

European powers back Yeltsin, but workers must ...

DEFEND THE CHECHEN PEOPLE

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin's boast that the military phase of the battle with Chechnya is 'practically over' has evaporated.

Press reports indicate that Chechen forces remain in control of a good third of the capital city, Grozny.

Even the Russian government's press service was forced to admit that the Chechens 'were laying mines, recruiting new fighters, bringing up reserves and setting up command posts south of the Sunzha river'.

The fire-bombing of Grozny has been intensified in what one Chechen military commander described as a 'hurricane' launched against the city, indiscriminately killing men, women and children.

A coach load of women arrived in Grozny with a placard on their vehicle bearing the message 'Soldatskiye Materi' ('Soldiers' Mothers'). The women are demanding the return of their sons. They were met with news from Russian prisoners that the army has been concealing bodies in mass graves to keep down the official casualty figures.

Lie

Yeltsin's lie that the war was being fought against a gang of lawless bandits has been cruelly exposed by General Georgy Kondratev. In a TV interview the Afghan war veteran said:

'As a professional military man I understand it is not bandit formations but only Chechen people we are fighting.'

'Men have taken up weapons to defend their homes, their land and the graves of their forefathers buried there.'

He compared the situation to that of 1937 when Sta-

BY THE EDITOR

lin purged the army of all but sycophants.

For these sort of remarks it was reported in Moscow that Kondratev had been sacked as deputy defence minister along with two other stern critics of the Chechen invasion — Generals Boris Gromov and Valery Mironov.

Chaos

But such is the chaos now reigning in Moscow that a counter-statement was issued saying that the three remained in their posts.

Kondratev's attack on President Yeltsin highlights the discontent in the military elite over a debacle that has already cost the lives of hundreds and hundreds of young soldiers and has humiliated the armed forces.

■ Meanwhile the European Union continues with its tacit support for Yeltsin's bloody war. As the 'Independent' reported last week: 'The European Union yesterday drew back from applying greater pressure on

Russia over Chechnya because of fears that it might damage the government of Boris Yeltsin.'

The European Union foreign ministers made yet another call for an end to

'the violence' but refused to discuss sanctions against Moscow.

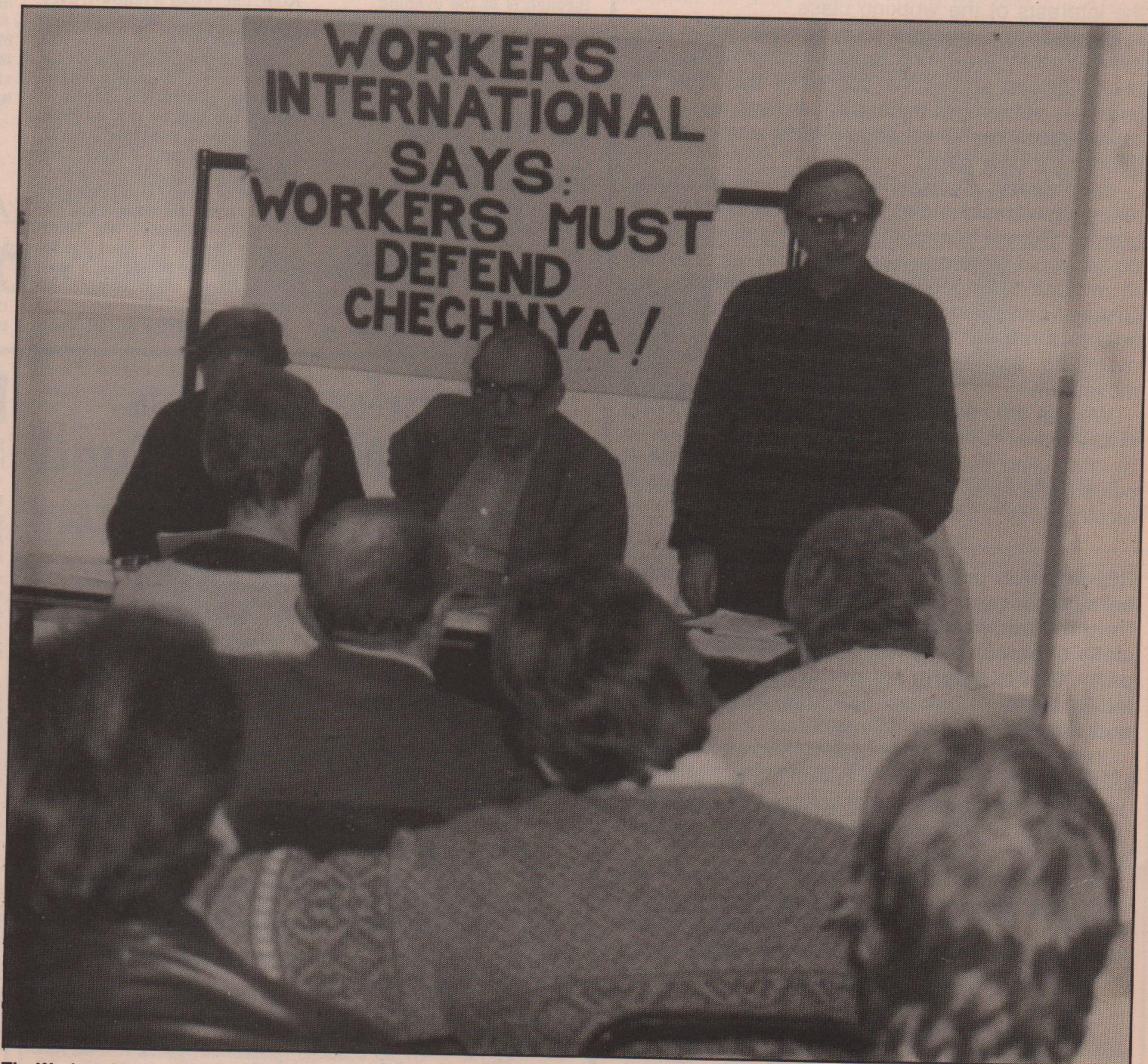
British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd simply said that 'what had been going on in Chechnya' made

'more difficult' the conclusion of a trade pact with Russia.

Despite louder noises from Germany, the press also made clear last week that Bonn keeps all lines of

communication open with the Yeltsin government.

■ 'Defend Chechnya': see Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International public meeting resolution — back page.



The Workers International's public meeting in London on 20 January passed a resolution calling for support for Chechnya. See page 8

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Workers Press

Once again on Clause Four

THERE is no doubt that if Blair and Prescott succeed in removing Clause Four from the Labour Party's constitution many will leave that party.

Blair's attempt to get rid of Clause Four has raised to a new level a profound contradiction: that between the needs of the working class in today's situation and the fact that that class remains tied to the Labour Party.

It is because of this that right-wing Labour Party members are increasingly worried that Blair has made a serious mistake in raising the issue of Clause Four at this stage.

One such right-winger said: 'The overwhelming view is that we should not have got involved in this now' ('The Times', 15 January). This same right-winger also said that Blair didn't 'understand the party'.

* * * * *

IT WAS in the light of this contradiction that as far back as 1992 Workers Press raised the question: what sort of party does the working class need if it is to tackle the problems of unemployment, the destruction of social services, growing poverty for young and old members of the working class, and the shackling of the unions to the needs of the state and the employing class?

Now, should revolutionary socialists stand aside from the fact that thousands of working-class people have decided to enter a political fight against Blair and the right wing? Certainly we must take every opportunity to expose the Labour leadership for what it is, thus helping workers to shed illusions in the idea that the Labour Party can serve the interests of the working class.

But Blair has dragged such workers into a fight in which they are being brought bang up against such illusions and in the course of this fight will learn — not simply because they are told — in **experience** what the Labour Party is and of the need for a new party.

In defending Clause Four we do not of course share such illusions and in no way do we hide our banner. But we cannot stand outside the fight. To do so would be to allow centrists and opportunists to mislead the fight. It is clear that some in the Clause Four defence campaign want to restrict the fight to a narrow layer consisting of Labour Party members and 'official' representatives of the movement.

We join the campaign to make it wider, to bring in all those to the struggle who are being hammered by the ruling class — the homeless, the unemployed, students, those involved in the fight against racism.

* * * * *

BEHIND this approach to Labour Party members lies another important point. It is true that from the outset the Labour Party had a definite class character — it was a bourgeois workers' party, that is a party supported by workers but led by those whose politics reflected the needs and interests of the ruling class.

In a certain sense it is also true to say that 'the Labour Party is finished'. It is true in the **historical** sense that reformism, under the present conditions of capitalist crisis, can no longer get any reforms for the working class.

But it is far from sufficient merely to repeat this truth. The class nature of the Labour Party may be a question that is settled for **revolutionary Marxists** but it is far from finished for the millions who vote Labour and for millions of workers in the trades unions.

That is why we think it wrong to stand aside from the movement building up in the working class against Blair's attack on Clause Four. We must be in the very centre of this movement. Only in this way will we be able to answer more concretely the questions of **how** an alternative leadership and party to Labour is to be built.

Letters

Support the Donbass miners!

Workers Press has received the following appeal for support from V. Myasnikov of the Independent Miners Union of western Donbass.

ON 11 January 1995, a statement was made by the director of the 'Stepnaya' mine, V.N. Polovnikov. It declared that a strike by workers at the mine on 4 January had been illegal.

The essence of the matter is this: management, for no good reason, held up payment of long-service bonuses due for 1994. On 4 January a meeting of the labour collective began spontaneously on the third shift.

Responsibility for the meeting was taken by A. Olefirov and A. Pochechuro, members of the Independent Miners Union (IMU). The workers took a decision not to work on the third shift, and the same happened on the fourth shift.

The management of the mine immediately issued a writ for damages of 1,176,722,000 karbovanets (over £15,000) against the IMU branch at the mine, its president A. Korolev, and committee members A. Olefirov and A. Pochechuro.

