at the beginning of the war, some papers in January even hinted that the bomb attacks which

triggered the war might not have been the work of Chechen terrorists after all.

The shift within the Russian press was sparked by reverses in the war, but it is also being fed by the realisation that success in the war will strengthen Putin, no friend of the free press. Such fears were confirmed at the end of January by the arrest of journalist Andrei Babitsky on charges of working with the Chechen guerrillas, at the same time as Putin made a speech attacking "all sorts of scum" who wanted to tear Russia apart.

As the mood of concern grows in the press it will be reflected by a growing anti-war movement in Russia itself. This movement can help stop the slaughter by mobilising the Russian people around the call to:

- Stop the War
- Russian Troops out of Chechnya
- Support independence for Chechnya.

COMMUNIST PARTY SUPPORT FOR THE WAR

The only candidate in serious contention with Putin in the March presidentials will be the Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov. But Zyuganov is no opponent of the reactionary war in Chechnya.

This autumn the CPRF uttered not a word of protest at the witch-hunt of Chechen and other Caucasian nationals living in Moscow and other Russian cities. Zyuganov has been a loud and uncritical supporter of Putin's war from day one.

The party's Duma election campaign in December was fought under the slogan of "Victory to the Patriots of Russia". Nor is Zyuganov a declared enemy of capitalism as can be judged from his statement: "I'm for the market. We have discarded many of the dogmas that used to be as untouchable as the sacred cows in India. If we come to power, we will not move towards all-out nationalisation and egalitarianism."

The CPRF has a claimed membership of some 500,000; it is Russia's only real mass party. But its social class composition consists mainly of pensioners, war veterans, some former members of the Soviet nomenklatura, and a heavy ballast of lower-level former bureaucrats, once employed in the party and state apparatus, many of them in the agrarian and military-industrial sectors.

Founded out of the wreckage of the CPSU, the CPRF initially simply carried over the pre-Gorbachevite ideology and structures of the CPSU. In February 1993 Gennady Zyuganov became chairman of the central executive committee and began a process of ditching the baggage of Soviet Marxism-Leninism and replacing it with a patriotic, strong state Russian nationalism. In October 1993 during Yeltsin's shelling of the White House the CPRF abstained from all involvement and opposed any attempt to mobilise an insurrection.

In the December 1993 elections, when a bonapartist constitution with an impotent Duma was forced through in a referendum, the CPRF became the principal opposition party, but hardly an obstructive one. It voted for the state budgets throughout 1994-96.

Under Chernomyrdin and more recently under Yevgeny Primakov, the CPRF won some reforms for its base. Under Primakov, the CPRF had a deputy prime minister in the person of Yuri Maslyukov. In the

1995 Duma elections the CPRF emerged as the strongest party. There was a severe economic crisis and the war in Chechnya was ending in defeat for the Russian army. Support for the CPRF rose considerably. But the party did nothing to mobilise a mass movement against economic hardship or the war.

The presidential elections in 1996, in which Zyuganov was the CPRF's candidate, marked a major ideological shift. His platform contained not a single reference to socialism. The economic section of the platform promised state support for private companies and proclaimed that the party would work in "collaboration with corporations", provided they served "Russia's national-state interests".

Zyuganov is an outright anti-semitite. His close colleague, Viktor Ilyukhin, chairman of one of the Duma committees, stated quite openly: "If there were less Jews in the Russian government, then Russia would not be in the state it is in today."

Zyuganov and the CPRF deny the charge of anti-semitism. On December 23 1998, the party's website carried a statement by Zyuganov intended to prove the "internationalist" character of the party. However, it could not restrain itself from returning to the theme that the Zionists (Jews) are responsible for all Russia's ills:

"The Zionisation of the governmental authorities of Russia was one of the causes of the country's present-day catastrophic situation, of the mass impoverishment and extinction of its population."

Zyuganov goes on to speak of the "destructive role of Zionist capital in the disruption of the economy of Russia and in the misappropriation of its national property." Moreover he claims that "the representatives of one nationality" have "seized the key positions in several branches of the economy." This is all pogrom inciting stuff – reminiscent of the pre-1917 Black Hundreds.

In the forthcoming elections the decisive issue is the war. It overrides all other tactical consideration when it comes to voting. And under conditions of a war waged against the Chechen people Zyuganov is no rallying pole for the working class. He does not deserve a single workers' vote.

