

These Hillingdon hospital workers are coming up for the first anniversary of their dispute, like the Liverpool dockers. They are stepping up their campaign by protesting outside the HQ of the Davis Group which owns the Pall Mall cleaning firm. Today (Saturday 7 September) there are to be a series of protests outside HSS hire shops, also Davis-owned (see page 3 for full story)

## Down with the Job Seekers Allowance!

### NO SLAVE LABOUR! NO BENEFIT CUTS!



## March against the J.S.A.

### Saturday 7th September

Assemble: 12 noon

Shepherds Bush Green

LONDON

Rally 2.30pm Labour & Trades Council Hall  
16 Church Street off Acton High Street

Sponsors include: London Against the JSA; Greater London Association of Trades Councils; Ealing Trades Council; Socialist Labour Party; Ealing UNISON; Harrowmouth GMB; National Unemployed Workers Union; Harrowmouth Unemployed Centre; CPGB London Benefits Agency & Employment Service Branches; Ealing Green Party; Colin Roach Centre; Hillingdon Socialist Alliance; West London Against JSA; Hounslow Claimants Action; Oxford Unemployed Workers & Claimants Union

JobSeekersAllowance + JobseekersAllowance + JobSeekersAllowance + JobSeekersAllo



# Simple choice facing TUC delegates

# BACK MERSEY

# DOCKERS!

TUC delegates are being asked to set up a hardship fund for the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers to enable them to continue their fight for reinstatement.

The dockers and their families, lobbying TUC delegates at the conference next week, face real hardship. It is now coming up to one year since the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company sacked these men on 28 September 1995.

And it is 107 years since the famous 'Dockers' Tanner strike in 1889 founded the Transport and General Workers' Union. But today's dockers — many with over 30 years' service — are 'unofficial' and 'illegal' in their struggle.

Sacked for crossing a picket line against casualisation mounted by 80 young dockers employed by Torside Ltd., these men rejected (by 84 per cent in a secret ballot) the £25,000 offered to sell their jobs.

To win their simple demand — 'reinstatement' — they are carrying out an 'old fashioned' single-minded struggle to bring the MDHC

BY DOT GIBSON

to its knees, and they have organised an international blockade of the scab port.

It is either the MDHC or the dockers. That is the simple choice facing this year's TUC.

Capital today demands a labour force that is at its complete mercy, stripped of all its means to defend wages, working conditions and safety. It is this need that is behind the drive to casualisation. It is this that is at the heart of the Liverpool dispute.

The British state owns a 'golden' shareholding, a controlling interest in MDHC. In the inter-European trade war,

the British ruling class plans a non-union, cheap-labour, casualised port in Liverpool. They want to control the trans-Atlantic trade, transporting containers by road and rail links through the Channel tunnel to every major city in Europe within 36 hours of arrival.

## Blow

Worldwide dockers' solidarity action is therefore a major blow against these plans and a big step forward in rebuilding workers' internationalism.

In European, North American and Australian ports dockers are fighting for a con-

tinuation of their boycott actions forcing the giant shipping consortiums to leave the scab port Liverpool.

Through these actions they are also telling their employers, their governments, that they will not be used against each other in capital's trade war.

The blockade has wiped £100 million off the MDHC's share values. The company's half-year financial report revealed a 17.1 per cent fall in profits.

The Liverpool dockers can win this fight. Is the British TUC prepared to back up the actions taken by thousands of waterfront workers around the world?

# Liverpool dockers' TUC fringe meeting

Monday 9 September, 5.30pm

Oak Lea hotel, Albert Road, near Winter Gardens

Speakers — **Doreen McNally** (Woman of the Waterfront), **Jimmy Nolan** (Chair Merseyside Port Shop Stewards), **FBU general secretary Ken Cameron**, **Jimmy Davies** (secretary/treasurer MPSS), **TGWU general executive committee member Mike Carden**

## Liverpool dockers

Monday 9 September: TUC lobby. Contact London support group (0956 138496) or Unison (0171-388 2366) for details of coaches.

Saturday 28 September: First year anniversary march and rally, Myrtle Parade to Pier Head, 1pm.