The regional council of the IMU of the western Donbass will defend its members with all available means. We ask you to support us. Send a letter of support for our trade union members to the mine management:

323037 Ukraine, Dnepropetrovsk oblast, g. Pershotravensk, 'Stepnaya' mine.

Fax: (010) 705673 70257
Copies of faxes should also be sent to the IMU on (010) 705672 62385. The easiest time to get through is in the evening.

Vassilli Myasnikov
Regional President
IMU Western Donbass

Credulity strained on Gott

CHARLIE POTTINS writes that Ken Livingstone 'used the "Guardian's" literary page, courtesy of its then editor Richard Gott, to repeat claims

that members of the Workers Revolutionary Party who ousted their discredited former leader Gerry Healy were doing it for MI5' ('Inside Left', 14 January).

It is unfortunate that Workers Press's first mention of Gott since he resigned from the 'Guardian', on the ground that he had not told its editor about his meetings with KGB agents, came in the form of this passing remark. Unfortunately, since it has been suggested — in a letter to the 'Spectator', whose witch-hunting 'revelation' about Gott triggered the resignation — that Gott deliberately commissioned the Livingstone review to get at Trotskyists.

The letter was from John Spencer, who reviewed the recent Lotz-Feldman hagiography of G. Healy in Workers Press (24 September 1994). The letter started: 'Your "outing" of Richard Gott is to be welcomed', quoted, as an example of Gott's 'lack of scruple', the publication of Livingstone's article, and claimed: 'Gott's aim in commissioning this article seems to have been to make mischief among the KGB's traditional Trotskyist enemies. In the process he was not averse to helping along a nasty smear campaign.'

The idea that Gott commissioned the article 'to make mischief among the KGB's traditional Trotskyist enemies' strains credulity:

(1) because the article was a eulogy to G. Healy, who is regarded by Livingstone, Gott and many 'Guardian' readers as a Trotskyist;

(2) because, given the way newspaper offices work it is far more likely that Livingstone volunteered the review than that Gott commissioned it;

(3) because it is universally accepted that Gott was not an active *agent provocateur* for the KGB, but rather a fellow-traveller of Maoism who had lunches with its officers.

Maybe Gott's political views, formed in a 'left' milieu dominated by Stalinism, made it easier for him to nod through Livingstone's wretched article. I don't know and I don't very much care. But John Spencer's picture of Gott, Lotz/Feldman book in hand, thinking 'How can we make mischief for Trotskyists? I know, I'll send this for review to one of Healy's most grovelling admirers!', is absurd.

And why write to the loath-

some 'Spectator'? Why imply, for its readers' titillation, that Gott decided to include the Livingstone review at the KGB's behest? That just strengthened the right-wing witch-hunt, which was motivated by anti-communism and justified in the Tory press on the ground that lurching with the KGB was worse than lurching with the CIA, as right-wing journalists often do.

Workers Press should speak out in defence of Gott against the hypocritical witch-hunt. We will not soften our fight against Stalinism by doing so.

Simon Pirani
London SE18

Workers' struggle is international

I THINK János Boróvi leaves room for a misunderstanding (Letters, 21 January).

He writes: 'The Mexican peso, the Italian lira and the Spanish peseta are currently under attack, but lack of confidence in these currencies is not because of speculation.'

It is because of the internal political and economic crisis (governmental crises in Italy and Spain, the fight of the Zapatistas in Mexico); a specific national expression of the world crisis of imperialism; and the resistance of the exploited to the effects of the crisis.'

Of course it is simplistic to deduce the character of the political situation in a given country mechanically from the overall crisis of imperialism.

Nevertheless it is just as wrong to imply that the struggle of the Zapatistas in Mexico or of Italian pensioners against cuts exist solely within a national dimension.

The struggle of the working class and the masses is itself an international phenomenon, not simply a response to 'internal' national problems.

Bob Archer
East London

Ambiguous wording

HAS the Circulation Department decided to get this newspaper funded by sections of the

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British Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy?

The department urges all of the newspaper's supporters and sympathisers to get ready 'for the drive to get Workers Press into the hands of all those campaigning to defend Clause Four' (14 January).

Will 1995 be the year when ownership and control of Workers Press pass into the hands of Stalinised and left social democratic bureaucrats? Or did the ambiguity of the above form of wording escape the attention of the editor?

Paul B. Smith
Govan, Glasgow

Building an alternative

D. SMITH (Letters 21 January) asks that the Workers Revolutionary Party 'stop wasting time calling for the defence of Clause Four and concentrate on showing how bankrupt and traitorous Labour really are'. But it is precisely in the struggle to defend Clause Four that we show how bankrupt and traitorous Labour really are.

Furthermore, in my limited experience of the campaign to defend Clause Four, what D. Smith calls the 'rag-bag of so-called socialist parties' are also exposed as, at best, left critics of the Labour Party.

They reach for their guns, to coin a phrase, every time the issue of actually building a socialist alternative to the Labour Party is proposed. I did hear a member of the United Secretariat group say 'build a socialist alternative', but he then added 'to the Labour Party leaders', thus restoring my faith in human nature!

The fact is that in the campaign to defend Clause Four there are some people very receptive to the idea of building an alternative party. In my view the best way to talk to them is from inside the campaign.

In Leicester, on 8 February at 7.30pm in the Castle Community Rooms, Walford Road, the Campaign is holding an open debate on 'Can we afford to nationalise?'. To my mind this is another way of asking 'What are we going to do about compensation?'. We could do with some help, and Leicester isn't very far from Sheffield...

Paul Henderson
Leicester

Workers Press £3,000 Monthly Fund

ANOTHER week but not enough of the readies are coming in to meet the needs of a paper like ours. It's tiring to have to keep asking for money but ask I must.

I am pleased to see that more readers are sending in letters in the last few weeks, reversing the previous downward trend. Please keep this up, and try to slip a bit of money in with your letter — or, if you don't feel up to writing, money on its own is most agreeable to us!

Along with the other discussions we need to have — Clause Four, internationalism, Scotland, etc. — we need to seek ways to make Workers Press the paper that meets the needs of the working class to defend and take forward its interests against capitalism. Join our fight for the paper!

Mike Cooke

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SATURDAY 4 FEBRUARY 1995: National Assembly Against Racism 10am-5pm, York Hall, Old Ford Road, London E2 (Bethnal Green tube). John Monks (TUC), Diane Abbott MP, Ken Livingstone MP, Kumar Murshid (Tower Hamlets Anti-Racist Committee). Workshops, £10 registered delegates, £7/£4 individuals. Details Tower Hamlets Anti-Racist Committee (THARC), 22 Hanbury St, E1.

SATURDAY 4 FEBRUARY: Critique conference on 'Political Organisation in the Transitional Epoch'. Plenary sessions. Workshops on racism, nationalism, religion, Stalinism, commodity fetishism, feminism, radical nationalism, trade unionism. Invited speakers. 10am-5pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (tube Holborn).

SATURDAY 11 FEBRUARY: Hounslow trades council anti-racist march and rally. Assemble 12.45pm, Thornbury Playing Fields, London Road, Isleworth, London. Details: J.R. Patrick 081-891 4482.

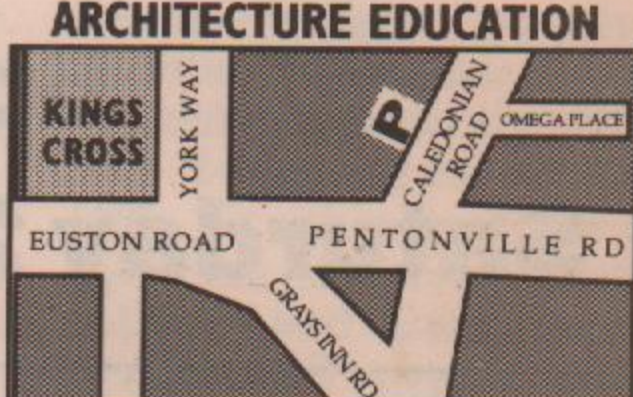
FRIDAY 3 MARCH: Tom Stratton Memorial Meeting. Tom was an activist and shop steward in UCATT and the AEEU, a member of the WRP, and of the Pensions movement. The meeting will speak about Tom's life and his struggles. To be held at Ruskin House, Croydon.

SATURDAY 27 MAY: African Liberation Day march. Theme: 'Not just charity but complete liberation'. Organised by the African Liberation Support Campaign. Assemble 1pm, Kennington Park, London SE11. Rally at Trafalgar Square. Details: 071-924 9033.



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Ten years since the Wapping printers' dispute . . . Unite against anti-union laws!

Ten years after the printers' strike, the fight to organise continues. **MARTIN WESTWOOD and PHIL EDWARDS report**

LAST Saturday, for the first time in many years, the victimisation of a trade union member at Rupert Murdoch's notorious News International plant in Wapping, east London, was met with organised resistance by the trade union movement.

Five hundred protesters marched to this bastion of anti-trade-unionism in the pouring rain in support of a sacked member of the National Union of Journalists.

Maria Hoyle was sacked before Christmas by the 'Today' newspaper for daring to organise a health-and-safety meeting at a nearby public house.

Support on the march included Anglian Graphical Paper and Media Union (GPMU), Sheffield and Rotherham National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Sheffield Teachers' Association (NUT), Haringey trades council, and Tower Hamlets trades council, whose members were especially welcomed at the rally that followed by NUJ president Anita Halpen.

Refused

The crowd was undoubtedly encouraged by the strike action taken that day by 13,000 postal workers, who had refused to be intimidated by an injunction taken out by management.

Bob Crowe of the railway workers' and seamen's union, the RMT, called for the repeal of the anti-union laws by an incoming Labour government.

It came as no surprise that in all his rhetoric TUC general secretary John Monks made no such call from the platform.

He could only declare that 98 per cent of people consulted in a TUC survey agreed that unions were necessary.

The actual problems of the trade union movement were not addressed, perhaps because the TUC is one of them.

The Labour Party was criticised by Dixie Dean, co-ordinator of the Campaign Against the Criminal Justice Act, for failing to oppose this legislation even though it clearly targets both the young and the most oppressed layers of society, as well as the organised trade union movement.

