

'Le flic' threatens to join mass movement

STRIKE WAVE PARALYSES FRANCE

THE offensive of the French workers against plans to slash their welfare benefits has plunged the Juppé government into a full-blown political crisis.

All the major towns, including Paris, remain paralysed as the strike movement of workers in the public and private sectors gains momentum.

As the strike entered its second week:

■ Long-distance train services were limited to a few trains to London (mostly driven by British workers) and Brussels. There were 150 miles of traffic jams on roads leading into Paris.

■ Postal workers joined in, with 107 of the country's sorting centres affected by the walk-out.

■ Electricity production was slashed to a third its normal level as action by workers hit 80 out of 100 power-distribution centres.

■ Dockers in Marseille voted to call a 24-hour strike and Air France workers announced demonstrations.

■ Even the police, 'le flic', disgruntled with having to face angry strikers, have threatened to strike, an indication of the depth and scope of the movement.

■ Students at all the main universities took action alongside the working class, rejecting a government offer to consider demands for extra funds, and decided to continue strikes and occupations.

Last week's crisis Cabinet meeting declared there would be no backing down to the strikers. But these are empty words.

■ The truth is the French government is damned if it gives into the strikers. The German government is putting enormous pressure on the Chirac regime to fight it out with the working class. The immediate future of the European common currency rests on the outcome of this struggle.

BY THE EDITOR

Only concerted action by the German and international bankers last week prevented the franc from falling through the floor.

■ But the French government is damned if it resists the working class and tries to stand firm.

For Juppé and his cabinet face a bitter and angry working class. During the election campaign earlier this year President Chirac promised measures to reduce the level of unemployment. He broke his promises. Unemployment is still rising and all state benefits are threatened with severe cuts.

Millions of middle-class French people also face reductions in their benefits. Even those who have been caught for hours in traffic jams have expressed their support for the strikers.

Hospital workers, teachers, bank workers and taxi drivers were the latest to join the movement.

Many schools have announced that they will close in anticipation of an all-out teachers' strike.

Talks between public sector unions and public service minister Dominique Perben collapsed within two hours with no agreement in sight. This was an indication of the pressure on the trade union leadership.

The government's £4mn-a-day efforts to mount a strike-breaking alternative transport system

have proved largely ineffective.

The French ruling class is deeply divided.

■ Sections have demanded that the government stands firm and fights it out.

■ Others have called for the sacking of Juppé.

■ Yet other sections propose a general election.

In a stormy National Assembly debate last Tuesday, Juppé declared: 'France is at the crossroads and can choose between reform and decline.'

But Juppé's choice is no choice. The 'reform' he talks about means a deep-going attack on the conditions of life won by working people in France. These are the 'reforms' of the ruling class the world over, as has been experienced in Britain.

But Juppé's 'decline' of capital is real. The ruling class can no longer rule in the old way. There are no 'reforms' in favour of the working class to be won on the old terms.

The burning question is one of working-class leadership. The working class has to take the worldwide situation into its own hands. The movement in France is one step towards resolving this question, but only a step.

In the conditions of capital the crisis will continue.

Whatever the immediate outcome, the class struggle in France has taken a sharp turn which has implications for the whole of Europe. The working class is on the offensive. It must be supported by the working class in Europe and beyond.

■ See editorial — page 2. Come to the 'Crisis in the labour movement' conference in February 1996 in Manchester, details page 2.

Liverpool dockers' march



Last Saturday, Liverpool dockers and thousands of their supporters from throughout the workers' movement marched through the city and listened to speakers who reported on the international campaign against casual labour and to defend conditions. Full report, page 8; interview, page 3; and, reviews of pamphlets on past docks' struggles, page 7.

Workers International member attacked in South Africa

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL calls upon trade unionists and socialists throughout the world to protest at a vicious attack on our comrade Bongani Mkhungo.

On Saturday 2 December, Bongani was attacked and held by stewards at the mass trade unionists' rally in Durban on the 10th anniversary of COSATU. He was handing out the leaflet printed in last week's Workers Press.

Bongani's possessions were seized, his political leaflets and pamphlets burned on the spot, and the stewards threatened to kill him. Fortunately this happened in a public place in front of a large crowd. He was able to get away.

Violence in the workers' movement must be condemned. Every member of a trade union and political party has the right to voice and campaign for their opinion. A leadership which tries to suppress its critics in this way can never lead the workers to freedom.

It was the bitter truths stated

in the leaflet which Bongani and other members of Workers International were distributing that enraged the COSATU leaders, especially because the message was so well received by the workers who read it.

The leaflet called for COSATU, on its 10th anniversary, to **break now** from its alliance with the so-called 'Government of National Unity', itself an alliance with capital. And it then asked: 'What happened to the Workers' Charter and the fight for a workers' party?'

The leaflet shows how this government is attacking nurses, truck drivers and car workers, and bringing in anti-union anti-strike laws. It does this while protected by COSATU.

Bongani is an executive committee member of Workers International, and was its candidate in South Africa's last elections. He is a well-known workers' leader in Durban, active in the development of the trade union federation FOSATU and its successor COSATU.

To unite the factory workers with the communities, he worked to build the township Civic Associations. As a member of NUMSA, the metal workers' union, Bongani played an active part in establishing the first shop stewards' combine to cover all rubber workers in South Africa and became its first secretary.

He was victimised by Dunlops for his trade union activities, and following his sacking was asked by his union to represent them overseas in the campaign for the release of NUMSA president, Moses Mayekeso, who was imprisoned by the apartheid state. He remained in Britain as a guest of the Transport and General Workers' Union and worked in Transport House, Liverpool for some months in 1989.

Trade unionists and socialists in every country will recognise the nature of the attack on comrade Bongani.

No one is any longer unaware of the record of the ANC leaders in brutally attacking those brave comrades who oppose them from

the left — from the side of the working class.

Without their own democratic trade unions, independent from the state, the workers have no representation, and they are prey to sectarian divisions and violence. Over 3,000 people have been killed this year in Natal alone.

If, instead of acting as policemen in the workers' movement on behalf of the Government of National Unity, COSATU ended its alliance and resumed its independence from the state, it could unite the workers in struggle. It was for making this point that Bongani was attacked.

We have no hesitation in asking for protests to be sent to COSATU General Secretary, PO Box 1019, Johannesburg 1000, South Africa. Fax 00 27 11 339 6940. Please send us a copy on 0171-387 0569.

**International Secretariat
Workers International
(to Rebuild
the Fourth International)
5 December 1995**

Workers Press Meeting

Saturday 10 February, 10.30am-4pm

University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London (north side of Oxford Circus).

This meeting will be both a review of Workers Press's record in struggle — which celebrated 10 years of publication last Wednesday (issue no.1 was published on 6 December 1985) — and a looking forward to making the kind of paper that meets the needs of the working-class movement as it moves into a period of heightened struggle and opportunity.

This is part of the preparation for the 'Crisis in the labour movement' conference in Manchester on 24 February (see Letters, page 2). We will be publishing a list of speakers and there will be opportunity for everyone to contribute to the discussion.

■ Workers Press will be taking a break for two weeks in the New Year which will mean there will not be a paper on 30 December and 6 January 1996.

IT IS TEMPTING to draw glib comparisons between the explosive social and political crisis that is now unfolding with great intensity and rapidity in France, and the events of 1968. It would be easy. But it would be misleading.

Naturally the entry of the students alongside the workers into a mounting strike wave aimed at the government must recall the days of 1968. In 1968 it was the students, protesting against the arrest of students at Nanterre, who drew the working class into a mighty movement against the government.

Today it is the working class that has pulled in students throughout France behind their demand that the government revoke its plans for a slashing of state benefits. They are now fighting side-by-side against the government.

But this is not the only difference between now and 1968. The differences between then and now require careful consideration by workers in France and throughout the world. Two differences in particular stand out:

1. The French Communist Party (PCF) of today is nothing like the party of that name which in 1968 played such a critical, counter-revolutionary role in betraying the French working class. The PCF in 1968 was at the centre of canalising the strike wave into what were dead-end, parliamentary forms of activity. It was the PCF that led the campaign for a 'popular government' as the answer to the crisis. It was the same party, along with its arm in the trades unions, the CGT, that did everything to ensure that the struggles of the workers and the students were separated.

The regime of General de Gaulle prided itself on its 'anti-Americanism'. In this respect de Gaulle's policy fitted in well with the needs of Soviet diplomacy, as the Stalinist bureaucracy sought for a counter-weight in Europe to the power of US imperialism. It was this consideration that determined the counter-revolutionary political line of the PCF in the days of May-June 1968 when it played the central role in allowing de Gaulle's regime to regain the initiative from the working class that had power within its grasp.

Why is the PCF not in the same shape to carry out such a betrayal today? Because in the intervening period Stalinism has collapsed. For generations the 'Communist' parties of the world, includ-

Workers Press

France — this is not 1968

ing the PCF, were able to present themselves as defenders of the 'socialist' Soviet Union. It was on this basis that many of the best and most militant elements in the French working class had rallied to the banner of the PCF and thereby gave it its political and moral authority in the labour movement.

Naturally those who today lead the PCF are thoroughly reactionary. They no doubt are striving to see the movement derailed and defeated. But their capacity to achieve these aims is not at all what it was. In this crucial respect, the situation is far more favourable for the working class than it was 27 years ago.

2. The strike movement of 1968 came in the period when French capitalism was expanding at a relatively rapid rate. Indeed in the immediate period prior to May-June 1968 the French economy was considered the 'model' capitalism in Europe, and French economic policy the ideal that Germany and Britain ought to have been following.

ALTHOUGH the crisis of French capitalism was becoming more apparent as the end of the 1960s approached, the post-war boom had not fully exhausted itself. Indeed it was possible in the early 1980s for a supposedly 'socialist' government under Francois Mitterrand, worried about the events of 1968, to carry out an expansionary policy. It used state spending to create extra jobs in the state sector, improve pensions, etc.

The present social upheaval takes place when the external pressures on the French ruling class, not least from its 'ally' Germany, are intense, when even the sort of short-lived 'experiment' of Mit-

terrand is completely out of the question. Years of attacks on the working class and sections of the middle class, designed to create the 'strong franc' (le franc fort), have failed to resolve the crisis of the French economy.

A huge cut in state spending, especially in the provision for the payment of pensions, is needed if the French ruling class is to meet the terms of the Maastricht Treaty. Should the French ruling class fail in this aim, should Maastricht collapse, the central axis of the European Union would be shattered, with all the political and social consequences this would have for the whole continent and beyond. The way would be open for a trade war throughout Europe, with the rising unemployment and widespread social crisis that this would make inevitable.