## DOCKERS CHARTER

### LATEST ISSUE OUT NOW!

Available from the Liverpool Docks Shop Stewards' Committee, c/o 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. Money to 'Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Appeal'. Price 50p (20p unwaged). Add postage. Also send donations. Bulk orders tel: 0151-207 3388.



# Workers Press

## Bankrupt Britain

### GOVERNMENT TRENDS in spending and taxation cannot carry on.

This is the conclusion of a newly-released government publication: 'Public Finance Trends'.

As the *Independent*, commenting on the survey, said:

'Whichever party wins the general election is likely to have to either raise taxes or to cut spending — just as the Conservatives did after the 1992 election.'

Despite all its rhetoric, it is now clear that the Thatcher governments did not reduce the level of state spending. As a share of national income it is almost exactly the same as it was in 1979.

This is so because cut-backs in certain areas of spending have been almost exactly matched by increases in social spending, especially spending to finance unemployment benefits.

Even then the government's finances have been stabilised only by massive sales of state assets, amounting to some £3,200bn.

But even so interest payments on government debt have quadrupled since 1979. These costs now account for the fourth largest category of spending after social security, education and health.

Taking the 17 years since Thatcher came to office the government has covered its deficits by borrowings that total £223bn.

Even taking the period since Major became prime minister the national debt has doubled and now stands at £385.5bn.

\* \* \* \* \*

FOR the Tory government — as well as for a Labour government — the real issue remains the level of the social security budget. Spending under this head came to £77.2bn in the last financial year out of a total of some £303bn. Looking at the Thatcher years as a whole, social security spending came to £770bn out of a grand total of £3,204bn government expenditure.

Spending on unemployment benefits, along with supplementary benefits and income support, has grown dramatically, as well as invalidity benefits, retirement and widows' pensions.

Despite all the efforts to induce people to take out private pension schemes, the bill for state pensions has risen from £8.6bn in 1979 to £40.9bn last year.

Reacting to the figures, shadow chancellor Gordon Brown declared that they proved that the Tories cannot manage the economy.

But far more is at stake, as even Brown knows. These figures are not an indication of Tory 'mismanagement' but of the deep crisis of capital in Britain.

Bill Martin, chief economist at the City investment bank UBS, said:

'The Tories have cut taxes too much and they have let the social security budget get out of control. Even without pre-election tax cuts there is an intractable problem.'

He warned that a Labour government would face a budget deficit running at above 5 per cent of national income, way beyond the Maastricht Treaty requirement and in the not-so-long run quite unsustainable.

\* \* \* \* \*

BUT the crisis revealed in these figures itself shows that whatever set-backs have occurred in the years since 1979, the working class has not been definitively defeated. The ruling class has not been able to shift the balance of class forces in its favour to any real or significant extent.

What is also clear is that the Labour Party will assume office with a massive financial crisis on its hands.

It will have to confront the working class head on. It is for this that we must prepare. The centre of those preparations is for a new party of the working class. We are having a most encouraging response to our coming conference in November called to discuss just this issue.

Please do write in and let us have your views.

# Letters

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## Up to the same tricks

BROWSING through some material on Australia on the internet, I came across the following from the *Green-Left Weekly*:

'Prior to the meeting, members of the CPSU [the public sector union] opposition group in Canberra, Public Sector Fight-back (PSF), drafted a supplementary motion calling for a 24-hour strike on 29 August, the day of anti-budget action called by the National Union of Students and supported by the National Tertiary Education and Industry Union.

'Despite participating in drafting the 24-hour strike motion, the International Socialist Organisation put another motion to the meeting calling for a 48-hour stoppage.

'After a lot of discussion, amendments and a destructive display of left disunity, the meeting voted against the amended ISO motion and was closed down before the PSF motion could be put.'

Later in the same article: 'The CPSU opposition group in NSW [New South Wales], Rank and File Action, put a supplementary motion for a 24-hour strike on 29 August. However, left unity was broken when ISO members put their own motion calling for a 48-hour strike.

'The result was that neither supplementary motion was carried.'

And again: 'In Melbourne... Kim Linden reports that a motion for a 24-hour strike on 29 August, put by opposition group National Challenge, was lost 60-120.