These attacks on individual organisers and activists are by no means unique.

Louisa Bull of the GPMU in Canary Wharf, east London, pointed to several cases involving her members.

Linked

Health-and-safety questions are of particular importance in the printing industry because they are linked to conditions of work and new technology.

Only trades unions are able to raise these questions and organise a fight around them.

Greg Challis from Sheffield NUJ described similar victimisations in his area.

The opposition to trade unionism in the printing industry now takes the form of managers directly involving the police in removing officials from newspaper offices, he said.

These officials have held a protest rally and have won widespread support, Challis said.

The march and rally showed that the need to rebuild trade union organisation on a new footing could not be more evident.

Recruitment campaigns and messages of solidarity must be accompanied by a wider discussion about how to unite those in struggle against these anti-union laws.



Almost 2,000 people marched through Edinburgh last Saturday against the Criminal Justice Act. Anti-roads campaigners gave their support

Union officials victimised by Sheffield paper

JOURNALISTS on Sheffield's local papers are facing a major attack on their trade union rights.

In April 1994 Sheffield Newspapers (which publishes the 'Sheffield Star', 'Sheffield Telegraph' and 'Sheffield Weekly Gazette') introduced personal contracts for journalists on those papers.

To do this they withdrew recognition from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) chapel (branch) on the papers. It was thought that the NUJ was still recognised for health-and-safety questions.

However, with the NUJ de-recognised on contracts, workloads and use of new technology increased. The result was an increase in cases of repetitive strain injury (RSI).

Management simply ignored the NUJ's correspondence on health and safety for six months, until the union called in the factory inspectorate. At a meeting with the inspector, Sheffield Newspapers first claimed the NUJ was recognised for health and safety, and then promptly denied it.

NUJ officials were told they would be notified by 16 December whether health-and-safety recognition was still effective. They were not informed. An open letter, demanding a yes or no answer, was signed by journalists, followed by a newsroom protest meeting on 19 December when it became apparent that recognition had been withdrawn.

Also on 19 December Greg Challis, the NUJ father of

chapel (branch officer), was summoned to a disciplinary meeting at 15 minutes' notice. He was denied the right to representation by a full-time official of the union, even though the company's disciplinary code, issued to him at the beginning of the hearing, stated that he had that right.

At a hearing for NUJ mother of chapel Julia Armstrong, on 22 December, the police were called to physically expel her chosen representative, Colin Bourne, the NUJ's full-time officer for provincial newspapers.

Sheffield and Rotherham NUJ branch immediately launched a campaign of protest. Trade union bodies and health-and-safety campaigners sent messages condemning the vic-

timisations. More than 150 people attended a rally on 22 December outside the 'Star's' offices, and banners were sent by 12 unions across South Yorkshire. Petitions were signed by 700 people, including Sheffield's five Labour MPs.

However NUJ general secretary John Foster and Sheffield MEP Roger Barton were denied access to the building when they tried to hand the petitions in. The 'Star's' editor was unavailable for comment when Tony Benn MP tried to ring and complain.

Sheffield Newspapers has given Challis a final written warning and Armstrong a written warning. The NUJ is preparing to take both cases to tribunal for discrimination against trade union representatives.

Cherie Blair sought to keep defaulter in jail

BY MIKE COOKE

LABOUR Party leader Tony Blair's wife, Cherie Booth, has built up some expertise as a barrister acting, at judicial review hearings, for local councils pursuing poll-tax defaulters. She has acted for Burnley, South Ribble, Blackburn, Hyndburn and Thanet councils.

In the case of 28-year-old Martin Jacques, Booth pressed for the continued imprisonment of Jacques, who is on £44 a week income support.

Helen Dent, a lawyer who represented Jacques against Booth, said: 'We have run up against Cherie Booth in three or four other poll-tax cases and each time she has been acting for the local authorities. She seems to have become something of a favourite with them.'

Booth said she had to accept this case because she had to abide by the 'cab-rank' principle which says she can't turn down politically sensitive cases.

However, her 'chambers', the legal bodies that barristers belong to, can decide not to take up certain forms of litigation from a moral point of view. And for barristers who feel strongly about not taking up a case there are well-known ways and means of avoiding the 'cab rank'.

And, Booth has earned money — believed to be about £200 — from addressing a conference of enforcement officers and bailiffs about the poll tax.

Her paper to the conference held by the Institute of Revenue, Rating and Valuation Officers in March 1994 was entitled 'Enforcement — Effective Prosecution in the Magistrates' Court'. It explains how to initiate liability orders and applications for imprisonment.

'Ultimately, if a liability order is not complied with, the officer will have to decide what enforcement action should be taken,' she advised the conference. 'In the event that it is decided that distress should be levied and, in the event that that is unsuccessful, committal [that is, imprisonment] should be applied for.'

Booth insisted to the 'Independent on Sunday' (22 January): 'I am sure that you would be very hard-pressed to find any evidence that I have ever suggested that people who can't afford to pay or who are poverty-stricken should have action taken against them.'

Passed

Booth has only acted in judicial reviews where a sentence has already been passed by magistrates.

Sources close to the Blairs say that all her cases involved culpable or wilful non-payment.

But 'ruthless' was how Jacques described her performance at his judicial review in November 1993.

'She did her job well and didn't give my barrister a chance. It was a terrible experi-

ence in jail. I had never been in trouble before.' Jacques had already served half of his 14-day magistrates' sentence in Preston jail. He completed his sentence in Brixton.

His offer to pay his £200.62 poll-tax debt at a rate of £5 a fortnight had been rejected at the magistrates' court but his lawyers had managed to get him released pending the judicial review.

'I was living in a flat in Leyland, but I lost my job,' said Jacques. 'I'd been paying the poll tax by direct debit but, when I was on income support, I had only £4 left after outgoings. I asked the magistrates to take it out of the income support, but they said they couldn't. It wasn't a protest. I couldn't afford to pay.'

Booth acted in the High Court in November 1993 on behalf of two sets of magistrates who had jailed two men — one of them Jacques.

She told the judge: 'My Lord, I am simply anxious on behalf of both the charging authorities that these gentlemen continue to serve their sentences or produce the money.'

But when it was decided to send the men back to jail and the question of costs came up Booth said: 'I accept that there is no evidence that Mr Jacques has any means at all.'

Was Jacques culpable or wilful in not paying the poll tax if he didn't have any means at all?

The 'Independent on Sunday' commented: 'Mrs Blair was

previously a Labour activist, and when her husband succeeded to the party leadership she became what is known as a platform wife, Mrs Tony Blair rather than her professional persona, Ms Cherie Booth.

'The image of Tony and Cherie as a young, handsome and successful working couple was created as much by the anxieties of the Labour Party to make inroads into the middle class as by the inventive power of the media.'


Practising

Tony Blair himself used to be a practising barrister.

Booth joined the Labour Party in 1976 and contested a seat in the 1983 general election but lost. The Blairs have two homes. In Islington, north London, their property is estimated to be worth £400,000. Their second home is a Victorian house in Trimdon Colliery, County Durham. Blair represents the Sedgefield constituency in the North East.

An appeal in a divisional court, such as a judicial review of a magistrates' decision in the High Court, involving minimal preparation work and an appearance, would normally fetch a barrister between £350 and £500.

Poll-tax defaulters, unlike defendants in criminal cases, are not entitled to legal aid. There have been an estimated 2,089 people jailed for non-payment of the poll tax.



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Inside left

Brightlingsea bootboys

BRIGHTLINGSEA, on the Essex coast, had a taste of state violence when police in riot gear, in a spearhead formation, forced their way through a crowd of local people to make a way for sheep lorries. They just punched their way through perfectly well-behaved demonstrators like Robocops,' said 61-year-old Fred Griffin.

'I no longer feel as though I am in England,' said Rosemary Catford, 48. 'It feels more as if we're in Chile or Uganda. I was proud of my police force. But now it's like a different country.' ('The Times', 20 January).

Remembering police clubbing miners at Orgreave during the 1984-85 miners' strike, charging printworkers at Wapping in 1985, or turning into bloody battles what were peaceful protests against the poll tax in 1990 or the Criminal Justice Bill last year, we in the labour movement may wonder if these middle-class southerners in their sleepy little town were in a different country over the past decade.

But let's not be hard on them. With only the bourgeois media to misguide them, how were they to know any better? At least now they are learning.

On BBC1's 'Question Time' on 19 January, Jonathan Dimbleby tried to steer panellists back to a question on the police violence. Former Tory health secretary Edwina Currie defended farmers (upsetting them before cost her her job), and Liberal Matthew Davis spoke about Britain's influence in Europe.

Labour's shadow transport spokesman Michael Meacher agreed police had been heavy-handed. 'These were respectable people at Brightlingsea. Not the usual . . .' From the expression on his face, I formed the impression that, such exceptions apart, the rest of us — the 'usual' crowd — can expect no sympathy from Labour.

Muckslinger

WHAT is it with 'Socialist Organiser'? A few years ago it featured Sean Matgamna writing about 'rivers of filth'. More recently editor Mark Osborn called the Workers Revolutionary Party a 'septic political sewer' (see Peter Fryer's Personal Column, 7 January). All bit infantile, if you ask me.

What should we make of Osborn's denunciation of what he calls 'the Cannon-Pablo-Mandel tendency, which emerged in the 40s — and of which you, politically speaking, are a sub-section'? (This expression was used by Osborn in a letter to Workers Press, which was quoted by Fryer.)

Osborn's phrase may suit 'Socialist Organiser' as it turns toward the ideas of Max Shachtman, against whom Leon Trotsky wrote in 'Defence of Marxism' (1940), on dialectics and the defence of the Soviet Union.

But it doesn't fit in with Osborn's claim that 'Socialist Organiser . . . Trotskyist — and . . . Workers Press/WRP is not' (a claim made in his letter to Workers Press). Whatever his faults, James Cannon, leader of the Socialist Workers Party in the US, was Trotsky's ally against Shachtman.