It would be no exaggeration to say that on the outcome of the present struggle in France rests the immediate future of the EU and the aim of European unification on capitalist foundations. That this is a reactionary utopia is being demonstrated by the unfolding events in France.

It is against this attempt by the French government to dismantle the system of welfare benefits that there has been an explosion of anger in the working class. From the very start this has been a political struggle carried out directly against the government. Within a few days it has spilled over into the private sector of the economy. There is a widespread feeling that if this fight is lost then the benefits and pensions of everybody, today and for future generations, will be destroyed.

The working class is angry because it recently elected a government that promised to reduce unemployment and improve social security benefits. Here is

foretaste of things to come if a Labour government is elected in this country. One in three young men in the Paris suburbs is unemployed, there is growing unrest among students as they see educational standards being destroyed. There are 10,000 homeless people in the French capital, and 40,000 in the country as a whole.

■ If Chirac yields to the demands of the working class he only threatens to make the situation more precarious, both by encouraging the movement and plunging economic and political relations in Western Europe into a profound crisis.

What is certain is that French capital cannot possibly yield to the demands of the workers for the protection of their pensions and other benefits. Any agreement between the government and the strikers — assuming one is reached and the government survives — can solve nothing.

■ If Chirac tries to stand firm, his government risks the mounting anger and movement of the working class, which at this stage has widespread support in the middle class.

None of this is meant to induce complacency about the present struggles. To the extent that the reformists and PCF retain influence in the working class they will try and defeat it.

But this is not the main issue.

A new situation has opened, of significance for the French working class, but also the working class throughout Europe. The conditions for dealing with the fundamental problem in the working class: the need for the reconstruction of a leadership that will fight to the end for its interests, have now entered a new period.

In Britain, everything must be done to ensure that the French workers are victorious. The French workers must not fight alone! As an immediate step messages of support must be poured into the French working-class movement. Representatives of the French working-class must be invited to Britain to explain the issues in the strike movement and to win support from British workers.

The Liverpool dockers have shown in practice that a fight that starts on the national plane can quickly win widespread international support if the leaders of the struggle set out to win such support.

They have set an example that all should follow.

WE WELCOME LETTERS
SEND THEM TO: WORKERS PRESS,
PO BOX 735, LONDON SW8 1YB
— OR FAX 0171-387 0569

Letters

Mistaken appraisal of Scargill's call

WHEN Arthur Scargill's call for a Socialist Labour Party was reported, I expected his main critics to be such sectarians as the International Communist Party, who, no doubt, denounce his call as a plot to head off the development of a revolutionary party.

Having read Scargill's call in Workers Press (25 November), I believe that the Workers Press statement on it (18 November) is mistaken in its appraisal.

Scargill has been in the Labour Party for some 35 years, I believe, and has previously determinedly stuck by it and the prospect of a Labour government that would carry out reforms.

Conditions in the Labour Party now make it virtually impossible to fight for 'socialism' or even reforms within it. The suspension of the Wallsall Socialist Group — denounced by Prescott and Clare Short as a 'party within a party' — underlines this.

The crisis that such people and those like Scargill are in has to be appreciated and cannot be separated from Workers Press's perspective of a new party.

The Workers Press statement

says that Scargill's call is 'deeply imbued with the notion that the old Labour Party can be restored'.

This is not borne out by Scargill's clear call for a new party. His statement that a 'Labour government could solve unemployment even within a capitalist society' could be incorporated in a modern programme of transitional demands upon such a government to challenge capitalism itself.

The statement also characterises Scargill's attack on the Labour Party for supporting the European Common Market as being nationalist and reactionary though this is not obvious from the call.

Instead of drawing a dividing line between Workers Press and Scargill 'the reformist', should not Workers Press be endeavouring to engage Scargill in the debate on the new party, for instance issuing an open letter to him and others not so as to widen the gap but to intensify the discussion and involve the widest layer of workers and socialists in it?

K.S.

Barking

■ Workers Press is sponsoring a conference to discuss the 'Crisis in the labour movement' and the need for a new socialist party on 24 February 1996, 11.30am-5.30pm at Manchester

Town Hall. Write or phone Workers Press for details at the addresses or numbers given in the 'black box' at the top of the back page.

From a docker's wife

An open letter to the Mersey Dock & Harbour Company

I'M speaking as the wife of a man who has worked on the now booming and highly profitable Liverpool docks for 28 years, through good times and bad.

He has constantly refused severance pay because he wants to work. I don't work, I look after my elderly parents. Our children are still in the education system on inadequate grants, that we have to subsidise.

We are totally dependent on my husband's income and I stand firmly beside him whatever the outcome.

I am not political. The only organisation I'm a paid-up member of is Amnesty International and the Christmas Hamper Club.

On the Thursday when the letter threatening dismissal arrived I put it in the folder with the others. On the Friday, when he was sacked, I felt perversely relieved, because over the last 34 years we have lived constantly under this threat.

I have stood by and watched as MDHC have, in my opinion, used and totally abused a loyal, hard-working, co-operative workforce, which is acknowledged as the best in the country. I've watched my husband being bullied by threats and born the knock-on effects this has on family and social life.

When my husband and his colleagues moved to Seaforth, they were obliged to sign this contract they are supposed to be in breach of. The choice being sign or go.

It might be OK, I said. You will know your rota in advance, it will only be changed occasionally, we can plan our lives around it. How wrong I was!

We have phone calls practically on a daily basis, altering his shift, 7am to 3pm will be changed to 7am to 7pm, 3pm to 11pm can become 11am to 11pm or nights.

The day before a rota day off, they can ring and change your shift to 12-hour nights, then your holiday becomes a sleep day. We get calls on his day off, asking him to work or to change the next day's shift.

Bank holidays, you're expected to work 12 hours, but for your day-in-lieu you get seven hours' pay. We've had a call when he's been in bed less than four hours after a 12-hour night shift.

We'd been out one Sunday and arrived home early hours Mon-

day, expecting a lie-in because my husband was on twilight. Our son got out of bed and said docks had rang — my husband was to go in at 7am. So after less than 5 hours in bed he was back at work, driving a straddler.

If you're out when they ring, they ask where you were as though you are accountable, had no right to be out, and should be available 168 hours a week.

Then there are the health effects: insomnia, loss of appetite, low spirits and stress.

There has been a personality change in my husband so noticeable that neighbours, friends and family have commented. He's gone from being the life and soul of everything to just being there. We've carried this unhappiness around like invisible humps on our backs, bent under the burden.

Three hundred men from Seaforth didn't cross the picket line. One hundred and twenty did not receive a contract: they did no more and no less than the others.

Under the circumstances what kind of men would sign a contract and walk past 120 mates who didn't get one, not the majority of these men.

In my opinion, MDHC knew this. I feel it was the grand finale to their plan, which began in 1989. And also in my opinion, this whole situation has been orchestrated so they can return to casual labour. Denial insults peo-

ple's intelligence. Mr Cliff went on television and said the contracts were the same, no one was offered less pay. I am numerate and literate. I read my husband's contract and he was offered £3,000 a year less.

MDHC have behaved disgracefully. Industrial relations are at an all-time low.

They have refused to speak to a democratically elected shop steward. They have refused to pay my husband a profit-related bonus he was entitled to. I'm sure other men are in the same position. They appear to move the goal posts when it suits them. I have seen this situation coming.

I wondered how human beings could treat their fellow men in such a cruel and insensitive way without any apparent thought for the social and economic consequences.

Then I thought maybe we have been dehumanised. It's easy to destroy number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or collectively destroy the dockers, because they are numbers, not real people, so it doesn't matter.

Well Mr Furlong and Mr Cliff, when you climb into your beds tonight, spare a thought for me.

Shame on you!

Doreen McNally

Human being, wife and mother, red hair, blue eyes, flesh and blood and with as much right to shelter and nourish my family as you have yours.

'Mersey dockers have supported every social and industrial fight'

Liverpool dockers' shop steward JIM NOLAN spoke to Dot Gibson of Workers Press of the fight on Merseyside:

SOME people, even on the 'left' say that we are acting in isolation. The campaign we've made on an international level proves beyond any doubt that we never saw ourselves in isolation.

It proves that dock workers all over the world recognise the continuing exploitation by ship owners and port employers that has been going on for generations.

When 500 of us were sacked it created support among dock workers internationally because over the past 20-25 years we have always participated in the international conferences of dock workers. We already had rela-

tions with these dockers. They know us!

Here at home we have always supported various industrial struggles. Every demonstration or call for stoppage over social or industrial issues has got our support. We have always supported the Liverpool people.

That's why at this moment of our struggle Liverpool is rallying to our support — from Vauxhall and Ford workers to the Customs and Excise staff, the seafarers and the unemployed.

This also proves that the dock worker has not acted in isolation — as a breed apart.

But it isn't only these past experiences that bind us together, and it isn't only in Liverpool. We have addressed over 1,000 meetings since the beginning of this dispute and we have found that what we are fighting about here is the reality for millions of people.

Some people, even on the 'left' tell us that we should have

walked across the Torside picket line and carried out a ballot for strike action. The answer to this has a lot to do with the type of labour movement we are talking about.

The anti-trade union laws make it impossible for Liverpool dockers to support each other legally. We work in different areas with different pay and hours' structures.

For instance, there's the Container Terminal, Norse Irish, Coastal Containers, the Timber Terminal, Torside, Nelson Freight.

It's illegal for the workers in one to support the workers in the others. Do we let that stop us from supporting each other? We say, no!

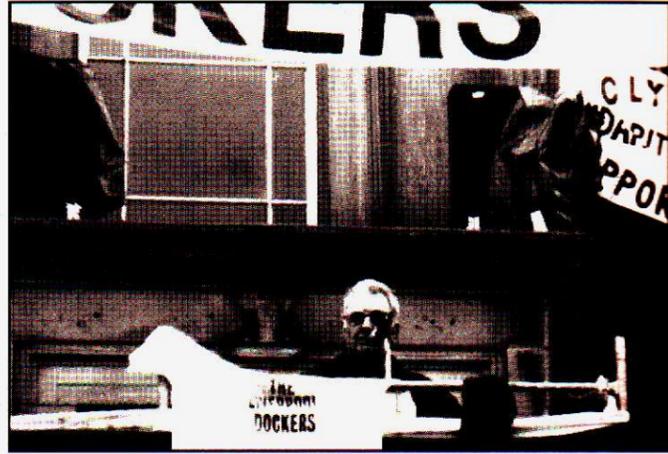
Of course each dock worker supports his own political beliefs, but right now in Liverpool, like every other worker in this country today, we want to see the return of a Labour government with socialist policies.

We want the attacks on us — which have been legislated through parliament — to be repealed. If a Labour government is returned they must do that. They must bring in laws in the interest of the people — to protect all working people.