'This followed protracted discussion on an ISO motion for a 48-hour strike, during which most members left the meeting. Members eventually voted to hold another stop-work meeting on 28 August to further discuss a strike.'

This all happened on 23 August when members of the Community and Public Sector Union were taking part in 'stop-work meetings' across Australia to decide the next steps in the union's campaign against the federal government's cuts to the public service.

But what is the ISO and why did they take the ultra-left position they did and effectively make sure that support for the 24-hour action was dissipated? After all, they were meant to be supporting someone else's 24-hour action. How could they

justify pushing it up to 48 hours without consulting the initiators — the students and the college workers?

Many readers won't be surprised to find out that the ISO is an international 'sister group' of the British Socialist Workers' Party.

In Britain, the SWP is often to be found at union branch meetings and national conferences to spring without warning a more 'left' amendment that leads to defeat for itself and the original motion. No doubt those who put forward these amendments do so in good faith and feel virtuous in having raised the revolutionary banner.

But they do not take forward the struggle of the working class.

The *Green-Left Weekly* is the paper of the Democratic Socialist Party in Australia, having at least some roots in the movement led until his death by Ernest Mandel. Its laments over 'left disunity' are characteristic of this tendency.

But it is the working class that must put the left in order and bring out the best in those members of left groups who are dedicated to the interests of that class.

The recent events in Australia, where workers and others converged on Canberra on 19 August to express their anger at the Tory government and the year-long struggle of the Liverpool dockers are signs it won't be long before the working class does just that.

Mike Cooke  
London SE5

## Comments on the TUC

I'VE been reading the 57-page preliminary agenda for this year's TUC in Blackpool, and thought I'd make some comments.

As the TUC is the largest organised expression of the working class, comprising elected representatives, I would hope that it would have proposals which will help workers advance their struggle against repressive trade union legislation, setbacks to workers' wages, deterioration of living conditions, unnecessary new technology, destructive 'new management techniques', capitalist profiteering, etc.

The demands being made of the current government and its successor strike me as very modest. Where the minimum wage is mentioned, there has been a capitulation to the Labour Party's delayed introduction programme.

Section II of the agenda enti-

tled 'Public Services' would frighten most readers with its omission of reference to cutbacks of services and demolition of the social security systems.

There are currently no references to the proposed Job Seekers Allowance and an appropriate fightback. On the other hand, Unison, the NUT, the Graphical Paper and Media Union and the National Union of Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades have put forward some interesting proposals, and I recommend people read them.

The relationship between the trades unions and the Labour Party would not appear to be very clear. A few proposals suggest a challenge to the Labour Party may be required, but this is only expressed in the most cautious of wording.

Many proposals (and lack of proposals) suggest many union representatives are depending on the Labour Party to represent workers' interests after the next general election.

This is unfortunate. The trade unions and the Trades Union Congress are supposed to be the independent political expressions of the working class, defending all workers' interests, including the unemployed.

Unless or until the working class develops an alternative party then organised labour uses its representation in the current (social-democratic) Labour Party to advance all workers interests. However, the Labour Party is only one place the unions hold influence, and it would be a mistake to rely on this party to advance a socialist programme.

It is important that the unions put forward a strong and coherent programme to advance all workers' rights, before the Labour Party holds office, so that workers won't be governed down the garden path into oblivion.

There is a remarkably low level of concrete proposals for action to repeal the anti-trade union laws, and to advance workers' rights (not just on wages but on equity and other important issues).

It is probably a good idea to spell out an offensive so that workers will gather as much solidarity as possible in their struggles. The fightback may, of course, involve the usual petitions, demonstrations and strikes and should broaden out to include demands concerning the unemployed.

There should be a strong message that workers in Britain are willing to engage in international solidarity action. Section 14 of the preliminary agenda,

entitled, 'Promoting Trade Unions worldwide' is the most political section of the programme but consists of only four contributions.

(The Liverpool dockers and their struggle aren't mentioned anywhere in the preliminary agenda, by the way.)

The Trades Union Congress is still a very important political organisation for all members, the working class, whether they are formally represented in it or not, because it is the largest organised expression of the class.