Throwing off the legacy of the past

Recent developments in Russia have shown that the working class is beginning to overcome the terrible effects of Stalinism and the shock therapy of capitalism, explains *Dave Stockton*

A REPORT to a joint conference of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Russian trade unions gives a revealing picture of the Russian economy and workforce.

According to official figures the state sector has declined from 75.4 per cent of the economy in 1991 to 40.1 per cent in 1997. In addition the "collective and mixed ownership sector" increased from 10.3 per cent to 19.4 per cent, and the private sector grew from 13.3 per cent to 39.9 per cent.

The report warns, however, that the validity of these figures "is widely questioned" because of what it euphemistically refers to as "a lack of transparency in the ownership structure", admitting that in many enterprises "it is very difficult to identify who are the real owners."

The report points out that:

"most of the enterprises privatised through the management-employee buy-out... are run by the old management, meaning no substantial change in their largely ineffective governance... privatisation itself has neither reduced labour hoarding nor improved the allocation of resources, including labour, with effects on the overall productivity."

The vast majority of workers in the Russian Federation are still employed in the old large and medium-sized enterprises dating from Soviet days: 67 per cent in 1998 – down from 78.6 per cent in 1992.

New start-up private firms, most operating in trade, catering, repairs and construction (rarely in industry or transport) are the main source of new employment, and wages in them are significantly higher and regularly paid. However most remain small scale and their overall share in employment is low, estimated at 13 per cent at the beginning of 1998.

The fall in the employed labour force in Russia was 10.2 million workers between 1991 and 1998 – 13.8 per cent. However this decline was actually very low when compared to the slump of 40 per cent in GDP. Such variance would never be the case in a functioning capitalist economy where the trend is rather the reverse – labour is shed in a greater proportion than production falls – i.e. there is an increase in "productivity" due to the intensification of exploitation as workers are replaced by machines (new technology) and/or greater work is squeezed out of the remaining workforce. Russia's crisis seems to have had exactly the opposite effect.

The method of privatising the great majority of Russian industrial enterprises – the voucher system – led to management-employee buy-outs. This prevented mass layoffs of redundant workers and managers, since they were the shareholders/owners.

Only in the valuable energy and raw materials sector, in some high-tech industries, were the initial voucher or shareholders rapidly bought out by the "businessmen" and bankers from the illegal if not criminal sectors (the Mafia) and the big bureaucrats who had plundered their own enterprises or sold off state and municipal assets (the kleptocrats).

The result of this was that in the majority of "unprofitable" enterprises managers still accept responsibility for keeping on workers. The report claims that:

"According to numerous surveys, they prefer declines in production capacity utilisation to mass layoffs, explaining their stance by insufficient protection for dismissed workers; impossibility for displaced workers to find a new job due to depressed demand for labour; and a desire to maintain a core of skilled workers for future recovery."



It is clear that these are not managers under the whip of capital but under the pressure of their own workforce, from regional authorities and the trade unions.

There has been a sharp decline in real wages, by 57 per cent between 1991 and 1998. Real wages started to decline at the beginning of the 1990s and this process accelerated violently after premier Yegor Gaidar's "shock therapy" in January 1992. After stabilising in 1993 they again dropped significantly. A small recovery of real wages took place from 1996 to mid-1998 but was violently reversed by the crisis of August 1998. In the second half of 1998 wages lost 29 per cent of their real value in comparison with the previous half-year and this decline continued in the first months of 1999. In January 1999, the average real wage was down by 40 per cent, compared with January 1998.

The gap between women's and men's wages has widened. In 1989, on average, wages for women were 70 per cent of men's: in 1997 women received only 55 per cent of the male wage. This is due to a strengthening of wage differentiation between industries dominated by male and by female workers. Women workers dominate in light industry (textile, garment and leather industries), education, health and social care, culture and agriculture.

But male-dominated industries like fuel, power or metal production pay the highest wages in the economy. Inequalities between sectors have greatly increased in the 1990s. In 1997 the difference in the average wage between the highest-paying sector (fuel) and the lowest paying one (agriculture) was 490 per cent while in 1991 it was only 140 per cent. Large wage gaps also exist between the state, private and mixed ownership sectors: in November 1997 workers in private enterprises earned on average 75 per cent higher wages than workers in the state sector and even 97 per cent more than their counterparts in the mixed sector.