If we can advance our quality of life at work, then this is reflected in our social existence, it is reflected in our political struggle — they have an identity. Dockers have a history of struggle against inhuman working conditions.

Our forefathers came here from Wales, Scotland and Ireland. They came alongside seafarers, and they developed early trade unionism. They recognised that a change in the situation of their exploitation by the ship owners and port employers could only come about by political change.

Many workers fought in the 1939-45 war and they believed in a fight against fascism for democracy.



Liverpool dock workers' shop steward Jimmy Nolan speaking at the demonstration last Saturday

The only problem was that, on their return, they were faced with renewing the fight at work because democracy doesn't exist at the workplace. There is still private ownership of production, distribution and exchange.

Some people on the 'left' are of the opinion that dock workers have crossed picket lines. They should re-read the history of port workers.

They will come to the conclusion that port workers have always supported each other and have had to participate in confrontation against ship owners and port employers over and over again in order to advance their quality of life.

As far as the present onslaught that the Mersey Docks

and Harbour Company has unleashed against the 500 dockers is concerned, everyone can be assured that we will continue the struggle and the 500 will be reinstated.

They will work for one authority. We will not work for Drake International, and we will advance our trade union fight for a shorter working week, proper wages, holidays and sick benefit, and we will advance our fight over pension contributions and benefits.

We insist that the prime minister, John Major, instructs the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company to implement the 1989 legislation which 'removes the fear of casual and part-time labour'.

We will win!

'Put cancer patients down' says ex-mayor

AS if the threat of dizzy Sloane Di Spencer sneaking in on a visit wasn't enough, hospital patients at death's door have the cheering news that a Labour councillor thinks they should all be 'put down'.

Brighton councillor Gill Sweeting, a former mayor, received a letter from the Brighton and Hove Macmillan hospice appeal, asking for donations or help with fundraising.

'I find the whole concept of the hospice movement obscene,' Mrs Sweeting replied. 'I have visited a hospice and have had patients tell me how marvellous they are.'

'However, I firmly believe that if someone is dying and with the level of pain management that a hospice provides, he or she should be put down.'

The ex-mayor's remarks upset the appeal organisers, fellow councillors and local people. John Oliver, general secretary of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, regretted her choice of words.

'We want people to have a choice at the end of their lives but this is a very unfortunate way to re-open the debate.'

But Mrs Sweeting, 52, was unrepentant: 'I do not regret saying that dying people should be put down. That is the term used for animals and it should apply to us as well.'

Her husband Paul had been embarrassed by her remarks, he admitted. 'He is a bit squeamish when talking about death or illness.'

Expedition to probe wreck of the Derbyshire

BY COLIN PENDLETON

AN expedition is to be sent to investigate the wreck of the Derbyshire, the biggest ever British vessel lost at sea, which went down in a typhoon off Japan in September 1980, with the loss of all 44 crew.

The ship, a 90,000-ton bulk carrier built by Swan Hunter on the Tyne, had only been in service for four years. It went down so fast that the crew were unable even to send an SOS message.

Marine experts, as well as families of crew members, were not satisfied with a 1987-88 public inquiry, held after a sister ship

was grounded, which found that the Derbyshire had been over-come by the forces of nature.

The wreck's exact position was ascertained in June last year by a survey vessel chartered by the International Transport Workers Federation.

Between 1980 and 1994 a total of 149 bulk carriers went down, including 21 for which there was no known cause. More than 1,100 seafarers lost their lives.

More than 400 bulk carriers are in use today, though unlike the Derbyshire, none fly the Red Ensign.

In a report out last week, Lord Donaldson said he 'found it astonishing' that 'no significant design

changes have been made' in the carriers, used for heavy cargoes such as ore, coal and steel, since the loss of the Derbyshire. Hatch covers are designed to withstand a 1.75m head of water crashing on them, although in some weathers, they could meet worse.

The sinking of the Derbyshire could have been triggered by abnormal waves, such as frequently occur in the waters off Japan.

The wreck is lying three miles down. The government and European Commission-funded expedition will not try to raise the vessel, but will send down an immersible to photograph it, and maybe raise sections to examine.

Haiti killer was CIA

FORMER Haitian goon-squad boss Emmanouel Constant, whose FRAPH organisation is accused of beating, raping and killing hundreds of political opponents, has told US television interviewers that he was on the CIA payroll from 1991-94.

'I was meeting with the CIA on a regular basis,' Constant said on the CBS news programme 60 Minutes. He said the agency had given him a code name, 'Gamal', a walkie-talkie, and \$700 a month in cash. 'They knew exactly what I was doing.'

The Haitian, in custody in

Maryland on immigration charges, is fighting a court order that he be deported to Haiti, where he faces criminal charges.

Vietnam gets bankers' order: 'Privatise!'

THE World Bank has told the Vietnamese government that it must make a more 'aggressive' effort to privatise industries. The warning came as a meeting in Paris agreed \$2.3 billion in aid.

A UN official said the Vietnamese were worried by the

effect of privatisation in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe.

'When they see the kind of economic contraction going on, that scares them.'

Russian bankers' association leader Vladimir Bazarya has warned that transferring state assets to commercial banks would produce no benefits and could destroy some industries.

Bazarya said in some cases production had already fallen, and companies been destroyed, after banks bought in.

The Russian government is pressing ahead with privatisation, and auctioning the huge Yukos oil concern, in an attempt to meet deficits.

Sectarianism at work

BY OUR INDUSTRIAL CORRESPONDENT

SOUTHWARK council senior management has been preparing to hand over all departments to private contractors for years, but a campaign led by the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) trade union organisation foiled their plans.

Nevertheless, under Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), the DLO had to submit a tender in competition with private contractors. Out of 20 contracts, the DLO won 12 and private contractor, Botes, won eight.

Whittle

The union was able to whittle down the original number of transfers to the contractor from 57 workers to seven, and under the Transfer of Undertakings

legislation (TUPE), the same wages, conditions and trade union rights as those on the DLO were negotiated.

A mass meeting accepted the outcome of negotiations, agreeing to continue the campaign against CCT, but not through industrial action. Nobody moved against.

Of the seven workers to transfer to Botes, five voted to accept and two, John Jones (a shop steward) and Terry Mason voted against. Realising that if the two did not transfer they would automatically terminate their employment, a mass meeting voted:

■ To recognise their right to refuse transfer.

■ To pay their wages if they wished to campaign full-time against CCT under the direction of the DLO trade union organisation.

The two voted against the resolution, and went to the Islington council building workers' meeting this morning against the

decisions of the mass meetings. Islington workers voted to support the Southwark DLO trade union organisation.

The day after the mass meeting the two workers, supported by members of the 'Building Workers Group' set up a 'picket' at the Frensham Road depot of the Southwark DLO. Convenor of shop stewards, Tony O'Brien, led the rest of the workers across the 'picket'.

Undemocratic

In a letter to the Islington council building workers' trade union organisation, the Southwark DLO shop stewards say:

'This group is wholly undemocratic. It intervenes in situations as it sees fit without any respect for existing trade union organisation. It calls for unity, then acts against it. Its attitude is that if employers attack and succeed then the unions, shop stewards

and officials are, without fail, all to blame.

'They put propaganda around even when a principled fight has been put up by trade union activists. The only exception is if one of the members of their group is involved. It is no surprise to us that this group gives out a leaflet which attacks and calls for the removal of the convenor/steward instead of calling for his defence when management intend to sack him.

'The question must be asked: when over the last five years many DLO's conveners in the London area have been got rid of by management, why does this group have at the same time put out leaflets which attack these conveners and call for their removal?

'Are they an anti-union group, or what!?!'

■ Next week Workers Press will publish an interview with Tony O'Brien

Mass arrests in Athens

FURTHER details of the 513 arrests made of Greek anarchists following events on 17/18 November have come in (original report, Workers Press, 25 November).

Arrests raids were carried out to charge those involved in anti-police disturbances during the annual commemoration of the massacre of Athens polytechnic students during the 1970s military junta regime.

Family and friends of those arrested are calling for release of all those arrested and have protested outside Athens police HQ.

They will be brought to court in groups of 20-30 to avoid more 'violence'.

Almost 2,000 people (mostly anarchists) entered Athens' polytechnic school during 17 November.

This Greek institution has traditionally protected its rights of 'academic ground' against the police. This meant that police were NOT allowed to enter, unless a serious crime (eg, murder or rape) was proved to have happened.

These rights were silently changed and the university/polytechnic board of directors gave permission for the police to enter the building.

But this did not become apparent until 7am on 18 November.

That morning, police launched a tactical attack into the polytechnic (eg, teargas). The anarchists replied with fires and molotov cocktails. Six hundred million drachmas (\$2.5 million US) is the estimated damage.

Television talked about '50 kids, 15 years old... all of them!'

The next day revealed 513 arrests. Only 40 people were under 18.

One man was caught by the police in the evening. He was brutally beaten up by 25 police officers. He was taken behind a police car and kicked on the head by high-ranking police officers when he was already unconscious.

He was taken to hospital. Reporters' videos of that scene were taken away by the police. Other reporters helped wipe the blood off the street.

Fascist groups joined the party earlier, throwing stones at the anarchists.

TV said 'right-wing groups were not allowed to come close to the scene'. TV also showed scenes from burning cars, taken from last year's riots. They were presented as 'live'.

WORKERS PRESS IS THE PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

British section of the Workers International (to Rebuild the Fourth International)

Please send me information about the WRP

Name date

Address

Trade union (if any) Age (if under 21)

Send to: PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB

Inside left

Arthur: the cat among the pigeons

THE response from much of the left to Arthur Scargill's call for a Socialist Labour Party has been enthusiastic, or downright hostile. From King Coal to Clown Prince' was the headline in *New Times* (25 November), the ex-'Euro'-Stalinist paper that thinks it's clever to cross ticket lines (see Steve Munby's attack on Liverpool dockers in its 11 November issue).

Scargill's timing was 'absurd', wrote Kevin Davey, his notion of socialism 'anachronistic'. Not a single MP has endorsed the idea, not even his closest friends in and around the Campaign Group. Tony Benn, the one figure whose support might have improved the prospects of the new party, has refused to entertain the idea. Well, that's one thing in its favour! *Workers Liberty* is, predictably, against the idea, but so, interestingly, was the *Morning Star*.

Socialist Outlook's December issue has an editorial ('Scargill: wrong formula, wrong time', a full-page feature 'Scargill's false start') and a historical feature (on the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s), all devoted to opposing Scargill's call for a break from 'New Labour'. Harry Sloan thinks union leaders have succeeded in 'damping down' workers' militancy, 'trade union activism is at low ebb', and nothing can change till Blair is elected.