I say this to counter the cynicism I hear amongst some workers about any organised expression, whether it be a union or a party. I believe the problem here may lie in the false expectation of some people that others will fight the struggle for them, that this or that party or organisation will solve their problems or that the struggle will be won tomorrow.

This goes against the very principle of workers' self-organisation and socialism. I believe it is important for trade unionists to draft a series of concrete political proposals with appropriate action to advance the interests of all workers, wherever they may have influence.

Ellen Ramsay  
London

## Clarification

A REPORT of a workers' conference in Perm, Russia, published under my name in *Workers Press* (25 May), was preceded by an introductory paragraph listing various organisations which were represented there.

Among these it included Rabochaya Demokratiya, which it described as 'once close to the Militant but now closer to the Stalinists'.

Comrades have asked me to clarify to *Workers Press* readers that there are two groups called Rabochaya Demokratiya — the one mentioned above, and a second one, consisting of comrades who rejected the course towards closer relations with the Stalinists and remain in international affiliation with Militant Labour.

Simon Piran  
London SE18

## Correction

MY APOLOGIES to the author of *Trainspotting*, and his fans, for misspelling his first name (*Workers Press*, 24 August). He is, of course, Irvine, not Irving, Welsh.

Terry Brotherston  
Edinburgh

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# Hillingdon strikers step up the fight

BY ANTON MOCTONIAN

HILLINGDON hospital's domestic cleaning and portering workers plan to intensify their efforts as they come up to their 12th month of determined struggle against Pall Mall's attack on their pay and conditions.

The strikers are determined to win reinstatement on the old conditions. They were heartened when the Pall Mall manager at Hillingdon was sacked on 23 August. This is seen as a sign the company are on the verge of concessions. A campaign is beginning to develop in solidarity with the strikers, after a year with inadequate outside support.

All this week, from 2 to 6 September, there has been a vigil outside the Davis group head office in Grosvenor Place, organised by Unison, the public service union representing the workers.

Today, Saturday 7 September, pickets are to be held outside the HSS hire shops owned by the Davis group, between 10am and 12noon.

At the last meeting of Unison's London regional council the Hillingdon strikers called for the development of a strategy to help them win. The pickets outside HSS shops will be a long overdue step towards this.

The attack against the Hillingdon workers started on 1 October

last year. Pall Mall demanded cuts in holidays from five to three weeks. The NHS sick pay scheme, lieu days for bank holidays and London weighting were to be abolished. Overtime was to be cut to an hourly rate of £3 to £4.50.

When the Hillingdon workers took a stand against this they put themselves in the front line against Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in the NHS.

They have braved all weathers and racist attacks. They are at the forefront of the fight which pits them against that gang of employers who compete against each other to see who is best able to drive their workers into the worse conditions.

It is no accident that Pall

Mall's parent company, the Davis Group, has lobbied hard against the TUPE laws which give workers in privatised areas of the public services limited protection against rapacious, greedy employers.

The Hillingdon strike has highlighted the need to develop a campaign against CCT and for a minimum wage in the labour movement. With Blair and Co. moving further to the right, the question of who will do this is clearly posed.

Finance and messages of support should be sent to Unison, Civic House, 8 Aberdeen Terrace, Blackheath, London SE3 0QY. Cheques payable to 'Greater London Industrial Action Fund'.

## CS gas abuse

BY JACKIE VANCE

REMEMBER all those detailed explanations given by the British police about the circumstances in which they would use CS gas sprays?

Long interviews by chief constables and videos on national television news made it clear that it was necessary for the bobby on the beat to be equipped with the CS spray to defend themselves from dangerous knife-wielding thugs and karate-trained psychopaths.

Well, the sprays have been used for the first time in two incidents involving the Cleveland police — firstly against a young mother and her baby and secondly against a girl aged 13 and a boy of 14.

In May the dangerous chemical liquid was sprayed over both the mother and child as the woman tried to stop her baby being taken away from her and put into care. The mother had to be taken into hospital for precautionary treatment.

Two weeks ago the Cleveland cops again went into action with their new playthings when they were called to a local authority

home because of 'two disruptive children'. Their justification for attacking the teenage children with the CS spray? They feared that 'they might seriously harm themselves'!