Nor does it explain why 'Socialist Organiser's' leading thinker, Sean Matgamna, sought to enlist his group with Ernest Mandel's 'United Secretariat' in the mid-70s.

Our party opposed Pablo and Mandel's adaptation to Stalinism, but defended the Soviet Union, China, and the Vietnamese people against US imperialism. Before Osborn delivers 'history's verdict' on Stalinism, or the WRP, he should come clean on his own group's history. Charlie Pottins



'Desert Storm' members during their New Year's Eve rave in Tuzla

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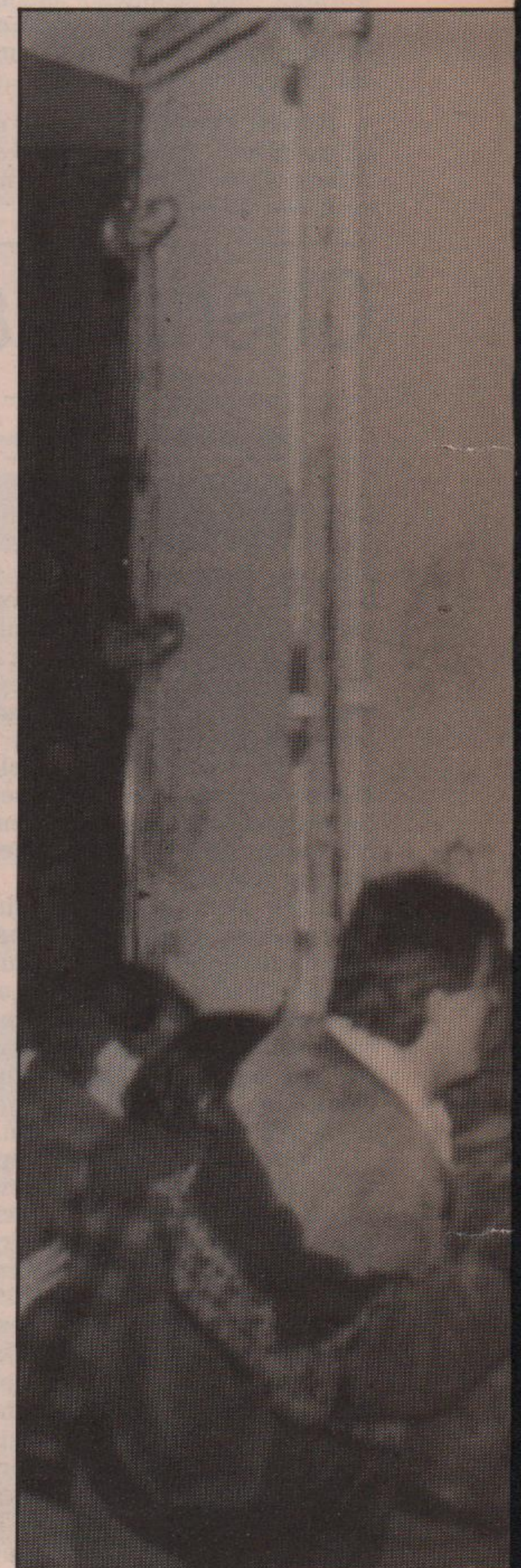
The last Workers Aid for Bosnia took along with it three hours from Glasgow and one from play in the New Year. TOM what happened

IT WAS decided this convoy would do more than just take material aid to Tuzla, following the meeting between Workers Aid members Paddy Mac and Lisa Mead and the Glasgow-based group 'Desert Storm' on last October's demonstration against the Criminal Justice Bill in London. On the basis of that first meeting the plan developed for the group to go with their equipment to Tuzla.

When one of the 'Desert Storm' DJs was unable to go to Tuzla, they asked James from Nottingham's 'Full on Dance Squad' (FoD Squad) to come too.

Also on the convoy were two trucks from Cambridge and Leicester 'Student Aid for Bosnia', set up as a result of work by Workers Aid. Four students came from Cambridge University and three from Leicester. The convoy as a whole consisted of six trucks — a 17-tonner, a 10-tonner, and four 7.5-tonne trucks. There were 20 people on the convoy.

We left on Sunday 18 December. We arrived late in the evening of 19



Workers Aid truck being used by 'Desert Storm'

FORMING D TUZLA

**Bosnia convoy to Tuzla
house-music DJs — two
from Nottingham — to
TONY MYERS describes**

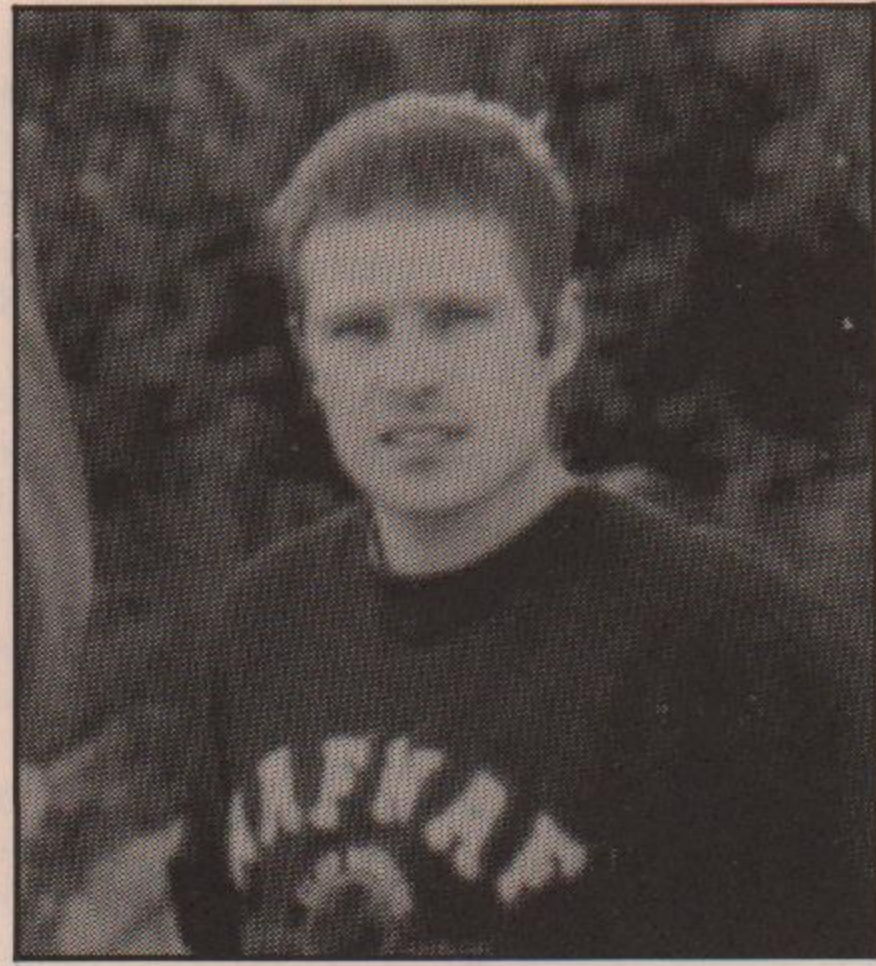
December in Split, Croatia, where we had to make some final arrangements for our papers. We met there two Workers Aid trucks and a van carrying aid from Spain. The intention was to leave Split together but because of the delays in getting papers we had to go separately.

While we were in Split everything was closed so we had to arrange our own entertainment — provided by 'Desert Storm' and FoD Squad.

We drove the trucks along the side of the Red Cross loading bay, built a wall of pallets each side, and then set up the sound system and the lights at one side, and arranged seating with pallets and a fire on the other, and told the British United Nations squaddies to come to our rave — which they did with lots of cans of beer!

We also went to a refugee camp and asked if they'd like to come along.

There must have been at least 100 people the first night, Christmas Eve, and 150 on Christmas



Convoy member Tony Myers

Day. We danced till the early hours of the morning.

While we were in Split we painted two of the trucks — including 'Desert Storm's'.

We left Split and arrived in Tuzla on the evening of 30 January. We were lucky because the weather was good — we had blue skies during the whole of the journey.

Before we left we had to decide whether to go with the UN soldiers on a route over the steep slopes of the foothills of the mountains; or to go around the foothills on a route where there was a front line, a route used by Bosnian soldiers.

It was not a hard decision. Even though a ceasefire existed, we

knew who would help us if we were fired on. The UN soldiers would run away and say: 'It's not in our mandate to protect you.' But the Bosnian soldiers would stand and fight to help us.

So we drove on the route along the front line. For eight kilometres of this route there was danger of so-called 'sniper fire' — this wasn't from bullets, but from tank-grenades. And for two kilometres of this we had to drive without lights in the dark, and we had to use the handbrakes to stop the trucks (so the brake lights wouldn't come on). But for once we were thankful for the snow because it made the edges of the road stand out.

We arrived tired and worn out at about 5am. We slept and then woke up to more snow! We sorted our papers out and unloaded the aid for the miners and the students at the university. We also had a much-needed meal, which was provided by the miners.

By this time it was dark again. It was New Year's Eve, and because we'd arrived late there was no time to organise the rave. We couldn't get a venue. The DJs tried to get one from a man who owned a local radio station called Chameleon, and a nightclub, but he said all the soldiers coming home from the front line had guns and grenades and that it would be crazy.



Checking the snow tyres on the 'Desert Storm' truck

He told the DJs that one of the soldiers had thrown a hand-grenade into his nightclub. But in my opinion the only reason the grenade was thrown was because the club wasn't open!

These soldiers had been fighting on the front line, and seen their best friends and family killed. All they wanted to do was forget — at least for this one night, New Year's Eve — and they did, thanks to the DJs and Workers Aid for Bosnia.

It was arranged for the DJs to play on Chameleon radio but they insisted that someone from Workers Aid should be allowed to speak about the campaign — which I did. But we still had no venue for the rave. Then one of our truck drivers, Mark, who was from the Forest of Dean, said: 'Why don't we take the 17-tonner, pull the curtain back on one side, and stick all the gear on the truck and drive around Tuzla with the music?'