Limited employment decline is compensated by large-scale underemployment: redundant workers are often put on administrative leave and short-time work. In 1998, at any one time 4.5 million workers were in this position. In addition, around three million workers are paid extremely low wages, reflecting their reduced workload.

Non-payment of wages can also be taken as another form of underemployment. According to surveys conducted by the All-Russia Centre for Public Opinion (VTsIOM) and the Ministry of Labour, only 46 per cent of workers in industrial enterprises got their wages in full in June 1997



Demonstrations by Russian workers against the non payment of wages

and this declined to 25 per cent in March 1998. By December 1, 1998 total wage arrears reached 85 billion roubles, about 3.2 per cent of GDP. In 1999 however this backlog was significantly reduced, to 59 billion roubles by June 1999.

Another measure of the great leap backwards induced by the restoration process is the increase in the percentage engaged in agriculture in contrast to a world-wide opposite trend. It increased from 13.2 per cent in 1990 to 14.8 per cent in 1997. Many displaced workers have been forced to start subsistence farming while a number of families possessing a plot of land grow food for themselves, relatives and occasionally for the market.

Unemployment was recognised as a real phenomenon and made legal only in 1991. At the end of 1992 the unemployment rate according to ILO's Labour Force Survey (LFS) had already climbed to 4.8 per cent. The unemployment rate in 1999 according to the LFS was 14.2 per cent.

The social groups hardest hit are young people and women. But here are also huge and increasing regional disparities in unemployment, ranging in 1997 from 4.8 per cent in Moscow to 27 per cent in the republic of Dagestan and 58.2 per cent in the Republic of Ingushetia.

The data for the wages, unemployment, underemployment and multi-employment present a grim picture of the misery and insecurity that capitalist restoration has meant for Russian workers.

The last few years, however, have seen a heartening revival of workers' struggles – for unpaid wages and against privatisations. The high point of recent class struggle was the movement in 1997-8 for the immediate payment of the huge wage arrears mentioned above. Workers, including the miners, mounted blockades of major roads and railway lines. The threat of an all out general strike played an important role in the crisis of August 1998.

Yeltsin had to beat a hasty retreat and brought Yevgeny Primakov – an ally of the CPRF – to the premiership, with a couple of communist ministers. The movement culminated with a one day general strike on October 7 1998 – when 12 million people at 39,000 enterprises went on strike or were involved in work stoppages and 17 million were involved in meetings and demonstrations in towns and cities across the country.

The strike was led by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia with CPRF participation but these bureaucratic leaders, satisfied with Primakov in power, demobilised the movement. When the economic and political crisis was over Yeltsin sacked Primakov.

By the autumn things were simmering again. The total debt on wages was estimated in September 1999 to be 56,155 million roubles. More than 17 million employees at 107 thousand enterprises had not been paid on time. Government-employer-trade union negotiations for 2000-2001 on the level of the minimum wage and pensions reached deadlock.

The refusal of the employers and the government to negotiate with the unions led to an increase of collective actions of protest. In September 1999, indefinite strikes were announced by about 7,000 people at 226 educational institutions in six regions of the Russian Federation. The main demand of the strikers is for the payment of wages owed. There are many strikes at power and energy enterprises and institutions with the same demands. Workers' collectives have launched actions in different cities, towns and regions across the vast Federation.

Notable amongst forms of workers' actions in 1999 was the occupation strike, such as the one in Vyborg, where workers occupied the factory, elected a manager and ran the factory themselves. When the British owners managed to get the authorities to reclaim "their" mill for them – storming it with OMON forces at dead of night – the workers besieged the besiegers and the paramilitary police were forced to withdraw.

Over the last year or two reports are multiplying of regional strike committees, even of proto-soviets, and of both trade union and political forces attempting to build a workers' party. Labour organisations like the union "Zashita" (Defence) are openly anti-capitalist. The Movement for a Worker's Party has elected Oleg Shein from Astrakhan as its deputy in the recent Duma elections.

These developments indicate that Russian workers are taking important steps towards political class consciousness. This is particularly significant given the terrible legacy of Stalinist dictatorship – which destroyed all traces of working class self organisation – followed rapidly by the severe crisis brought about by the restoration process. Both had severely undermined even rudimentary trade union consciousness and organisation, let alone political class consciousness and political organisation.