The editorial concedes generously that Scargill 'could play a key role' in a left-wing political regroupment of 'mass forces' (whatever that is), but urges him to 'think again' before starting a new party. *Socialist Worker*, which reports each week how many people have been signed up for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), thought Scargill's call too oriented towards contesting parliamentary seats. The SWP's monthly *Socialist Review* (December) explained: '... the impact of the far left is at its weakest on the electoral field at present... the left's strength is in extra-parliamentary activity: the strikes, campaigns and demonstrations are where socialists find they can build most easily.'

The problem of the left in Britain has all too often been to blur the distinction between organisation based in those sorts of struggles, which talks about the power ordinary working people have to change the world, and electoral organisation which subjugates everything else to winning votes.

In other words, rather than challenge the Labour leaders in the political field, the SWP will complement them, combining conservative syndicalism and student protest with condescending talks about the long-term advantages of socialism.

ALONGSIDE a back-page lead on the Liverpool dockers' struggle, *Socialist Worker* (2 December) reported an anti-cuts demonstration in Nottingham on 25 November, in which council workers, teachers, firefighters, and old age pensioners took part.

'People were angry and felt let down by the nonappearance of a Labour front bench spokesperson,' the SWP paper said, not mentioning that two Liverpool dockers took part, and were disappointed not to be allowed to speak.

Socialist Worker's weekly sales piece was headed 'Strike collections boost sales'. It said sellers had been collecting for Liverpool dockers and Scottish postal workers. Talking of blurred distinctions, a friend in the public service union Unison tells us a motion before her branch, supporting the dockers' struggle, proposed a £200 donation to... *Socialist Worker*. The branch decided to donate £500 — to the dockers.

Charlie Pottins

The end of Hard way to learn about bourgeoise

Elections for seats in the Russian Duma (parliament) take place on the 17 December. Last week, ALEXII GUSEV described the parties closest to the present government. Here he looks at the various 'opposition' parties including the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, and the stance taken by parties claiming to represent Russian workers. Gusev is a member of the Socialist Workers Union, the Russian section of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.

AMONG opponents of the 'party of power', first place belongs to the **Communist Party of the Russian Federation** (CPRF) led by Gennady Zyuganov. Its social basis is that part of the former bureaucracy which considers itself to have been more or less left out of the reform of the social-economic system: that is, significant sections of the military-industrial complex's management, and lower-level managers in the economy.

This fraction of the ruling class is fighting with all its might for a redivision of power and property in its own favour. To this end, the CPRF hopes to secure majority support by claiming to defend the interests of everyone: the 'simple workers' and managers, the intelligentsia and small tradespeople, the unemployed and even the 'new Russians' (who, according to Zyuganov, are suffering from having 'nowhere to invest their money'). Zyuganov's party claims to be uniting 'the whole nation' under the banner of patriotism, statehood and 'justice'.

Analysis of the CPRF's theory and politics shows, unambiguously, not only that it is not 'communist' (not even in words) but also that it cannot in general be considered part of the left.

Right-wing forces

The cult of a mighty state or 'great power'; the counterposition of the 'unity of the nation' to the class struggle, as though the latter was invented by some especially greedy sections of the bourgeoisie; the slogan of 'mixed forms of ownership' — all these are the typical bill of fare of right-wing political forces.

Taking into account the labels it uses, Zyuganov's 'communism' can

be seen aspiring not only to new methods of social-economic rule by the bureaucracy, but also to well-tried 'pre-perestroika' methods. On the other hand, this 'communism' needs to attract those voters who, facing poverty and unemployment, have come to the conclusion that 'it cannot get any worse than it is now', and are even ready to agree to a partial return to the past under the 'communists'.

Zyuganov's 'theoretical' work is a magic Russian salad whose ingredients include Russian religious philosophy, clichés from Stalinist 'agitprop' and terms used by western 'political science'.

His party programme includes: promises of price controls; a struggle to return to 'the power of the Soviets' (the Stalin-Brezhnev type, of course) and to restore the USSR; tax cuts; the strengthening of discipline and order; a struggle against the mafia and the criminals; guaranteed 'social security' for Russian citizens; and so on — as well as the lofty phrases about the accumulation of a national capital and a greater role for the state in the economy, which are also used by **Our Home Is Russia**.

In short, the opposition aims to drive out the 'Chernomyrdinite' part of the establishment. This would also entail a partial revision of the privatisation programme, in those cases where the interests of the management caste have been damaged, and greater privileges for various sections of industry, above all those connected with the military-industrial complex.

The character of the CPRF's 'opposition' was clearly revealed in its attitude to the war unleashed against Chechnya by Russian imperialism. The Zyuganovites saw the invasion of Chechnya as an occasion to attack the government and the

executive power.

And what for? For mistakes in military planning, for 'delay' in dealing with 'separatists', and for the fact that when federal troops withdrew from Chechnya they left behind 'mountains of weapons' which were taken by the Chechen militia.

The CPRF fraction in the Duma, declaring themselves 'defenders of the Russian army', blocked even the timid attempts by some 'democrats' to express moral condemnation of the empire's soldiers, who they compared to Nazi war criminals.

A similar line was taken by newspapers sympathetic to the CPRF.

One of these, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, earlier this year published a short story, 'In Grozny's Trenches', in which the positive hero is a Russian army lieutenant who shows no mercy to the Chechen enemy. He is contrasted to negative characters, such as a young soldier whose unit is serving in Grozny and who tries to desert, and his mother who comes to take her son away from the front.

The tale ends with the 'patriotic' soldiers, led by the lieutenant, killing the young 'traitor' and his mother — who, by the way, look like Jews. The author — and his 'communist' newspaper — approve of this 'courageous' deed. The appearance of such proto-fascist material in the 'opposition press' tells us far more about the soul of Zyuganovite 'communism' than dozens of demagogic declarations by the CPRF bosses.

CPRF's closest ally is the **Agrarian Party of Russia** headed by Mikhail Lapshin. It consists of bureaucrats from the agricultural sector — directors from various types of co-operatives, kolkhozi (collective farms) and sovkhozi (state farms), most of which have now been renamed joint stock companies. Having resisted the encroachments of the towns, and other bourgeois forces in general, these elements are determined at all costs to preserve their monopoly over the land.

Proclaiming themselves 'defenders of the peasantry', the Agrarians

demand higher state subsidies for agriculture — that is, a larger proportion of the national income for the ruling layers in the countryside.

The rest of the Agrarian Party programme, including the political part, does not differ from that of the CPRF. And so the Agrarian fraction in the Duma has been the most militant defender of 'our Serb brothers' and the [Bosnian Serb] regime of Radovan Karadzic.

The third considerable force in the opposition camp is the **Congress of Russian Communities**. Its leaders are Yuri Skokov, former secretary of the state security council, who refused to support Yeltsin in his confrontation with the Supreme Soviet in October 1993 [when the 'rebels' led by Rutskoi and Khazbulatov were suppressed by Yeltsin]; General Alexandr Lebed, former commander of the 14th Russian army in Pridnestrovye [or Transdnestr, the territory with predominantly Russian population claiming the right to secede from Moldova]; and Sergei Glazyev, a former minister of foreign trade.

Originally a small organisation founded to support Russian companies abroad (hence its name), the Congress has taken on political significance with the entry of Skokov and Lebed into its leadership. Skokov is well known for his wide connections in industrial circles.

Lebed, a popular personality, rose to prominence after halting the war between Pridnestrovya and Moldova and making searing criticisms of the Pridnestrovya leadership's corruption; he has also attacked 'incompetence' at the top of the Russian army, including that of the defence minister, Pavel Grachev.

Glazyev is an economist, author of yet another 'alternative' economic programme, every bit as mysterious as Yavlinsky's.

The same patriotic call as is made by Chernomyrdin and Zyuganov — to defend 'the nation's industry' (meaning: the nation's ruling class) — is the essence of the Congress's programme. But it is flavoured with a strong criticism of 'monetarist radicalism', in contrast to **Our Home Is Russia**, and has no call to restore 'So-

Bosnia Solidarity

The Bosnia Solidarity Campaign is launching an appeal to set up permanent offices in central London which will campaign for multi-ethnic Bosnia and against partition. We want it to be a drop-in centre, and a centre for campaigning — where banners and placards can be made, leaflets and newsletters produced, etc. — where all those fighting for multi-ethnicity will feel welcome at all times and can come together to work in the most effective way.

To do this we are launching a PREMISES FUND. All donations are welcome, no matter how small or large. Most useful would be to fill in a banker's order (write to us for details). Make cheques payable to the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign. Send it to the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign at 12 Flitcroft Street, London WC2H 8DJ. The latest Bosnia Solidarity Newsletter is available for 20p+24p post and packing from the same address.

Don't put asylum-seekers on the streets

Protest against government plans to cut all welfare benefit to asylum-seekers, introduce the 'safe countries' list, increase internal immigration controls

**Lobby of parliament
Tuesday 19 December, 1pm-5pm
Committee room 14, House of Commons
(St Stephen's entrance)**

organised by the Asylum Rights Campaign with the Campaign against the Immigration and Asylum Bill

No justice! No peace! picket

Maidstone prison, County Road
Wednesday 20 December, 12noon
Support Winston Silcott (B74053) and Raphael Rowe (MP3660). Write to them for Christmas at HMP Maidstone, Kent ME14 1UZ.

Sponsored by Winston Silcott Defence Campaign, the M25 Three Campaign, Gravesend Resistance, Colin Roach Centre and Kent Militant Labour

Illusions

Bourgeois democracy in Russia

viet power', one of the central demands of the CPRF. Those bourgeois-bureaucratic layers rallying to the Congress occupy a position between the 'Chernomyrdinite' and 'Zyuganovite' fractions of their class. Lebed is the Congress's most colourful and outstanding leader. Paradoxically, he has sympathisers among 'patriots', some sections of the liberal intelligentsia and even among workers.

The 'patriots' are attracted to his image as a brave general and defender of the 'fatherland'; the intellectuals like his criticisms of Grachev, who fell out of favour as a result of the Chechen campaign; the workers see him as a fighter against corruption. Lebed himself has hardly any clearly-defined political views — Skokov and Glazyev lend a helping hand with those — but his clear priority is 'restoration of order'.

[Lebed is likely to stand in the presidential election next summer.] In the case of him winning power, he would surely not hesitate to use the most drastic measures, for example against strikes that took on a 'disruptive' character.

It is no accident that he pointed to Pinochet's regime in Chile as an example of his beloved 'restoration of order'. But today Lebed poses as an 'opponent' of the government, and his party can expect some success in the parliamentary elections.

Also in the 'opposition' camp stands Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's **Russian Liberal Democratic Party**. Its supporters include considerable layers of the petty bourgeoisie; bureaucratic, military and declassed elements; and — as has been shown by sociological surveys — backward sections of unskilled workers.