We had to unload the 17-tonner, and take the equipment out of 'Desert Storm's' truck and put it in the 17-tonner. We also had to find places to stay for 20 people. All this was achieved by 11pm, which was amazing given the long and physically demanding journey that we'd been through.

One of the drivers who had the keys to the truck had gone off — so we couldn't start it! He only arrived in the nick of time — at 11.45pm, 15 minutes before the New Year!

Then we set off around Tuzla. The first place we stopped at was the town hall where the police started dancing and turned on the flashing lights of their cars to increase the effect.

The mayor invited us in for coffee but we were too busy. We drove around for a while and parked in a housing estate of high-rise blocks. Within ten minutes there must have been more than 100 people dancing near the truck, and many hundreds more waving and dancing on their balconies.

The people brought us coffee and slivovitz. I've never been in such a friendly atmosphere and although most of the soldiers had AK-47s I didn't feel intimidated in any way. I had the most unusual but wicked night.

So did all of the people who called in to Chameleon the next day to say how much they had enjoyed it. Chameleon's owner said that when the DJs came back to Tuzla he would arrange for them to play on the station and at his nightclub.



'Desert Storm' on New Year's Eve, when they played to an audience of hundreds in Tuzla

Pirates on tiptoe

WHEN you're in a hole, stop digging. British Gas bosses seem never to have heard this saying, judging by what one of their senior managers told their home advisory staff on 18 January:

'We want to tiptoe away from this service so that no one notices.'

The manager was briefing the 138 home advisers on plans to charge for services at present provided free to elderly and disabled customers.

But five days later what was meant as a tiptoe echoed through the land like an explosion. Once again the company's hush-hush plans had been leaked.

British Gas proposes to slap a £25 fee on advice given to the elderly and disabled, and to charge a similar fee for setting timer clocks for blind customers.

An automatic three-year safety check for elderly and disabled customers will be scrap-

PERSONAL COLUMN

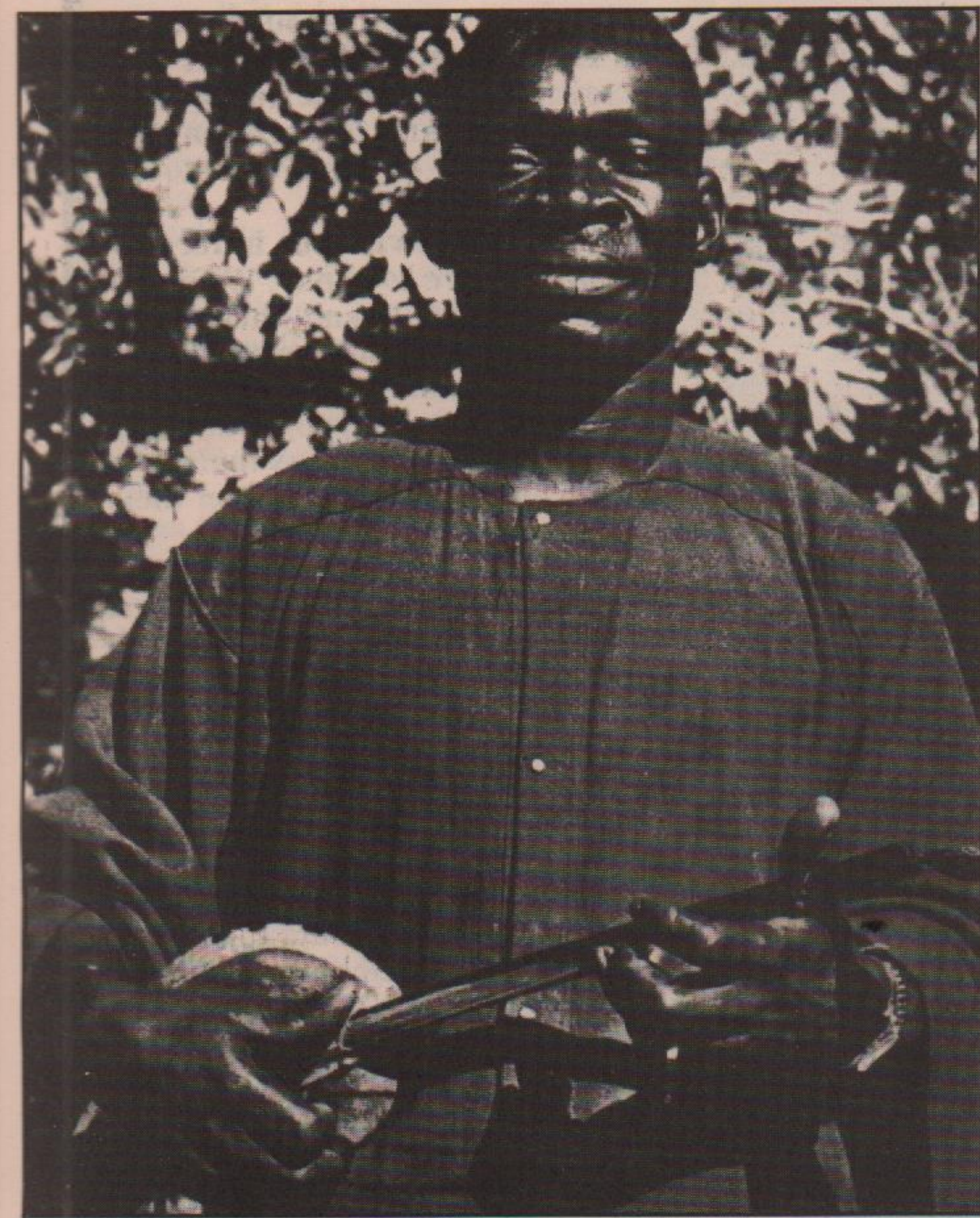
'Do less, but . . . make it sound more'; 'Tiptoe away . . . so that no one notices': here are the furtive guiding mottoes of these pirates of privatisation.

It's good to have it spelled out. It strengthens our fight for the renationalisation of all privatised industries, without a penny compensation.

Origins of the banjo

TERENCE HAWKES, professor of English at the University of Wales in Cardiff, writes in the current issue of the 'London Review of Books' that the origins of the banjo 'perhaps lay in Africa'.

That 'perhaps' is far too cautious. Some 30 years ago, in his liner notes to the LP 'Wolof Music of Senegal and the Gam-



Senegal musician Aamadou Coly Sall playing a lute with finger positions strikingly similar (in both hands) to those used by banjo-players today

ped, and signs in Braille will no longer be provided.

Charges will be introduced for gas safety checks, and home visits will be cut to 'an absolute minimum' by replacing them with telephone calls.

Special handles and adaptors provided for disabled customers are to be scrapped. The home advisory staff is to be slashed from 138 to 78 fairly soon, and will be completely scrapped within three years.

The leaked document, which runs to 123 pages, says the lesson learnt by British Gas from a visit to the US last September is: 'Do less, but maximise every opportunity for media coverage — make it sound more.'

Now, you'd have thought, wouldn't you, that British Gas would have learnt something from the outrage caused last November by the gigantic pay rise given to its chief executive Cedric Brown — a 75 per cent increase which brought his salary up to a cool £475,000 a year? The outrage was compounded by later price rises and by revelations about staff job cuts and pay cuts and a 90 per cent reduction in safety spending.

But British Gas appears to have learnt nothing at all. Even from a narrowly 'public relations' point of view, it's a disaster area.

It comes over as a bunch of greedy but incompetent con men, hell-bent on lining their pockets at the expense of customers in general, blind and disabled customers in particular.

They clearly don't give a damn about safety, or service, or truth.

bia' (FE4462), David Ames suggested that the five-stringed plucked lute known as the *halam* (or *khalam*) 'may have been the "grandfather" of the American banjo'.

In 1970, in his book 'Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues', Paul Oliver described the banjo as 'of West African origin', and suggested that it got its name from the Senegal lute called the *bania*.

It was Dena J. Epstein who clinched matters in 1978, in her remarkable book 'Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War'. The banjo, she wrote, 'seems to have been the most widely reported and longest lived of all the African instruments in the New World'.

As early as 1678, she said, Adrien Dessalles, in his 'Histoire Générale des Antilles' described the 'banza' in use among African slaves in Martinique; 30 years later John Oldmixon, in 'The British Empire in America', reported that the 'Bangil' ('not much unlike our Lute') was in use in Barbados.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote his 'Notes on the State of Virginia' in 1781, he said of black people in that state: 'The instrument proper to them is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa.' Several other writers in the same period also took it for granted that the banjo was of African provenance.

Peter Fryer

Labourism, Trotskyism and the dockers

Workers Press reader Tom Cowan comments on a recent book on the history of post-war dockers' struggles. Below the book's author, Bill Hunter, replies

HAVING read your review of 'They Knew Why They Fought: Unofficial Leadership and Struggles on the Docks 1945-1989' by Bill Hunter (Workers Press, 3 September 1994), I decided to purchase and read this book on the history of the portworkers' struggles, particularly as I was involved, in a very small way, with those struggles in the London area in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

I found Hunter's book to be interesting, but not a full or objective account of the national portworkers' struggles. Rather than a historical account of these struggles, it reads more like a history of Trotskyist participation in them.

One example concerns the Birkenhead 'Port Workers Clarion'. Although this paper is mentioned and quoted from in

the book, there is no recognition of even the existence of the London-based rank-and-file paper of the same name.

Bert Aylward, Harry Constable and Bert Saunders are often mentioned as prominent leaders of the dockers' struggles, and, what is more, as being members of the Trotskyist organisation. But they are not credited with producing the London 'Port Workers Clarion'. This paper, because it had the authority of Aylward and Constable behind it, was very influential among dockers nationally.

Admittedly Hunter was based mainly in the north of England, but his story ranges over all the ports. So surely he could not have been ignorant of the existence and influence nationally of this paper; or of the role Aylward, Constable and Saunders (Trotskyist members at that!) played in producing it.