It is remarkable that the signs of revival are emerging so soon. But there remains an acute political crisis of leadership to be resolved if workers are to settle scores with their exploiters. It is vital to build a nationwide network of political activists with deep roots in the working class, to win them to an anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic action programme and lay the foundations of a new revolutionary party on the Bolshevik model, not the Stalinist one.

Providing a health service on the cheap

Colin Lloyd explains why the annual "crisis in the NHS" is actually a permanent crisis of underfunding, a direct result of capitalism's refusal to pay for a public health system that could really help the mass of people minimise the threat of severe illness and prolong their lives

EVERY GRAVEYARD in an industrial town tells the same story. Time and again you see the recent graves of men and women dead in their 50s and early 60s. This is the life expectancy of fifty years ago lingering like the poverty and unemployment that causes it.

The poorer you are, the sicker you are. The harder you work, the sooner you die. Those most in need of health care are the least likely to get it. All this is fact, proven time and again by public health researchers.

Health is a class question, and the proof is there in the statistics. But in recent years the focus on public health improvement – "prevention is better than cure" – has also served as a way of governments deflecting accusations of underspending on hospital care. Labour politicians mutter about the "vested interests" of NHS consultants, when doctors argue for more hospital beds. And the implication, for Labour leaders, is that all health trade unionists are stuck in the past, defending an outdated model of healthcare with our "obsessions" about waiting lists and hospital beds.

The flu crisis in the NHS has inevitably focused the left's attention on underfunding, but we need to be equally critical of Labour's attempts to address the underlying problems of public health. Despite the massive bureaucracy now in place to monitor and improve health provision in the community, it can only scratch the surface if there is no strategy to eradicate poverty and overwork.

Across the globe, the link between poverty and ill-health cannot be challenged. According to the World Health Organisation, while worldwide life expectancy is up, three out of four people in the poorest countries die before the age of 50. Out of 21 million deaths this year, eight million will die before the age of 50. Three hundred million people live in 16 countries where life expectancy decreased between 1975 and 1995, under the ravages of IMF and World Bank debt repayment programmes.

Given the global picture, it is no surprise to see the crude statistics in this country mirror the health divide between rich and poor. In December 1999, a team of researchers from Bristol University's anti-poverty unit issued a damning report on the UK's health divide. According to the Bristol report "The Widening Gap", male manual workers in Britain typically die nine and a half years before their counterparts in the "professional" classes.

The report found that the UK health gap is widening. Average household income in the poorest areas are 70 per cent of those in the richest. Twice as many children per thousand die in Glasgow Anniesland than in Esher Surrey.

Another report, published last April by a team at Glasgow's Royal Infirmary, shows how poverty affects survival rates for those with rheumatoid arthritis. In affluent areas 36 per cent were dead within 12 years of diagnosis. In deprived areas, the figure was 61 per cent.

In September a team studying babies' birth weight in Sheffield concluded:

"Despite an overall increase in mean birth-weight, large social differences persisted during the study period."

Three hundred and fifty babies a year, they said, are born so underweight that it will affect their health, "as a result of social inequality". According to the Bristol team meanwhile, if the conditions prevailing in the most affluent areas

existed nationwide then 7,500 fewer babies would have died last year.

Dr Daniel Dorling, one of the report's authors, said:

"Despite pledging to reduce poverty, the current Labour administration has clearly reneged on its commitments regarding health made before the election as well as reneging on much of what key cabinet ministers wrote and said in the past."

One Glasgow GP told the BBC what this means in human terms:

"We see far more premature heart disease, we see cancers of all sorts far more prevalent in this area than in more well off areas. We see far more alcoholism, we see far more abuse of hard drugs, we see obesity as a growing problem. We see the results of that in higher levels of diabetes; we see very high levels of mental illness. These are, I think, the signs of poverty."

The response of Labour to all this is to point to the amount of money they have directed into health promotion and education – and to the new structures they have put in place to combat health inequalities.

The 1999 Health Act created a number of quangos to police healthcare delivery and improve community health. The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) is meant to judge the benefits of treatment against the cost. The Commission for Health Improvement (CHIMP) is supposed to oversee the effectiveness of services across the UK. The whole first line of contact between patients and the NHS has been extended with the telephone advice service NHS Direct and the reorganisation of GP surgeries into Primary Care Groups responsible for purchasing health care for patients within the NHS.