These people are impressed by Zhirinovskiy's shameless demagoguery and his promises of all sorts of bribes to his voters, including cheap vodka. Significantly, the **Liberal Democratic Party** is supported by several financial groups and commercial structures with criminal or mafia connections.

Mafia

In the 1993 elections, several candidates clearly associated with the mafia got into parliament on Zhirinovskiy's list.

Zhirinovskiy's position is well known and there is no sense in repeating it. As for its prospects in the Duma elections, the Liberal Democratic Party is certain to win considerably less votes than it did in 1993. Then, it practically monopolised the 'non-communist patriotic' niche in politics, but now there are at least ten other nationalist parties and blocs of various shapes and sizes. As a result, Zhirinovskiy's potential support is sure to be divided.

The most uncompromising opposition force is the **Communists-Labour Russia — For the Soviet Union bloc**, an alliance based on the Stalinist movement called Labour Russia. Its backbone is the **Russian Communist Workers Party** led by Victor Anpilov. Socially, Labour Russia represents those very stagnant layers of the former bureaucracy and ideological establishment, who would not get involved in Russia's 'new reality'. All their hopes are concentrated on the resurrection of the Stalinist system — that is, not Brezhnev's or Khrushchev's, but exactly Stalin's version, with the undivided supremacy of the 'com-

munist' party, 'purges' and — top of the agenda! — 'regulated reductions in prices'.

Demanding the return of a completely stateised economy and 'planned' control of resources ('just like under Stalin'), the Anpilovites try to enlist the support of enterprise directors who are dissatisfied with the present regime. In return for supporting Labour Russia, the latter are guaranteed that they will keep their positions if the 'communists' gain power.

Nonetheless, Labour Russia's admirers of Stalin and Kim Il Sung cannot inspire the faith of the representatives of the more prominent circles of the bureaucracy, let alone the voters, and cannot count on any sort of success at the polls.

Is there a party of the working class?

In the spectrum of election platforms, does there exist a single one that represents the interests of the Russian working class and all the labouring masses? The simple answer is no.

The former official trade unions, the **Federation of Independent Trades Unions of Russia (FITUR)**, will go to the polls in alliance with two management groupings — the **Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs** [which came to prominence in the Duma in 1992, led by Arkadii Volski] and the **United Industrialist Party**.

Justifying the need for such an alliance, the leader of the FITUR, Mikhail Shmakov, claims that 'the trade unions' interests completely coincide with those of the vast majority of industrialists'. And this is true — because these trade unions are nothing more than a mechanism to discipline the workforce on behalf of the industrial management.

This is the role played by the trade union committees at the enterprises, and no amount of 'radical' rhetoric by the top trade union bosses can hide this fact.

It would be quite wrong to imagine that there are 'rank-and-file activists' in the FITUR who can put 'pressure' on their leadership and push it to the left. The notorious 'rank-and-file activists' in the factories — who as a rule are protégés and agents of the management — will only do anything when it is profitable for 'the industrialists', as Shmakov calls them. Trade union deputies in the Duma would carry out exactly the same function, as a support mechanism for industrial management... if this bloc happens to pass the 5 per cent barrier. But that is extremely unlikely.

As for the FITUR's 'ideology', it is expounded in its principal publication, the newspaper *Solidarnost*, whose editor is Andrei Isayev, former anarcho-syndicalist and one of the founders [with Boris Kagarlit'sky] of the still-born Labour Party.

Solidarnost is busy trumpeting the virtues of 'social partnership' with enterprise directors, expressing solidarity with the actions of the Russian army in Chechnya and with Radovan Karadzic's 'just war' in Bosnia.

One recent issue proclaimed that the trade unions' credo coincides with the doctrine of the Russian Orthodox church!

The situation in the so-called 'alternative' trade union camp is lit-

tle better. Its right wing has dispersed into various small liberal-bourgeois blocs. The left, in the shape of the alliance of workers' unions, **Zashchita** [Defence], has merged with the CPRF.

The leader of Zashchita, the former 'Marxist revolutionary' Yuri Leonov, decided to turn his organisation into a propaganda shop window for Zyuganov's party.

Leonov is at present a Duma deputy and hopes to regain a seat, by asking workers to vote for the CPRF. He recently took part in a television talk show and declared:

'We have to work things out so that workers have no desire to go on strike. To this end we must put deputies in the Duma in whom people can really believe. It's a simple recipe: vote for Zyuganov's crowd, and things will be so wonderful that you will never feel like striking or campaigning!'

Another electoral alliance claiming to represent working people is the **Party of Workers' Self-Management**, led by Svyatoslav Fyodorov, a noted ophthalmologist and director of the Co-operative Institute of Ophthalmological Surgery. This party's credo is based on workers' share-ownership, plus the 'free market', plus parliamentary democracy.

Its utopianism is obvious to many people — after all, it is one thing to run a commercially successful co-operative doing eye operations, using state-of-the-art technology and know-how — but quite another to run Russian industry, the greater part of which exists in a state of permanent crisis.

There are few people who today believe in the magic force of the 'free market' seasoned by 'self management'.

So what can be expected from the December elections? The principal battle — both for the seats elected from the party lists and for those based on territorial constituencies — will be between the three main representatives of the ruling class: the Our Home Is Russia bloc, the regional élites and the CPRF-Agrarian Party alliance.

They will be the most powerful forces in the new parliament. The elections may shift the balance of forces slightly, but are extremely unlikely to bring about any radical changes. And the majority of working people in Russia understand this.

Distrust

Certainly no more than 50 per cent of eligible voters will go to the polling stations. This sort of absenteeism reflects the spread of distrust in the political institutions of the system. According to sociological surveys, 67 per cent of the population, fully or partly, does not believe in parliament; 64 per cent does not believe in parties.

Illusions in bourgeois democracy are now in the process of being overcome — and this is part of the development of the class consciousness of the Russian proletariat.

The time when the working class transforms itself into a 'class for itself' is still far off.

For now, significant experiences are being accumulated by workers — negative experiences of the ruling class's political activity, and positive ones of struggle, although these are still very limited.

This is the preparation for a future active upsurge of the masses.

City Lights

The Budget

WHAT to make of last week's Budget? Perhaps we can start with a few quotations from the *Financial Times*, from whom a great deal more can be learned about such matters than from the vacuous outpourings of the Labour and trade union leaders.

Its editorial comment ('Between a Rock and a Hard Place', 29 November) included the following remarks:

'In presenting his third Budget, Mr Kenneth Clarke had to balance demands for a tax-cutting bonanza against those for fiscal prudence. The approach of the election made tax cuts politically essential. The disappointing performance of the public finances made prudence financially inescapable.'

'Within these constraints, the Budget that the chancellor of the exchequer has put together is credible, indeed creditable. Nevertheless, the compromise he has chosen may be proved too timid to satisfy his panic-stricken backbencher and too lax to placate his government's creditors.'

And further: '... the slippage in the public sector borrowing requirement for 1995-96, from last year's forecast of £21.5bn (3 per cent of gross domestic product) to today's figure of £29bn (4 per cent of GDP), was bound to constrain the chancellor's room for manoeuvre.'

'... his Budget will create no vast enthusiasm, either among his supporters or among his government's creditors... the financial markets had to be convinced that the needed combination of tough spending control and economic growth would be delivered.'

'Provided he has convinced them, Mr Clarke should be able to cut interest rates with impunity. If he has not the government is in a serious pickle. Mr Clarke has done his best. His fate is now in others' hands.'

The *Financial Times's* deputy editor Samuel Brittan was even more interesting in his reaction to the budget (29 November). Pouring cold water on the idea that the Tories had cut taxes for the middle class he commented:

'Confining our attention to the three years from 1993-94 to 1997-98, for which Mr Clarke has some responsibility, the tax burden will have risen by 2 per cent of GDP, equivalent of some £15bn at current values.'

'The chancellor had probably no alternative without radical surgery on the welfare state, which should not be undertaken in a panic. But please let us hear no more about "tax cuts".'

In other words, the Budget was a clear reflection of the relationship of class forces in Britain.

In the run-up to the Budget, the Tory right and the City were baying for cuts in government spending of anything from £6bn to £9bn to put the public finances back into shape. In the event government expenditure was cut by only £3bn, and while this will have serious consequences for those reliant on social and public services, it was simply not enough as far as big business is concerned.

As the City was quick to point out in the days immediately following the budget, for all the rhetoric about 'spending cuts', the year's Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (what the government is forced to borrow from the financial institutions to cover its spending needs) is nearly £7bn more than predicted in last year's Budget and, on present estimates, next year's PSBR will be £8.5bn higher than intended a year ago.

No doubt, as the more intelligent members of the Cabinet sense, any

further brutal attacks on public spending would threaten a social explosion on the scale of that now taking place in France. No doubt the government is all too aware of the mounting militancy in the working class, reflected in the growing strike movement. Yet such attacks are precisely what capital requires.

At the same time the Tories have been unable to satisfy the increasingly desperate members of the middle class on whom they have traditionally relied.

The penny cut in the standard rate of income tax will mean next to nothing and will in any case be wiped out as a result of the impact of the cost of living of such Budgetary measures as the increase in fuel tax which is certain to lead to an increase in virtually all prices.

There is no relief for those millions who have seen the value of their homes fall drastically; nor will there anything in the budget for those professional people who increasingly fear for their jobs.

The government is indeed between a rock and a hard place. Any future Labour government will be in exactly the same place.

An outbreak of coyness

DESPITE its growing financial difficulties, the *Independent* still occasionally turns up with a good story. Such was the one it ran last week exposing the fact that Rupert Murdoch had paid virtually no tax for ten years. Murdoch, owner of the *Sunday Times*, the *News of the World* and a huge chunk of BSkyB television, used his subsidiaries to move money from Britain to tax havens and Netherlands Antilles.

Quite legally, Murdoch's empire had claimed 'group tax relief' by offsetting profits made in one part against losses made in another. It was this sort of arrangement that allowed Murdoch to slash the price of *The Times* in an attempt to drive his rivals to the wall. His immediate target was the *Independent*. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission refused to make any move against Murdoch.

The result of such operations: News International has accumulated £979.4m of net profit since 1986 and paid just £11.74m in taxes.

The Labour leaders are fond of denouncing the 'fat cats' of British industry. But when the *Independent* asked them to comment on the Murdoch scandal, a spokesman for shadow chancellor Gordon Brown refused to make any statement: 'We tend not to make specific criticisms of specific companies.'

When Labour's consumer-affairs spokesman was asked to comment he retorted: 'It's nothing to do with me. Try the Treasury people [who work for Brown].'

Labour's spokeswoman for Trade and Industry, Margaret Beckett, was equally bashful. 'I'm not being evasive, but newspapers are the responsibility of Jack Cunningham,' she said in a further round of 'pass the parcel'. In his turn, Cunningham side-stepped the issue, leaving it for an aide to say: 'Jack hasn't really formulated his ideas yet.'