A clue to Hunter's reticence in recognising the London paper is when he boasts of Trotskyist support for the portworkers,

stating: 'We were almost the only group of politically motivated men and women — who gave consistent and loyal support to their struggle . . .' (my emphasis).

The question is: which other group of politically motivated men and women gave the dockers such support? The other group was the small Oehlerite Socialist Workers League, which was based in London and led by Joe Thomas. Aylward and Constable were members of this organisation — I don't know if Saunders ever joined, but as Constable's constant companion he regularly attended political discussions and editorial meetings.

Both Aylward and Constable joined the SWL on the basis of their politics, which were strongly against the Labour government and for the immediate building of an independent revolutionary workers' organisation, that is, a genuine communist party. This position was sharply divergent from

Trotskyist entrism and critical support for Labour policy. (This fact makes me query Hunter's suggestion that they joined the Labour Party and Gerry Healy's [Trotskyist] group.)

It was the SWL dockers' group which produced the London 'Port Workers Clarion' — Joe Thomas and his partner, Monica Cole, dealt with the technicalities of layout and printing.

I attended editorial meetings of the paper, with all the above mentioned in attendance, at which we discussed both the question of forms of co-operation with the Trotskyists and the political slant of the paper, which was for the exposing of Labourism and its reactionary anti-working-class government.

For further information on this question, from the standpoint of historical correctness, see the obituary of Joe Thomas by Ernest Rogers in 'Revolutionary History' (vol. 3, no. 2, Autumn 1990).

Tom Cowan

PORTWORKERS' 2^o. CLARION

*On we march we the workers, and the rumours that ye hear
Is the blunder sound of battle and deliverance drawing near.
For the hope of every creature is the banner that we bear,
And the world goes marching on. —Will Morris*

No. 4.

ORGAN OF THE BIRKENHEAD PORTWORKERS' COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY, 1952.

ARBITRATION ?

By THE EDITOR.

Since our last issue events have moved fairly quickly in respect to wage claim and other incidental matters.

The Press now informs us that negotiations have broken down — the parties having failed to agree. As a consequence the matter has now been referred to the Ministry of Labour and the Minister has decided, with the approval of the House, to refer the whole question of the differences to arbitration.

course of negotiations. What differences have arisen and what should be the best course to adopt as the next step. This would certainly create a feeling of confidence among the men in regard to their negotiations and also would give the negotiators ideas as to the general feeling of the membership upon the matters in question.

Such a course we believe would commend itself to every Docker throughout the length and breadth of the country.

1951. Tonnage Figures Highest In Post War Period

During recent months the Press campaign against the Dockers has reached new heights or sunk to lower levels according to how you view the matter. We have been assailed on all sides, and have been called slackers, shirkers, traitors. However, such is not the case, for we see, when perusing the 1951 statistics reported in the "Board of Trade Journal," which is the official organ of the Board of Trade, that 156,740,000 nett tons of shipping entered and left T.K.

The Birkenhead portworkers' defence committee 'Port Workers Clarion' took over this name from a London-based paper

Lessons of portworkers' fight

TOM COWAN criticises my book on the docks because it fails to recognise the 'London-based rank-and-file paper' the 'Port Workers Clarion' and declares that Constable and Aylward were members of the Oehlerite Socialist Workers League. And he concludes that I have deliberately ignored this.

My memories of this group during and just after the war are solely of it circulating very thick bulletins listing the 'errors' and 'opportunism' of Trotsky and dealing with incidents out of context.

I was not aware, when I wrote my book, that Constable and Aylward were involved with a London 'Port Workers' Clarion'. I have now learned that the Birkenhead portworkers' defence committee took over the name.

If Tom Cowan wishes to help fill in gaps in the history of dockers' struggles, then I, for one, would welcome it. But let him do it seriously, objectively, and with a sense of proportion.

My book attempts to examine the main lessons of the dockers' struggle and how they relate to the post-war developments of capitalism, and to put this in the context of questions which faced the whole working class.

The book seeks to show the limits of purely trade-union policies and of syndicalism, while

showing the great and inspiring efforts of rank-and-file workers to use their strength and organisation. My aim was to draw out the lessons of the struggles, and these are summarised in the book's conclusion, which is addressed to the class fighters who will come into struggle in the future.

Yes, one of my aims was to show Trotskyist participation in the dockers' struggles. I cannot deny it. That participation was part of reality!

One of the most important contributions made by Trotskyists was that we helped to link a movement in industry fighting employers and trade union bureaucracy with a movement in the Labour Party facing the same enemies.

Danny Brandon's editorial in the 'Port Workers Clarion', which I quote in the book, explained well the need for the dockers to link with the struggle in the Labour Party. And Harry Constable played a role in this, by meeting Labour MP Michael Foot and relating the position on the docks.

The book might have emphasised more the assistance the militant dockers were able to obtain from 'Tribune', including its defence of the right of dockers to join a union of their own choosing.

The defence of the dockers in 1954 brought three members of

the editorial board — Jenny Lee, J.P.W. Mallalieu and Michael Foot — to the verge of expulsion. The national executive committee of the Labour Party censured them and asked them: 'How do you reconcile your attacks on the leadership of the TGWU [Transport and General Workers' Union] with your membership of the Party?'

Some additions to the book could have been made. Since it was published I have discussed with several people how the picture of the struggle for the 'Blue Union' (the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers Union) could be given more detail. The main aspects and processes of the struggle are, I believe, outlined in the book, in the attention given to Merseyside.

But, the northern ports other than Merseyside — Manchester and Hull in particular — did

have their own characteristics and traditions. Since the publication of my book, Keith Sinclair, secretary of Hull trades council, has obtained some very important interviews and other material from Hull dockers; he has also carried out research in Hull newspapers. I hope a pamphlet based on this material will appear soon.

The struggles in London also, of course, need to be examined. Here what is contained in the book must be added to. This should include a much greater discussion of the leadership of the unofficial struggle, taking up its contradictions and the activities of the Communist Party-controlled Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions.

Perhaps there are readers who could assist in this?

Bill Hunter

THEY KNEW WHY THEY FOUGHT by Bill Hunter

Index Books, £7.95

'The historic struggles of the dockers' movement and the part played by workers from the Royal Docks are told in a fascinating new book' (Catherine Howard writing in the Newham 'Recorder').

Available by post from Index Book Centre, 28 Charlotte Street, London W1P 1HJ. Add 65p for mail orders

The fight to defend Clause Four

This is the first of a series of articles explaining the background to the current controversy surrounding Clause Four of the Labour Party's constitution. This is the clause that commits the party to the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. In the first of the series GEOFF PILLING looks at this clause in relation to the fight for socialism

A historical necessity

FOR Marxists socialism is not simply a 'policy' but a historical necessity if society is to survive and avoid the barbarism with which capitalism threatens the whole of the planet.

Indeed, that barbarism is already present as we near the end of the 20th century. It exists for those countless millions who daily face starvation and homelessness in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

It increasingly threatens greater numbers in the big capitalist countries: the millions of unemployed, the old, the sick and the young who are forced to survive on meagre state handouts, assuming they can get them.

At the same time capitalism plunders natural resources in its greed for profit, in the process threatening to destroy large areas of the environment. Capitalist thirst for profit is insatiable.

In Britain it brings the supply of even the most basic requirements for life under its domination — water, gas, electricity and the transport system. According to the latest press reports the Tories now plan to 'privatise' the country's nature reserves, starting with those in Wales.

Millions are to face impossibly high bills for water and fuel, face crippling high rail fares and are even to be denied access to the countryside, all in the interests of a bunch of profiteers who control the country's wealth.

During much of the last century the capitalist system, despite the horrors it created for many people, especially for the working class, was able to develop the productive forces, to increase humanity's control over nature.

But by the present century this progressive phase was over. Capitalism increasingly constituted an absolute barrier to human progress. Throughout the century capitalism has plunged society into ever-greater crises — including two world

wars, a huge slump in the 1930s and fascism.

It increasingly threatens the productive forces with total destruction. As Rosa Luxemburg, one of the leading socialists of early years of this century, put it, society is faced with the stark choice: socialism or barbarism. Either the working class will take power into its own hands and refashion society — or civilisation was threatened with total destruction.

Two classes

CAPITALISM is a system based on the division of society into two antagonistic classes: the capitalist class, in whose hands is concentrated the ownership of the means of production, and the working class, which exists through the sale of its ability to work, that is labour power.

It is through the exploitation of the labour of the working class that the capitalists obtain surplus value, which takes the form of profit, interest and rent. The fundamental contradiction of capitalism is that its basis is production for profit, and not production to satisfy human need.

As Henry Ford long ago said: 'I'm not in the business to produce cars, but to produce profits.'