But NICE and CHIMP are aimed at problems only related indirectly to the health class divide. They exist to root out failing parts of the health service or at least to investigate whether there is any reason located in doctors' and nurses' practice why treatment varies so dramatically across the UK. And they exist to pare back drug costs, limiting for example the availability of the latest flu treatments or the most advanced chemotherapy.

Primary Care Groups, in theory, should channel resources to the parts of the population that need them most. But the PCGs, and the reorganisation of the NHS Trusts to abolish the Tory "internal market" do not solve the fundamental problem.

The fundamental problem is that poorer people have a lower chance at birth of living a healthy life. That problem is compounded by the experience of being poor, with low paid workers suffering a higher rate of obesity, addiction (to drugs, cigarettes and alcohol) and mental illness.

And that in turn is compounded by the experience of work itself. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report last year concluded that high levels of job insecurity and work overload – both of which are on the increase even for skilled workers – had a direct effect on "general health".

It is on top of the effects of poverty and of work that the health inequalities addressed by the latest government initiatives occur. When it came into office Labour recognised the link between class and ill health, and in its White Paper "Our Healthier Nation" listed its anti-poverty measures as key to improving health:

"The worst excesses of low pay will be tackled through the National Minimum Wage. Social exclusion will be the subject of a long term, determined and co-ordinated Government effort, led by the Prime Minister's new Social Exclusion Unit. The Government is also working to foster a new culture of partnership in business between management and employees which will help impact on the problems of stress and insecurity in work."

The integrated transport policy and a crack-down on crime were also listed as measures to improve public health.

Three years on and the writing is on the wall. There is no national transport policy, the minimum wage was set so low that it didn't make a difference. Meanwhile health spending has fallen far short of what is needed, and the skills crisis among doctors and nurses has made things even worse.

The New Deal, which along with an economic upturn has forced thousands into low paid jobs, has probably worsened working class health. And what of the health of public sector employees facing a wave of "sick day" crackdowns that will see them lose

pay after a few days off work with illness?

Labour cannot solve the public health problem because it will not address the root cause: capitalism.

Capitalism thrives on the profits produced by the working class. In its early days it was prepared to work the working class to death to make a profit, but in the mid-19th century unregulated public health and unregulated work forced even the most reactionary bosses to accept the need for healthcare and benefits. But only at a bare minimum.

When working class pressure forced the creation of the National Health Service in 1945 it was only a partial victory. Socialists often point to the survival of private medicine, as a result of Aneurin Bevan's compromise with the doctors. But that was only one problem. Because the NHS was simply a nationalised version of the old "philanthropic" public health provision, the priority was always "patch them up and get them back to work".

The "medical model" of treatment – treat the

sick person as a broken machine – was virtually unchallenged in 1945. That is why mental health provision lagged far behind physical healthcare. And similarly, that is why preventive medicine was never taken seriously.

What was done to limit working hours and protect our health and safety at work has been stripped away by fifty years of attacks, massively accelerated under the Tories from 1980. Likewise, the Tory attitude to the poor was "they deserve it": hence Tory health minister Edwina Currie's attack on northern working class families for eating fatty food and smoking. A party that believed all working class ill-health factors to be self-imposed could never begin to tackle the problem.

Today Labour, despite its pious intentions, will only tinker at the edges because it will not challenge the profit system. Left reformism – for example in the guise of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation – has the same solution as the philanthropists of the 19th century:

"In the short term, the drive to reduce costs and/or increase profits may well have increased 'efficiency'. But, in the long term, the forces currently driving British industry have worrying implications not just for individual employees and their families, but also for Britain's future growth rates and the health of its 'social environment'. The single firm may find it difficult to sustain a credible commitment to the health and security of its employees. The researchers conclude that, over the long term, such commitments can only be established by investment in regulatory institutions."

But Labour has promised to de-regulate the labour market even further, leaving it up to "partnership" to ensure workers are not killed maimed or made chronically ill by their work.

While Labour points out the cost to employers of days lost through sickness – £12 billion a year – it refuses to bring in rules that really protect workers from the causes of ill health in the workplace.

If we look at the three major contributors to ill health – poverty, alienated labour and inadequate health care – there are relatively simple solutions once the ruling class is out of the picture.

■ A £7 an hour minimum wage that could ensure healthy living standards for all families.

■ A huge increase in benefits to eradicate poverty within five years.

■ Free 24 hour childcare to allow women to work when they want.

■ A 35 hour maximum working week, with night work only for essential services and strict workers' control over hazardous conditions.