Labour's spokesman on City affairs claimed that he hadn't seen Murdoch's accounts and 'had nothing to go on!'

It would of course be slanderous to link this outbreak of coyness among Blair's acolytes with the Labour leader's visit to Australia earlier this year to plead support for Labour from the world's most powerful media owner.

Rocking the boat and blowing the whistle

IN THE 69 vivid pages of Les Forster's autobiography, *Rocking the Boat* (Glasgow, Clydeside Press, £3.95), the reader will find more human interest, more light and shade, more humour, more class feeling, and more plain truth than in many a volume five times the length and ten times the price.

The cover describes this book as the 'Memoirs of a Glasgow socialist and whistleblower'. The author says that while writing it he was 'conscious of the debt owed to all men and women who stood up, spoke out, rocked the boat, and knocked spots off the capitalist system'.

Les Forster is, of course, one of that number. And he has repaid his debt with interest.

For my generation, his book brings back the authentic flavour of yesterday and the day before yesterday. For the younger generation just coming into struggle, it will be an eye-opener. But more about that later.

Born in industrial Maryhill in 1919, the son of a master blacksmith, Les Forster learnt the three Rs at a school where the history book was a mere propaganda tract and where, when the 'very coarse and sarcastic' teacher lifted his desk lid, 'you could be sure he was going for the dreaded thong'.

Les worked on building sites, in a foundry, in an engineering workshop, and then for 30 years on the railway, where the local manager 'did not like me one bit, taking the view... that I was a dangerous influence'.

One fine day this manager decided off his own bat to abolish 'washing up time', whereby the workers knocked off to clean up six minutes before the official stopping-time.

On the Saturday there was a unanimous walkout and a protest meeting, reported in the local press, which threatened a further stoppage. On the following Monday morning the manager was summoned to British Rail headquarters, and within hours 'washing up time' was restored.

Another victory came following a 'work study' exercise, when the workers were ordered to push wagons by hand in a snowstorm on a bitterly cold day. They refused; the union organiser was sent for, and visited the management first ('This behaviour is par for the course with many Trade Union officials').

The official's 'solution' was a 'pushing machine', a rusty relic that looked as if it had been dug out of a scrap-yard. When the official demonstrated it, it nearly did him an injury, and with great difficulty 'we tried to keep our faces straight'.

Soon afterwards the machine was pronounced a flop, and the normal way of working was resumed.

LES FORSTER was a member of the Communist Party from 1940 to 1953. When he joined, he was thirsting for political knowledge. He wanted to know what made the capitalist system tick.

What he got, in part, was adulation of the Soviet Union and Stalin, who was 'raised to the level of a Demi-God'.

But not only that. Through the CP, he was introduced to the writings of Marx and Engels. With Dickens you got a whiff of what life was like for the poor. Engels turned Charles Dickens' 'chiffs' into a hurricane of exposure.

And Marx's *Capital* showed how the capitalist class operated the great Industrial Revolution.

But Les began to have doubts about the Party. He came to realise that its leaders liked only rank-and-file movements which they could control and manipulate.

Publication of the CP programme *The British Road to*

PERSONAL COLUMN

Socialism in 1951 heightened his doubts — especially when a leading party hack claimed that it contained 'all you needed to know about Marxism'!

Stalin and CPGB general secretary Harry Pollitt, like the Pope, demanded blind obedience from their followers. And for the most part they got it. But there were exceptions.

One exception was Harry McShane, Scottish correspondent of the *Daily Worker*, highly respected in the labour movement, veteran of past unemployed struggles, and the last living link with John Maclean.

The party bureaucrats couldn't shut him up, so a 'scandalous conspiracy' was hatched during a parliamentary by-election in the Gorbals. John Gollan, CP Scottish secretary, sacked McShane from his post as press agent for the party candidate. Then the *Daily Worker* sacked him.

McShane resigned from the CP, as did Hugh Savage and a number of others. Les himself was expelled for a probationary period. He was told that if he withdrew his criticisms he would be readmitted. But he never went back.

Instead the dissidents formed the Clyde Workers' Socialist Federation (which later became the Socialist Workers' Federation) and published the monthly *Socialist Revolt*.

THIS is emphatically a book to put into the hands of young people — and there is an increasing number of them — who are seeking a way forward out of a crisis they are not responsible for but have inherited willy-nilly; who, as part of this quest, need first-hand evidence of what it was like to work and struggle in the old days; who, like Les Forster when he was their age, are 'thirsting for political knowledge'.

With *Rocking the Boat* Les Forster has paid his dues. And he has put us in his debt with this admirable account of the life of an admirable man.

For students of Trotsky

A WITTY friend remarked in my hearing the other day that the *Journal of Trotsky Studies* might more appropriately be called *Journal of Anti-Trotsky Studies*.

I see what he means, but take the view that no serious student of Trotsky's life and work can neglect the rich documentation, most of it translated into English for the first time, which this annual publication provides.

The recently published no. 3 (1995) contains an abridged translation by Brian Pearce of a 1935 review of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1931-33), by the Polish ex-communist Edward Janus ('Andrzej Stawar'). This translation has been made, not from the Polish original, but from French and Russian versions.

The notorious General Dmitri Volkogonov, author of an error-packed book on Stalin and a similar book on Lenin (which the *Guardian* hailed last week as performing 'a remarkable service') is the subject of a blistering open letter by Pierre Broué and Aleksandr Pantsov, translated by Pearce; and there are translations by Ian D. Thatcher of two Russian reviews of the general's 1991-92 'political portrait' of Trotsky. From the latter it is clear that this is not free from error, either.

The journal (annual subscription for individuals: £5) can be obtained from The Editors, *JTS*, Institute of Russian & East European Studies, Glasgow University, 29 Bute Gardens, Glasgow G12 8RS.

Peter Fryer

Shell and the fight against pollution

BY STEVE DRURY

MINING and oil extraction expose materials that have been isolated from life on the earth's surface for millions of years. In contact with air and water many of them break down to produce toxic chemicals. Refining and using the products further increases the danger of pollution.

The most common pollutants are sulphuric acid, toxic heavy metals entering natural water and rainfall, and very fine solids and slime that can devastate life in watercourses. Protecting the environment is possible, and in fact retrieves useful materials that are otherwise wasted. However, it involves costs that force down profitability.

The world's largest mining company, Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ), takes its name from the red-stained river that flowed from its first metal mines in Spain, full of iron slimes and sulphuric acid, and devoid of all life.

In the 1960s, the world was horrified at the plight of tortured and deformed children in Minimata, Japan, victims of mercury and cadmium poisoning from metal refineries.

Huge areas around mines and oilfields the world over are devastated. Most of the outcry comes from concerned groups in well-off countries with large mining and petroleum industries, such as the USA and Canada.

The greatest blight on human lives is in mineral-rich poor countries, where the potential wealth happens to coincide with densely-populated agricultural areas.

Such a place is the Niger delta, where the land, water and surrounding forests of the Ogoni people are now a crippled mess of black tars, snaking leaky pipelines, huge gas flares, seapages of deadly hydrogen-sulphide gas, and tainted water full of toxic brines that accompany the oil deep beneath the surface.

The culprit is the giant British-Dutch Shell Oil Company, which has generated huge profits for the last 35 years, thanks to a freak of Nigerian geology and the complicity of successive governments.

Reparations

Having lost the means to feed themselves, the Ogoni had to fight back as best they could, demanding reparations, a share of the profits and the introduction of safe technology.

Such minimal demands have been won by native people in North America and Australia after decades of struggle, and with the support both of environmentalist groups and organised labour.

The outcome in Nigeria has been state-organised massacre and forced migration. Shell conspired with the Abacha military dictatorship to send in the most brutalised troops, often disguised as other people of the delta, who shot and hacked apart thousands



Shell's leaky pipelines snake out across Ogoniland.



Ken Saro-Wiwa, murdered by the state, 10 November

in their path and burned down whole Ogoni communities.

These horrors culminated in the state murder on 10 November of the leaders of the campaign, the Ogoni author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his comrades.

Corrupt

Ogoniland is not an isolated incident. Exactly the same is happening to the coastal people of Irian Jaya (Indonesian New Guinea), for the same reasons — oil and companies like Shell in cahoots with a corrupt and repressive regime.

The highlands of Papua New Guinea, the deep jungles of Amazonia and the high Andes are being ripped apart in the frenzied search for gold. Like the Ogoni, local people are fighting back despite their poverty and isolation. Nor is this anything new.

For two centuries the search for mineral wealth has bludgeoned its way through local communities, starting in Europe, but spreading to encompass the globe. Tens of thousands of virtual slave labourers in the mines of South Africa, Malaysia, the Andes and India have died because of the lack of minimal safety standards.

Standing defiant on this trail of blood and tears are the Ogoni and the people of Bougainville in the Pacific (Papua New Guinea), who have closed one of the world's most profitable mines by strike action and armed occupation against low wages and devastation and for self-determination.

That this barbarism still continues stems from a complex interconnection of economic, political and social forces. Capitalism's general tendency for a decline in the rate of profit drives capital to the places where min-

eral riches coincide with low labour costs, minimal taxation and royalties, and where legislation for pollution control and land restoration, if it exists at all, is merely paper thin.

The very successes in forcing oil and mining companies to 'clean up their act' in North America and Australia is driving the mineral giants into the rest of Africa to seek profit and oil and gold.

The anarchy of capitalist commodity markets, combined with the general slump in the world economy, sees metal and oil prices at around the levels in real terms that they were before the inflationary explosion of the 1970s, further driving exploration into

'frontierland'. 'Decolonisation' in the 1960s left in place all the mechanisms necessary to lubricate this 'front-line' imperialism; the select bourgeois-nationalist dictatorial regimes, and the 'disciplinary' of the World Bank and other global institutions.

Under capitalism it is impossible for the poorest countries to survive without allowing imperialist interests to exploit the most basic of their natural resources.

Indebtedness and the 'advice' of the World Bank and UN consultants, plus strict conditions on the meagre loans that they can extract, forces them deeper into external control. Powerless against the growing fury of their own people, bourgeois nationalism creates the very conditions for their further enslavement by colluding with multinationals and imperialism.

Outset

In the 'best' cases this is completely against their limited principles, but more often than not through an army of compradors, these regimes became corrupted to the core at their very outset.

Calling today for an embargo on Shell and the overthrow of the Abacha dictatorship in Nigeria is an act of international solidarity with the oppressed.

But it must raise the question of what is to replace the Abacha regime. More generally, what must be done to eradicate the blight of imperialism? It cannot be reformed.

It is global in its ravages, yet its barbarism is the sign of its rapidly growing weakness.