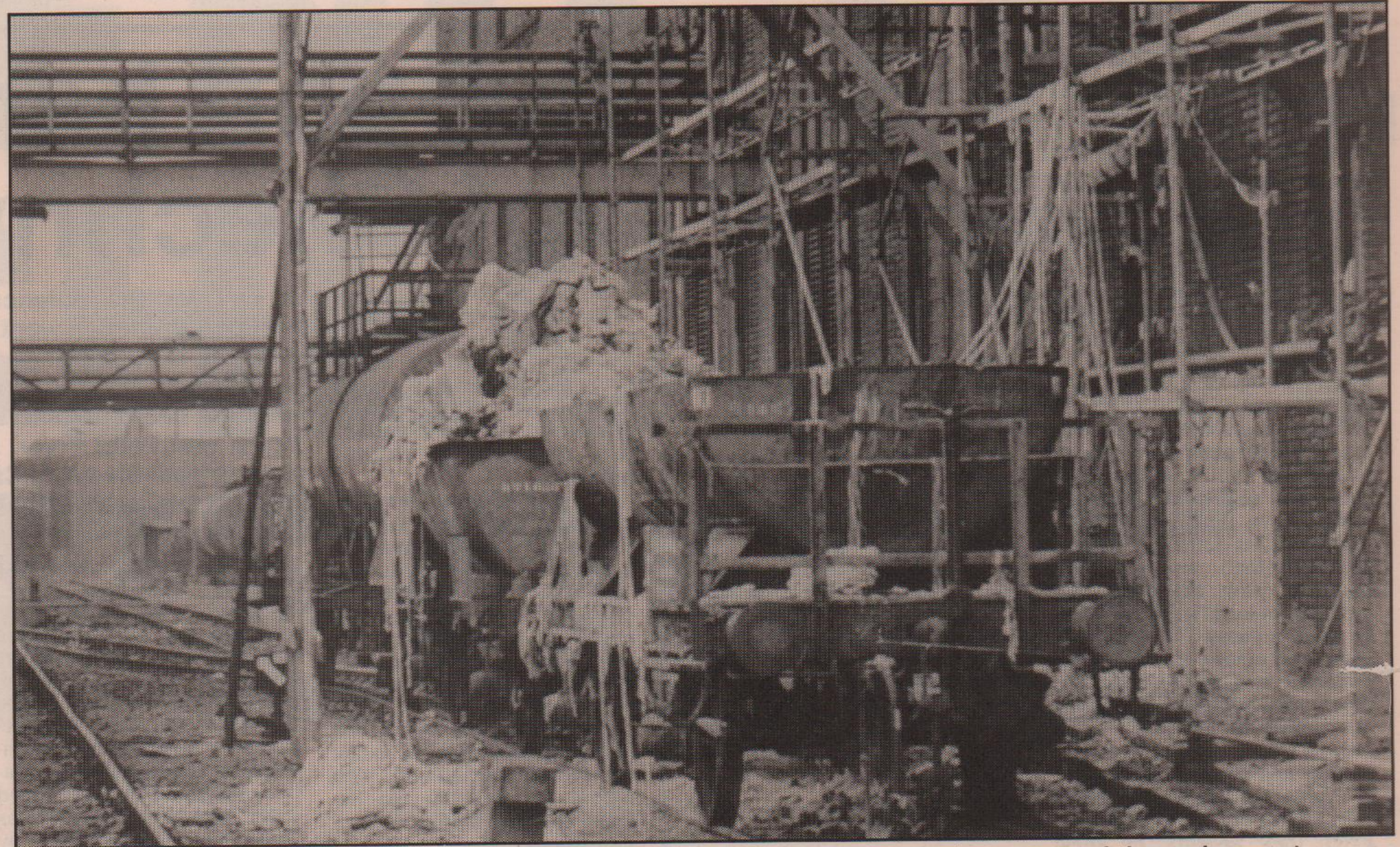
Capitalists move their capital around the globe in search of profit. If millions are to be made from producing drugs and armaments — now amongst the most important tradeable commodities — then this is what will be produced.

The satisfaction of real human needs is quite incidental to this process.

Where profits cannot be made, or made at a sufficient level or rate, then capitalists close down their operations, move their capital elsewhere or keep it in liquid form until more favourable opportunities arise for making profit.

This is the only 'plan' that each capitalist can have. Based as it is on the private ownership of the means of production, capitalism is a system based on anarchy. By anarchy we mean not complete chaos, but the abs-

Clause Four and socialism



Capitalism plunders natural resources in its greed for profit threatening to destroy large areas of the environment

ence of an overall plan for the production of things to satisfy human needs.

Each capitalist takes decisions about what to produce and in what quantities, all the decisions being determined by the need to make profit.

For certain periods, the decisions that each owner of capital takes may well 'fit together': that is, for example, the 'right' quantity of coal is produced to match the quantity of steel produced.

But if such a balance is achieved it is arrived at by accident. Let us say there is considerable over-production of one commodity in relation to other commodities, say too much

steel produced in relation to the demand for steel from the car industry.

This will lead to a cutback in steel production, closure of steel plants, sacking of steel workers and reduced demand for products that are supplied to the steel industry — iron ore, coal, etc.

What starts out as a crisis in one sector of the economy can, under the appropriate conditions, spread throughout whole economies, bringing massive unemployment and poverty.

Even more importantly, capitalism in the present century has become ever-more dominated by speculative activities — the buying and selling

of shares, of currencies, of other financial instruments. Vast speculative gains can accrue to those involved in what amounts to a giant casino.

Speculation

IN THE mad capitalist world of today, of all the trillions of dollars swilling around the money markets, some 90 per cent is employed in these sorts of speculative activities, with only 10 per cent employed to finance world trade, that is the actual movement of goods.

It is these speculators — the banks, insurance companies, pension funds — who hold the world in their grip. If they decide to speculate against a currency — as they have against the Mexican peso in the last few weeks — they can bring destitution to literally millions of people.

Thus the Mexican government, in order to obtain loans from the New York bankers, has been forced to introduce a so-called 'stabilisation' plan.

This means further savage cutbacks in the living standards of an already desperately poor people. The restoration of the value of the peso will be achieved at the expense of millions of Mexican workers and peasants.

Ending capitalist anarchy

THIS anarchy will only be ended when the working class takes control of the means of production and plans production to satisfy human needs.

This involves the expropriation of the capitalist class and the elimination of the private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

It is from this point of view that the development towards socialism involves the ownership in common of the means of production.

But this does not mean that the nationalisation of the basic industries is the same thing as socialism. Socialism can be built only on the basis of the working class taking power. The working class must des-

trophy the capitalist state and on that basis lay the foundation for the gradual disappearance of all remnants of class society and the establishment of a truly human society and culture.

But this does not mean that we reject the demand for the expropriation of separate groups of capitalists. As Trotsky wrote in the Transitional Programme, ('The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International'):

'The socialist programme of expropriation, i.e. of political overthrow of the bourgeoisie and liquidation of its economic domination, should in no case during the present transitional period hinder us from advancing, when the occasion warrants, the demand for the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence or of the most parasitic group of the bourgeoisie.'

Renationalisation

IT IS from this point of view that we raise the demand for the renationalisation of those industries privatised by the Tories — water, gas, electricity, the coal mines, the railways — which are surely vital for millions of working people and their families.

But we add something else. We demand this renationalisation be under workers' control and without compensation paid to the parasites who own and control these vital industries and services.

'The difference between these demands [for the expropriation of sections of the ruling class] and the middle-headed reformist slogan of "nationalisation" lies in the following:

(1) we reject indemnification [compensation];

(2) we warn the masses against demagogues of the People's Front who, giving lip-service to nationalisation, remain in reality agents of capital;

(3) we call upon the masses to rely only on their revolutionary strength;

(4) we link up the question of expropriation with the seizure of power by the workers and farmers' ('The Transitional Programme').

Workers' resistance worn down

BY JACKIE VANCE

WORKERS at the General Motors subsidiary, Packard Electric, at Tallaght, Dublin, have eventually been worn down in their resistance to a savage attack on their working conditions (see Workers Press, 14 January).

After twice decisively rejecting the company's £4 million per year cost-cutting attempts they have now voted to accept them by 472 votes to 289.

Under the constant threat that the factory would close and relocate, possibly to Hungary, the workforce had held out

against the proposals which included the introduction of new work methods, extending the working week by two unpaid hours, a pay freeze, and the elimination of a ten-minute tea break.

But after weeks of combined pressure from the Irish government, the company, and the trade union officials — both locally and in the leadership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions — they have been forced to accept.

The Packard clash is one of the many disputes which highlight the attempts to drive down the wages and conditions of Irish workers as the state struggles to maintain investment

from the international monopolies.

During the 1970s and 1980s American companies had been able to extract two-and-a-half times more profit on their investments in Ireland compared with investment in other western European countries.

Intensified

This situation is changing with intensified competition for investment from other countries — not only from eastern Europe where the fall of the Stalinist regimes has seen the attempted restoration of capitalism through the impoverishment of the working class — but

also from other governments throughout Europe who are increasing the investment inducements and attacking labour costs.

The inability of the Packard workers to fight off the attacks on their conditions exposes the limitations of the traditional methods of struggle of the Irish working class with its proud history of syndicalism.

Only the fight for internationalism and the linking with workers in other countries around a programme of demands that includes the nationalisation of industry under workers control can produce a political leadership to defeat the monopolies.

SERTUC support for victimised Kazakh miners

SUPPORT for the Independent Miners' Union of Kazakhstan came from the Southern and Eastern Regional Council of the TUC (SERTUC) when it issued a statement calling for the reinstatement of 19 miners sacked after a strike.

TUC general secretary John Monks, on behalf of the TUC, has written to the union and the President of Kazakhstan on the issue.

The motion accepted by SERTUC was proposed by the Greater London Association of

Trades Union Councils. It reads:

'Following the news of the strike of 2,000 members of the Independent Miners' Union in Kazakhstan, (former Soviet Republic), the sacking of 19 leading strikers in Malkudukskaya and the attempts, in spite of local laws, to declare the strike illegal, we call on the President of Kazakhstan to introduce such laws as will ensure the workers' legal right to strike in defence of their own interests.

'We call for the reinstatement

of the sacked miners. We also send our message of support to the miners' union involved.'

■ SERTUC also supported the actions of the Labour MEPs who advertised their backing for Clause Four of the Labour Party's constitution in the 'Guardian'.

Last Saturday SERTUC carried a motion, proposed by Transport and General Workers' Union Region No.1:

'This Regional Council of the TUC sends its good wishes and

congratulations to those MEPs who were signatories to the "Guardian" advertisement in which they opposed any change to Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution.

'The Regional Council believes the debate to be unnecessary, divisive and damaging. We urge the MEPs to continue to stand by their principles and not to allow either the mass media or sections of the Labour Leadership to harass them away from their genuinely-held convictions.'

Sudanese trades unionists declare war on torturers

SEAFARER Ahmad Mahamad Osman shocked a London conference last week when he described how Sudanese security police beat and tortured him for leading a strike. Over 100 refugee trades unionists assembled by the Sudanese Trade Union Alliance, pledged support for the struggle against their country's Islamic military dictatorship.