■ A massive health education programme – not just posters in the canteen but self-organised health drives on the estates and in workplaces by working class people themselves.

■ Billions more spent on community health: to train doctors and nurses and to raise local health centres from hard-pressed crisis services to the standards the bourgeoisie expects from its health farms, private gyms and consultants.

Until we massively attack the conditions that create ill health we will always be facing a health crisis and the health gap between rich and poor will grow.

Labour cannot solve the public health problem because it will not address the root cause: 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!

Flu epidemic highlights funding crisis in NHS

Tax the rich: make them pay for the NHS

THE NHS is in crisis. Every worker in the service knows it. Every one who uses it can see it the moment they go through the doors of their local hospital.

Behind every horror story that hits the headlines, like that of Mavis Skeet whose operation for throat cancer was cancelled four times until it proved inoperable, there are hundreds more cases of delay and overflowing wards. Everyone knows a story about a relative or workmate: day-long waits in Accident and Emergency, patients stacked in corridors; relatives providing basic care on the wards because of staff shortages; patients sent home long before they are fit.

New Labour tried every hand-washing trick to avoid blame for this crisis. The wrong kind of flu had hit Britain – never mind that the need for acute medical beds in winter can be predicted with absolute certainty. You don't need statisticians to forecast that elderly and vulnerable patients will get bronchitis and pneumonia between December and March.

Next they blamed the Tories for running down the NHS. True, but this does not alter the fact that Labour itself has failed to deliver extra funding, sticking instead to Tony's spending limits. Labour promised to cut waiting lists by 100,000. It hasn't. What's more, there are now thousands more patients simply waiting to get on a waiting list.

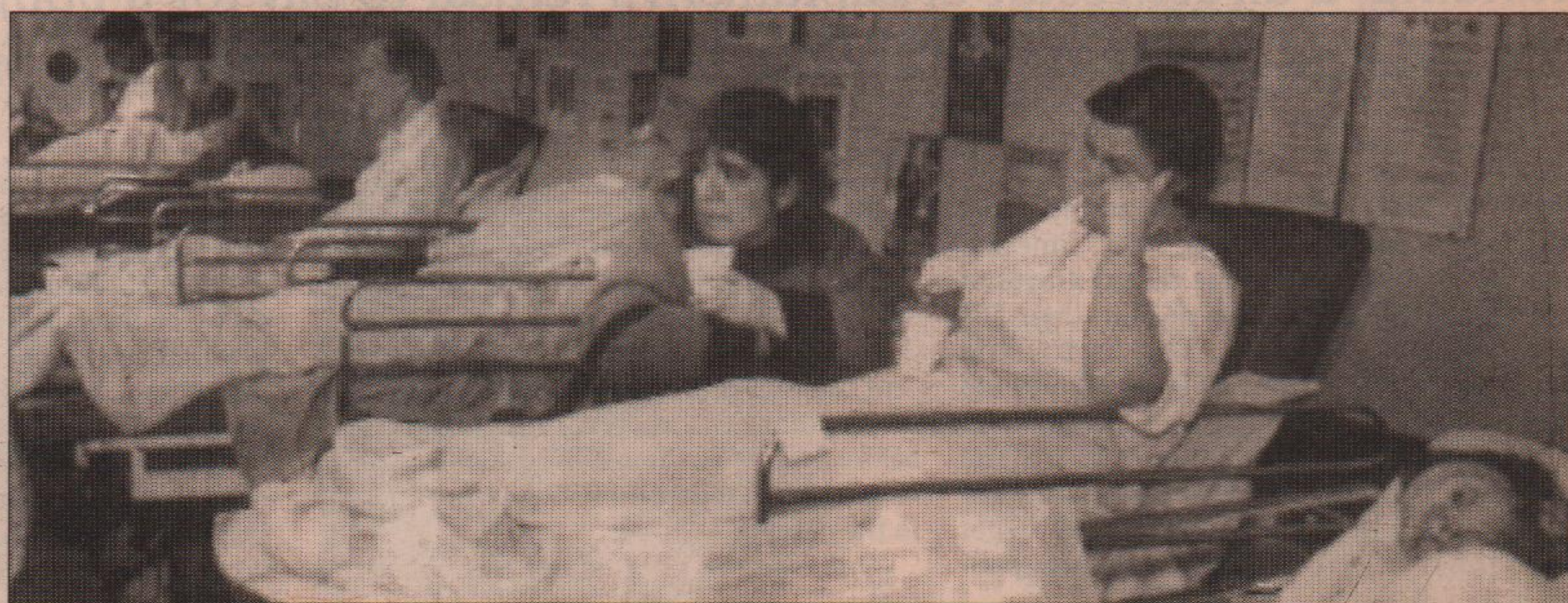
So Labour blames better treatments that are costing too much. This nonsense conceals the millions of pounds siphoned away from the NHS budget by the drug companies.