The building of an international party uniting workers and oppressed people to put an end to imperialism and the capitalist economic system is urgent.

The worldwide unity against Shell and Abacha shows that it is indeed possible.

African Liberation Support Campaign & Workers International to rebuild the Fourth International

Invites you to a

PUBLIC DISCUSSION MEETING

We say the NIGERIAN DICTATORSHIP DOES NOT ACT ALONE

The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his comrades by the Nigerian dictatorship on 10 November 1995 shocked and angered millions of people throughout the world. The Nigerian dictator, General Sani Abacha, may have put the rope round the necks of these brave fighters, but who gave him the confidence to act?

■ The British government has continued to supply arms to the Nigerian government despite the known brutality of the dictatorship. The British government is deporting asylum seekers and people who have lived in this country for years to an unknown fate under the Nigerian dictatorship.

■ Shell, the British-Dutch oil company, has laid waste the Niger delta. The rich farmlands and rain forests have been polluted by the leakage of crude oil. While the multi-nationals get rich, the poor people do not have even the most ordinary amenities — clean water, roads, electricity. Speakers will give their views and discuss what can be done.

There will be time for people to participate.

Carmela Berens — Journalist and member of Freedom Network

Ronnie McDonald — Gen. Secretary — OILC (Offshore oil workers' union)

Jimmy Nolan — Chair — Liverpool Dockers' Shop Stewards' Committee

Julie Affiong Southey — People's Embargo for Democracy in Nigeria

Cliff Slaughter — Executive Committee of Workers International

7.30pm Friday 5 January 1996

Brixton Recreation Centre, Station Road, Brixton.

PO Box 735, London, SW4 1YB. Telephone: 0171-627 8666

Reviews

How the 'Blue' union came to Hull docks

IN THE 1950s, workers in Hull were among the worst-paid dockers in Britain and with some of the worst working conditions. The issue, 'filling', that sparked the 1954 strike, and caused the men to change their union, involved a working practice that had long been abandoned in other ports.

On Tuesday 17 August 1954, the *Seaboard Enterprise*, containing grain, was in King George dock in Hull. This was not a silo berth and the allocated dockers were expected to unload it by 'bag-filling' or 'hand-scuttling'. The filling or scuttling method involved men standing up to their waist in loose grain in the hold of a ship and shovelling grain into bags using big metal scoops.

Bill Hunter in his history of unofficial dockers' struggles called this 'an antiquated and dangerous method of unloading grain'. Hunter quotes the TGWU National Docks Group secretary, who opposed the Hull strike, as saying it was a 'rotten, dirty, underpaid job that should have died with Queen Victoria' (*They Knew Why They Fought*, p.34).

But in 1954 there was a shortage of registered dockers and the men allocated to the *Seaboard Enterprise* were from Cardiff. They refused to unload the ship and some Hull men were 'Shanghaied' (picked to work some of the worst cargoes for low pay) to do the job instead. The Hull men also refused and the 11-day strike started that ended hand-scuttling on the dock.

Sinclair bases much of his pamphlet on discussions with Hull dockers who were involved in the dispute, in particular Albert Hart, the only strike leader that remains alive.

Hart explains about the strike: 'If the Cardiff men hadn't been there, in that control, there is a possibility that scuttling would have gone on for another ten or twelve years. The Cardiff men started the strike by refusing to go. If the Cardiff men had been sent to another job and we'd been shanghaied to the *Seaboard Enterprise*, we wouldn't have stood a cat-in-hells chance. We'd have scuttled the ship out the same as we'd done before.'

The aim was clear: to end the hand method and to unload the *Seaboard Enterprise* mechanically. Despite clear support from 2,000 striking dockers, the TGWU

On this page we review three pamphlets that will be of interest to those involved in, or who want to know more about, the background to two current struggles: that of the Merseyside dockers and of the Hillingdon hospital cleaners. The first pamphlet we discuss is *How the Blue Union came to Hull Docks* on 'The 1954 filling strike and its aftermath' by Keith Sinclair. This review has been 'due' for some time (since April) and we can only apologise to Keith for not carrying out this duty sooner. Below we review *The struggle for an independent trade union by the dockers in Merseyside and Hull during 1954-1955*, which consists of 'some observations' by John Archer. Also we look at *Organising the Unorganised: 'Race', Poor Work and Trade Unions* by John Wrench and Satnam Virdee of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations. This, in particular, studies the work of the Transport and General Workers' Union in trying to organise cleaners in Hillingdon.

refused to back them and instead urged a return to work. An unofficial strike committee of four men was formed which included Hart.

The committee met in the front room of Jim Murphy, an ex-docker who had been sued at one time by the TGWU official in Hull, Jim Parnell. It was Murphy who contacted the 'Blue' dockers' union in London.

The National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers Union (NAS&DU) had more democratic traditions than the T&G, with members making decisions rather than officials. The NAS&DU had a blue membership card, hence the nickname 'Blue' union. The T&G had a white card and was called the 'White' union.

But it was not just Murphy who encouraged the move to the 'Blue'. Through Murphy, the Hull dockers came in contact with the Birkenhead Port Workers Committee, a more permanent unofficial dockers' committee composed of members of the TGWU at the Merseyside port. One of the Birkenhead leaders, Bill Johnson, had been charged with seven others under the war-time 'Order 1305' by the postwar Labour government. Another of the seven, Harry Constable, leading London docker and 'Blue' union member, was also in touch with Murphy.

The Hull workers' decision to join the NAS&DU came within 48 hours of the strike starting, before the contacts with Birkenhead had become established. But the contact reinforced this decision.

Constable was a member of the Trotskyist 'Club' in the Labour Party led by Gerry Healy, and the Birkenhead committee voted to affiliate to the Trotskyist Fourth International in 1951.

Gerry Healy was expelled from the WRP in 1985.

But, Sinclair stresses, the move to the 'Blue' union 'was not dreamed up in the head of Gerry Healy or any other Trotskyist leader and then "sold" to the dockers'. Indeed, Sinclair points out, there were no Trotskyists in Hull in 1954.

'Healy was introduced to a number of left-wing activists in Hull in the mid-fifties,' says Sinclair, 'making a distinctly unfavourable impression on some such as the university historian John Saville and building worker Stan Suddaby whilst clearly impressing others such as Saville's colleague the late Tom Kemp and Blue Union member Doug Pinder.'

[Tom Kemp was a member of the Communist Party until 1956 when he became a Trotskyist and was a member of the WRP until he died on 21 December 1993.]

The Birkenhead dockers applied to join the 'Blue' following the Hull decision.

This pamphlet is an important complement to *They Knew Why They Fought*, concentrating on Hull where Hunter centres on the struggle on Merseyside. It gives valuable information for the necessary discussions on the history of the workers' movement.

The research carried out is clearly the basis for Sinclair's contribution to the discussion in Workers Press that followed Dot Gibson's review of *They Knew Why They Fought* (3 September 1994, with correspondence up to 29 April this year).

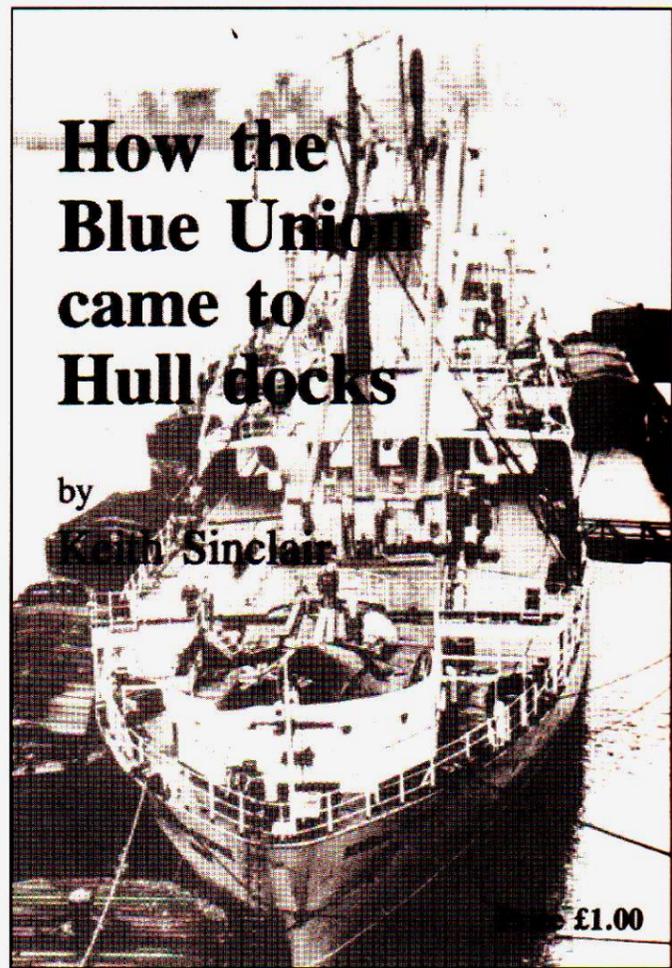
Sinclair has declared his intention of following this work up with one on the NAS&DU recognition struggle of 1955, which was more successful in Hull than in the other northern ports that

went over to the 'Blue' union. It is to be hoped that he will be able to carry out this intention and the best way to ensure that is to buy this pamphlet!

'The filling dispute was an important victory won through the use of unofficial action,' concludes Sinclair. 'Forty years on, the strike is referred to warmly as a "good" strike. Hand-scuttling was abolished but most important of all, Hull dockers realised it was possible to take on and defeat the employers.'

Mike Cooke

■ *How the Blue Union came to Hull Docks*, 20 pages, is available from Keith Sinclair, 27 Strathmore Avenue, Hull, HU6 7JH. Price £1 (add some money for postage and donation to the next pamphlet!).



How the Blue Union came to Hull docks

by Keith Sinclair

£1.00

The struggle for an independent union

JOHN ARCHER's pamphlet, *The Struggle for an Independent Trade Union by the Dockers in Merseyside and Hull during 1954-55*, is from someone who was 'peripherally involved in the events of 1955' and has 'voiced opinions about them in later years'.

In the first instance, it is a response to the misuse by Tom Cowan of the notes of a lecture given in 1990 by Archer to WRP members on the docks struggle. Cowan referred to these notes in a letter to Workers Press (1 April) in the discussion on Bill Hunter's book *They Knew Why They Fought*.

In addition, Archer describes the 'highly self-sacrificing people' who made up the Trotskyist 'Club' in the Labour Party, its connection to the international struggles in the Trotskyist movement, and its contribution to the dockers' fight for democratic unionism. He then considers 'what that contribution meant, and can still mean, for the construction of a section in Britain of Trotsky's Fourth International'.