Ahmad was first detained with other crew members when they stepped off ship in Port Sudan on 17 July 1972. He was called a 'saboteur', beaten by three security men, and thrown in a tiny cell. Ahmad's 'crime' and that of his crewmates was that they had entered an industrial dispute with the Sudan Shipping Line, and tried to sue the company.

During his detention he was kept shackled, and routinely made to crawl on the ground until his knees bled. Once when he had managed to smuggle some food to his cell, the guards punished him with a beating, then forced a half-inch pipe into his rectum to 'retrieve' it. He passed out, and woke at dawn, in pain and covered in blood.

Ahmad heard men in other cells crying out not to be raped. From their accents, he knew they were Beijas, from eastern Sudan, a minority who are being persecuted by the regime. Ahmad was detained again last year during dictator Lt. General Omar Al-Bashir's visit to Port Sudan. As a result of his treatment he needed an operation for spinal injury.

Engineer Hashem Mohamed Aboud, himself a torture victim, said the Islamic National Front-led military regime which seized power in Sudan in 1989 had forced thousands of trade unionists out of their jobs, and forced them to leave their homes and their country. Aboud

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

said Sudanese exiles must expose the regime and win support from other trades unionists.

'International solidarity has saved the lives of trade unionists inside Sudan. I was one of them,' he said.

Representatives of the Singers and Musicians' Union, some of whose members have been murdered by religious fanatics encouraged by the Islamic regime, enlivened the conference with a national song that had everyone clapping in rhythm. After this a grey-haired union veteran who had travelled from Egypt was warmly applauded.

Rights

Speaking in Arabic, he moved the London Declaration, launching the movement to back Sudanese workers' struggle for democratic rights, to end the war in the south of Sudan and recognise people's rights there, and to put forward an economic programme for Sudan's development.

In a message smuggled out of Sudan, leaders of the underground workers' movement welcomed support from abroad and pledged 'With your solidarity and support, we are confident we will be able to win our struggle.'

Support heroic defiance of Chechnya's people

THIS meeting unconditionally supports the heroic defiance of the people of Chechnya against the Russian tanks, guns, and bombs, and we call for the support of workers throughout the world against this imperialist-backed genocide.

We strongly protest at the murderous actions of Yeltsin. Behind the smokescreen of 'glasnost' and introducing 'democracy' he has unleashed the might of the Russian armed state to commit the most savage acts of barbarism against a small nation and its people.

We associate ourselves with all those in Russia, inside and outside parliament, who oppose the invasion and demand the withdrawal of Russian troops.

Millions of oppressed and exploited people throughout the world saw the 1917 revolution and its leadership as the main hope against their injustices. This was particularly true of the peoples of all the small nations.

The Bolsheviks were adamant in guaranteeing the right to self-determination to all the republics of the USSR. It was only with the usurpation of power by Stalin that this right was cruelly trampled upon.

When the Stalinist regime was overthrown in 1989 and the new rulers made promises of freedom and democracy, hope of independence again took hold. But for Chechnya it was not to be. The thousands of dead, injured, and mutilated include the victims of callous and deliberate attacks on civilians.

This and the total devastation of people's homes, are a testament to the true content of this 'democracy'.

One effect of Stalinism was to divide the workers in the West from the real oppression inflicted on the many nationalities which comprised the former Soviet Union — and from their historic struggles.

Chechnya was never incorporated into Russia by its own

A call for the defence of Chechnya's right to self-determination went out from the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International's public meeting in London on Friday 20 January. The meeting heard speakers from the Workers International and Peter Fryer. During the discussion two people from the north Caucasus spoke of long fight against the greater Russian chauvinism, first of the tsar, and later of the Stalinist bureaucracy. We publish a resolution agreed by the meeting

free will. For 40 years of the last century, Chechnya was needed by the Russian autocracy in order to conquer the Caucasus. For these four decades the Chechen mountaineers resisted this occupation, and could not be subdued even when their country was transformed into a colony by tsarism.

Neither have the Chechen

people forgotten the brutality of the Stalinist regime which deported them by force from their homeland.

The current carnage in Chechnya is a continuation of the United Nations-backed atrocities in Bosnia. As in Bosnia the electoral decisions of the people are cynically ignored by the 'democrats'. In 1991 85 per cent of the people of

Chechnya voted for independence — but the need to control the oil lines overrides all the 'democratic' rhetoric.

This savagery is an inevitable component in the development of Yeltsin's greater-Russian chauvinism and imperialism's 'new world order'. Yeltsin and the new, emerging bourgeoisie act on behalf of the imperialist market and the conditions imposed under the dictates of the IMF loans.

This is a war of plunder. At stake is control of the Chechen oil fields and the crucial pipe line connecting the supply of oil. The 'democratic revolution' in the former USSR is shown to be a fraud. This is the path of the capitalist market. There is no basis for a stable, peaceful, capitalist class in any comparable way to the development of western capitalist states.

'Craven' western support for Yeltsin

LEE Bryant, of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Information Centre in London, sent the following message to the 'Defend Chechnya' meeting:

OBVIOUSLY, all of us have been appalled by the wanton destruction of Chechnya's capital city Grozny, and by the Russian Army's senseless and brutal attacks on civilian areas in the whole of the republic.

More than that, we are also appalled (though not surprised) by the craven reaction of our politicians, who argue that supporting democracy in Russia means supporting Yeltsin and therefore supporting the Russian Army's assault on Chechnya. This is clearly ludicrous.

Yeltsin plainly does not represent the forces of democracy any longer. In fact he is either controlling or being controlled by a virulently anti-democratic faction within the leadership which is seeking a return to militaristic totalitarianism.

The people of Chechnya

have expressed their will clearly to pursue their future independent of the imperialistic Russia which has, at various stages of its recent history, attempted to destroy not only Chechens but other Caucasian peoples as well. This will has to be respected.

Regarding the Chechen leadership, this is a question which only the Chechen people can decide — not Yeltsin.

If Yeltsin's real aim had been to remove Dudayev, then the military action undertaken on New Year's Day has patently had the opposite effect.

Even genuine opponents of General Dudayev have been forced to rally behind him in the face of what can only be described as an attempt to destroy a nation.

Finally, there are frightening similarities between the wars in the former Yugoslavia and what is happening today in Russia.

For the sake of all of us we must stand up and oppose Yeltsin's actions in Chechnya and the western European leaders' responses to it.

Crush

The imperialist powers must crush all independence movements in order to prepare the way for a restored capitalism on the backs of a pauperised working class. If Yeltsin does not succeed in this, more openly fascist politicians such as Zhirinovskiy will be called upon. It is only the opposition of the Russian workers to the war that delays the open embracing of Zhirinovskiy.

In their great struggle the workers of Chechnya need the support of the Russian working class. They particularly need the support of the Russian and Ukrainian miners fighting to establish independent trades unions.

Although they are currently organised behind Dudayev and the banner of nationalism, national independence will only be won and guaranteed through the victory of working-class internationalism.

We defend the right to self-determination of Chechnya and demand the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops!

Ford motors drives into Poland

THE FORD Motor Company is to build its top-selling Escort model at a new plant to be built in Poland. This is further evidence that Ford's 'globalisation' plan means destroying jobs in the 'high-wage' economies and exploiting the cheaper labour of the 'under-developed' countries, including eastern Europe.

Being experts at manipulating governments into giving them favourable terms, Ford's have no doubt secured concessions from Lech Walesa's government for land, services, railway lines and low wages. Wale-

sa has previously made agreements with the world's shipping companies to supply the lowest paid sea workers.

Every existing Ford plant is under threat with more and more work being contracted out to low-paying firms.

For example, at Dagenham, the work of sewing machinists, who led two historic strikes for women to gain equal pay and then skilled status, has been handed over to Johnson Controls. They have a new plant on Ford's property feeding directly into the Ford Assembly Plant.

Writer faces trial for telling truth about Turkish state

TURKEY'S world-known writer Yashar Kemal faces trial on 'treason' charges for telling the truth about repression and the denial of rights to the Kurdish people.

The 72-year-old novelist is being prosecuted for an article in the German magazine 'Spiegel' attacking the Turkish regime's atrocities, and saying the regime had driven Kurds into armed rebellion for their legitimate rights.

Kemal may be tried under anti-terror laws which forbid any threat to the unity of the state.

Eight Kurdish MPs were jailed for up to 15 years last month on charges of advocating separatism, and some 100 Tur-

kish intellectuals have been jailed for supporting Kurdish rights.

Kemal is the only Turkish writer ever shortlisted for a Nobel prize. His best-known novel 'Memed My Hawk', about an Anatolian peasant boy who becomes a Robin Hood-like hero fighting oppressive landlords, was filmed by Peter Ustinov.

He has been imprisoned before for translating Marxist literature into Turkish.

In a report for the Index on Censorship to be published shortly he describes the Turkish regime as a racist tyranny. 'Under the guise of democracy . . . genocide, torture and village burnings are continuing in all their splendour.'

Angolan journalist killed

A LEADING Angolan opposition journalist has been assassinated. Ricardo de Mello, editor of the independent Luanda-based fax newspaper 'Imparcial Fax' was killed in Luanda on 17 January.

De Mello was a member of the independent journalists' association, the Sindicato dos Jornalistas Angolanos (SJA), which has published an outspoken newsletter 'Jornalismo Hoje'. This has questioned the role of both the MPLA government and Unita opposition in establishing peace in Angola.

So far details about the murder are sketchy. The Angolan government and police have not yet made any announcement about the assassination.

Antonio Gouveia, a member of the SJA executive council described the assassination as

politically-motivated. 'He died because he struggled for peace in Angola', he said.

Neither the MPLA nor Unita is prepared to tolerate criticism by journalists in Angola, a key journal a tight hold over the media.

Murdered

According to a report from the Paris-based organisation Reporters Sans Frontières, Angolan journalists have died or been murdered since the civil war began again in October 1992. Six other media workers including journalists from both MPLA- and Unita-controlled organs, still remain missing.

Mr Gouveia said that journalists in Angola would continue their struggle against harassment and oppression.

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