Labour should be told – face the facts. There are too few nurses, doctors, technicians, cleaners and porters because the NHS is chronically underfunded. It has too few "beds" because too few nurses have been trained and too few are directly employed by the NHS.

There has been a "winter crisis" every year for the last decade because the service is bursting at the seams the rest of the year. Britain currently spends slightly more than 6 per cent of national income on health, while the European Union average is 8 per cent.

Facing mounting attacks, including from doctor and Labour peer Lord Winston, Blair hurried to promise "new money".

A few days later his declaration that



Britain would catch up with Europe was exposed as a sham. Treasury officials pointed out that the £11 billion Blair promised was simply not planned for in Gordon Brown's targets. In any case, a 5 per cent increase in year-on-year spending on health would still leave Britain lagging behind.

The failure to properly fund the modest pay increases for NHS staff left managers looking for other cost-cutting measures. Hospitals are still unable to recruit new workers. In some areas a jobs freeze means that even newly trained nurses cannot get work.

The headline figures of 7 per cent rises for a minority of nurses neatly disguises the fact that the majority received little more than 3 per cent. Meanwhile, staffing levels in hospital labs are so poor that a recent survey by the Institute of Biomedical Science revealed that two-thirds of labs use unqualified staff to examine

crucial samples. Pay is so abysmal that graduates start on £9,500.

Instead of funding the service properly, New Labour has pressed ahead with cost-cutting initiatives. Some of these schemes could be useful as complements to the basic service. But instead they act as substitutes for it.

A phone-in advice service like NHS Direct? It's no use having a nurse on the end of a phone if none are in the hospital when you get there. More beds in Intermediate Care so that elderly patients can have physiotherapy before being sent home? Fine, but not if that means pushing them off the medical wards before they're ready. The authorities can then claim that they have maintained the number of beds when in fact they continue to axe acute medical beds.

Another expanding area is Ambulatory Care. You take yourself into hos-

pital for your operation, stay for too short a time, then take yourself home again. Like Community Care this wheeze ends up putting more pressure on families to care for relatives at home, especially women and older people.

But even worse than all these new models is the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). All 31 new hospitals promised by Labour are to be built under PFI. The companies that build them will then lease them back to the NHS. More services will be contracted out. Wherever PFI has been used, beds have been cut and workers' conditions eroded.

Already the private sector leeches off the NHS, taking NHS-trained staff and using beds paid for by working class taxpayers. Elements of a US-style, two-tier health system have crept in, but the alternative does not lie with the expansion of private health insurance as proposed by the Tories and even Lord Winston.

Instead, the answer to this crisis can only come through taxing the rich and big companies to pay for the service we need, ending private health care and PFI, and by nationalising the multinational drug companies such as SmithKline-Beecham under workers' control.

To win such demands for a properly funded NHS will not mean politely begging Tony Blair and Alan Milburn to see the light. Healthworkers in Britain need to draw inspiration from current fights involving student nurses in Ireland and hospital staff in France.

In Britain the time is overdue for NHS staff to say "enough is enough", and launch a militant fightback for the pay and conditions they deserve and need.

IRISH AND FRENCH HEALTH WORKERS TAKE TO THE STREETS

Hundreds of student nurses demonstrated outside the Dail in Dublin as it reassembled on 26 January in protest at the continued imposition of tuition fees on student nurses. This followed similar pickets outside two Irish cabinet meetings, a street demonstration in Galway and an occupation of a health minister's office.

Meanwhile, across France even senior doctors have taken to the streets alongside junior nurses in a sustained fight for increased funding of a healthcare system that is also desperately short of staff. They are calling for at least a two per cent real increase in state spending on health and decent pay increases to attract new recruits. At the Henri Mondor hospital in suburban Paris, with staff unable to cope with patient numbers, workers piled beds and mattresses to block the foyer and bar further surgical admissions.

FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 0181 981 0602

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