'Cowan quotes what Bob Pennington told me,' says Archer referring to the Workers Press correspondence. 'Pennington, Healy and [Harry] Ratner had, in 1953, met a group of dockers, "unofficial" leaders, and they agreed "to campaign for a mass shift from the "White" to the "Blue" Union, and to reject the perspective of "reform" of the "White" Union.'

'But Cowan then has the un-wisdom to try to make me responsible for the conclusion which he chooses to draw from this report. But it was he [Cowan],

not I, who "suggested" that this was a "bureaucratic manoeuvre, to spite and out-flank the Stalinists". It was he, not I, who asked: "Was it to subject the workers' struggle to the need of the "Club" ... to impress the Labour Lefts?"

I could "suggest" no such thing. It would have made no sense. The "Club" had barely a hundred members in 1955. The National Executive of the Labour Party had only recently forced it to close down its monthly paper, *Socialist Outlook*, under threat of being expelled. Moreover, the NEC did this after the Communist Party's press "disclosed" the names of the leading members of the "Club" and the local party units in which they were active.

'The very idea that anyone, least of all the "Club", could have imposed a "bureaucratic manoeuvre" on the dockers of Merseyside and Hull is, to put it mildly, far-fetched, especially after Hunter described the years of misrule by the employers and the apparatus of the T&GWU which had created the situation.

'Does not Cowan's "suggestion" betray a certain contempt for the dockers? And is not this contempt typical of those trained by the wisecracks of ultra-leftism, reformism and Stalinism?

'Constable, Aylward and the others were men of very different metal. They did not despise the dockers. They understood them. When the dockers gave them the chance to lead the "break-out", they did not throw it away.

'Neither they nor the other dockers were adventurers. Thanks to years of experience, they knew about real struggles in the real world. They did not ask

Healy for a guarantee in advance of success.'

Archer, who knew him well from 1936 onwards, considers that 'Healy revealed himself at his best in these events around 1955, that here we have an indication of the most positive characteristics of the man'.

As to Healy's negative characteristics, which 'came to dominate his activity' from the late 1960s, Archer maintains that the 'WRP must bear the responsibility, feeding such confusion into the ranks of worker militants and enabling reformists, Stalinists and bourgeois journalists to befool the image of Trotskyism.

'We owe to the new generation of worker militants who are flexing their muscles for the task of re-building the British Section of the Fourth International, that they shall have an account of our efforts and our mistakes that makes sense, that does not rely on anecdotes about "good" and "bad" people, and which expresses the continuity of struggle of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.'

Archer doesn't mention that the WRP began to take its responsibility for reversing its own degeneration — by expelling Healy in 1985! That being said, Archer's short document sheds important light on the strengths of the movement in the 1950s and should be studied.

■ *The Struggle for an Independent Trade Union by the Dockers in Merseyside and Hull*, 11 pages, is available from John Archer, 'Old Tavern', 138 Denby Lane, Upper Denby, Huddersfield, HD8 8UN. Price £1.30 postage paid.

Organising the unorganised

THE strike by Hillingdon hospital cleaners working for Pall Mall Services gives added interest to the study *Organising the Unorganised: 'Race', Poor Work and Trade Unions* by John Wrench and Satnam Virdee.

It comes from the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick and contains two case studies of unions trying to organise minority ethnic workers: cleaners in Hillingdon and workers at the Burnsall's factory in the Midlands who were on strike in 1993 for union recognition.

The study examines the relations and tensions between unions, community groups and ethnic minority organisations like the Indian Workers' Association.

It tends to be critical of the Transport and General Workers' Union in Hillingdon. For example, it cites the fact its office had an all-white counter when it was trying to organise among work-

ers who were mostly from ethnic groups. Many of these cleaners work at Heathrow airport.

It is more sympathetic to the local officers of the GMB general union involved in the Burnsall's dispute. But it highlights the fact that the anti-union laws have made it difficult, if not impossible from a reformist perspective, to defend members' interests.

The study quotes one GMB official as saying: 'There is no doubt that we are going to find it more difficult to recruit Asian workers in the future, because of what happened in the Burnsall strike.'

The academic nature of the study is bizarrely shown by a circular argument in its second paragraph: 'Economic factors do not explain the fundamental changes in employment over the 1980s. For example, the particularly high level of unemployment experienced in Britain was not simply "inevitable", but at least in part reflected the lack of commit-

ment to the maintenance of full employment on the part of Britain's ruling élite.'

Why this change took place or why there was previously such a 'commitment' is not explained or seen as a problem. This is possibly inevitable for research funded by the government's Economic and Social Research Council. The Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations is one of the council's 'designated' centres.

So, inevitably, the study tries to be even-handed between the 'radical' and 'reformist' positions in the struggle, but it does raise problems that need to be resolved by the movement.

■ *Organising the Unorganised: 'Race', Poor Work and Trade Unions*, 35 pages, is available from the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, Social Studies Building, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL. Price £5 including handling charge and VAT. Payable to University of Warwick.

As international support grows . . . Liverpool's dockers take the offensive

'THIS was a Merseyside dispute. Then it became national. Now it's international', Liverpool docks shop stewards' secretary Jimmy Davis told a mass rally in the city last Saturday.

BY BOB ARCHER

Thousands of trade unionists from Scotland, the north and London had marched through Liverpool with their banners to show support for the dock workers' struggle against casualisation and scab labour on the docks.

Davis reported particularly on a successful visit to Montreal, where French Canadian dockers had promised full support to the Liverpool strike.

'They gave us tremendous support. They work the same as Liverpool dockers, they look the same as Liverpool dockers. They just talk different.

'Any ship that docks in Liverpool will be blacked right through Canada.

'If the FTQ [the Quebec Labour Federation] can do it, why can't the TUC? They are not doing it and they should.'

Support has also come from the US, Australia, Spain and Japan.

Davis announced that an international conference of dock workers was to be held in February 1996.

'You are not taking on the Liverpool dockers, you are taking on the Dockers world-wide', he warned the Merseyside Port employers.

Chairing the rally, leading steward Jimmy Nolan expressed a growing offensive spirit among the 500 strikers.

Dismissed

'After ten weeks of being dismissed, the pain no longer hurts. We will negotiate as soon as possible, but if you don't we don't give a damn how long this strike continues.'

Nolan also made it very clear that the dockers would insist on returning only to improved conditions on the docks.

'We give notice that we cannot work with Drake International. We insist on going back to the Liverpool Port Authority.'

He called on TGWU secretary Bill Morris to get on television

and state clearly that he opposed what the dock employers were doing.

He also announced that the dock workers would seek ways to carry a struggle out against the Tory government who had promised in 1990 there would be no return to casual labour on the docks.

Vic Turner — one of the 'Pentonville Five' London dockers jailed for defying the Industrial Relations Court in 1972 and subsequently released following mass national strike action — was enthusiastically cheered when he addressed the rally.

Beautiful

'It is beautiful to see so many people from all over the British Isles,' he said.

'The employers were working to do away with the Dock Labour Scheme right from the start.

'Today there is no industry that can stand alone and by itself and win its own battles.

'You have shown that the Liverpool dockers do not stand alone.

'It has to be built on. We cannot go back to our own corners and forget that there are others in struggle.'

'No one in London knows the Liverpool dockers are on strike', he warned. 'We must give sustenance and support through support groups.'

'We should be demanding of the wider labour movement to give support.'

'It may not be long until Drake International goes under. But that's not the end of it. While we are sleeping the employers are scheming.'

'Let the general executive committee of the Transport and General Workers' Union — they're good lads — get out of their seats and get around the country preaching the gospel.'

'The cause of any dispute



Kurdish and Turkish strikers from JJ Fast Food, north London, marched in Liverpool and gave a message of support

comes from the employers, but we are the only ones with the remedy.

'We must cut the chains that fetter the trade union movement.'

Labour MEP **Alex Smith** brought support from the Labour group of MEPs.

Alan Duxbury, assistant general secretary of the CPSA, said that he was attending the rally on the request of his members employed in Customs and Excise and commented that that showed the changed mood among trade unionists.

Duxbury emphasised the importance of dock workers' struggles in building the trade

union movement, especially the Dockers' Tanner dispute of the 1880s.

He called for the Tory government to be removed and added:

'We don't win disputes with new policies. We need to re-establish the principles of Old Labour.'

Communication Workers' Union activist **Derek Durkin** brought greetings and support from Scottish postal workers

He agreed with calls on the union leaders to support the dispute but added:

'The support of the bureaucrats to this movement is fast becoming irrelevant.'

'Striking Scottish postal

workers kept getting letters from our leaders repudiating the dispute and just threw them into the picket braziers.'

Andy Ford, who works for the Blood Transfusion Service, reported on wide public opposition to cuts in the service which was treated with complete contempt by the government.

'The only thing that can stop this crew is ordinary workers and their trade unions. If the dockers go down it will be a blow to everybody in Merseyside,' he warned.

CPSA member **Dave Owen** brought greetings to the rally from 40 unemployment benefit

office workers on strike in Tooten, Liverpool.

'We are on unofficial strike along with 38 other offices,' he reported. 'Our strike is about management attempts to smash trade unions in the employment service. They want to tie our pay to how many people we can force off the unemployment register into crap job schemes.'

Support Groups for the dockers' strike have been set up rapidly in many parts of Scotland, and **Ritchie Venton** spoke for them at the rally. He attacked the 'disgraceful blanket of silence in the media' about the strike.

'Even when we occupied the Drake International office in Edinburgh and were filmed by STV, the story was pulled from the news.'

Unified

He called for the establishment of one unified democratic socialist party.

Peter Bix, a lecturer at Bolton further education college, told the rally that he and his colleagues had been out on strike against attempts to impose a new contract.

'There is a rising tide of struggle,' he added.

A heartfelt message of support was brought from the **JJ Fast Food strikers** in Tottenham:

'The fight of Liverpool dockers inspired us and we were proud to have a Liverpool docker on our picket line. We are constantly promised a new world order. We constantly get the same poverty and oppression.'

'Give 100 per cent support' Benn calls on Labour leaders

TONY BENN MP received a rapturous welcome from the rally outside St George's Hall:

'What a fantastic turnout for a strike which is going not only to end in victory but also play a role in defeating this government and ensuring that the working class gets its rights.'

'I urge the trade union and Labour leadership to give 100 per cent support to what is being done in this city,' he said, emphasising its historic importance.

'Ten years ago in the miners'

strike Arthur Scargill warned that you had to fight for the miners or the same thing would happen to you.'

He described how Asian women workers on strike in Hillingdon had been arrested and handcuffed and said: 'We cannot allow that to continue.' There were spontaneous shouts of 'Let's go down there.'

'We have to make sure a Labour government is elected that represents the working people,' Benn concluded.



Halewood Ford workers are preparing to strike

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