An inquiry into the use of the spray has been called for by Middlesborough councillor Bob Pitt and civil rights group Liberty whose campaign co-ordinator, Liz Parrat, said: 'We have called for the spray to be withdrawn since the day it was first used and will continue to do so.'

Clearly all the media attention which preceded the arming of the police with CS sprays was an elaborate attempt to justify their use. They are not primarily for self-defence but are another weapon to be used in police control of anyone who does not obey their demands.

CS gas was widely used by the British army in the north of Ireland, against Protestants and Catholics, to break up demonstrations. Many of the methods used by the British state to maintain its rule in Ireland have been adopted by the British police and there is now, undoubtedly, pressure from sections of the ruling class for the widespread use of CS gas in crowd control.

# Family demands justice for German building site death

DENISE STACEY and her children pictured along with supporters of the Construction Safety Campaign (CSC) outside the German embassy in London last Tuesday.

Denise and representatives of the CSC met with embassy officials to demand the prosecution of those responsible for the death of her husband, Leonard, on a building site in Jesewitz in Germany in October 1994.

Leonard was killed when struck by falling bricks causing him to fall 28 feet. He had been working for an English company, D. Carter Construction Management (DCCM). The site developers were a German company, ABN Wohn.

Investigations at the time by the relevant German authority revealed that safety laws had been infringed — no protective rails, scaffolding or safety nets had been provided by the employer. Work on the site was halted until these were installed and the investigation concluded that DCCM was guilty of an infringement of its legal duties.

Denise was not informed of Leonard's death until the following day and was, at first, told by the site superintendent not to bother coming over as he



would arrange a cremation and return her husband's ashes to her!

To date investigations to determine the relevance of DCCM's infringement of legal duties has progressed very little in either England or Germany. After continual pressure from Denise a coroner's inquest was held at Uxbridge court at the beginning of August. It was adjourned and referred to the Home

Office but the authorities in both countries are denying responsibility for processing the case.

Denise intends to prosecute in Germany as she holds the German authorities primarily responsible and Tony O'Brien, CSC secretary, has warned of more lobbies at the German embassy.

The CSC, in a leaflet, points out, 'German construction workers have

recently been complaining about English "cowboy" companies working over there and cutting costs on wages and conditions.

'This case highlights the need for British workers to ensure that before they are engaged on contracts abroad they should cover themselves by being familiar with the respective country's industrial rules and regulations and employer liability.'

## Docker challenges TUC leader Monks

BY EDDIE WELLER

THE Burston school rally last Sunday (1 September) went off well on a fine day with a good turnout. There was plenty of entertainment, including the Bo Diddley folk group.

The speakers were Ken Livingstone MP, TUC general secretary John Monks and Liverpool docker Freddie Hughes.

John Monks came out with the usual double-talk, full of verbiage on the history of the Burston school strike and the courage of the school's teachers Annie and Tom Higdon.

He said the TUC had to support and elect a Labour government to resist the Tories' policies against the working class. What he didn't mention was that it was because of the TUC leadership's betrayal that the Tories were able to get away with their attacks on the working class.

Ken Livingstone spoke of what Labour hoped for and maintained that there was

enough support on the left of the party to force Blair and Brown to pursue better policies. Indeed, some on the right were muttering already about the way the Labour Party was going.

He was confident that Labour would push through policies to attack the rich, particularly those in the City. But he didn't say how they were going to achieve that.

Freddie Hughes of the Liverpool dockers spoke of how they'd received support from various groups, particularly internationally. He also told of how they'd fought to secure their jobs. They weren't after money, their livelihoods were threatened and they'd been able to resist.

There was a great feeling of solidarity among the Liverpool dockers, he said.

When I spoke to Freddie Hughes after the rally, he said he'd asked Monks before the meeting for public support for the Liverpool dockers at the TUC conference on 9 September. Monks fudged the issue and was non-committal.

## Casual drivers

BY PETER GIBSON

SOUTH KOREAN car producer Daewoo employs drivers to and from dealers on zero-hours contracts in Britain.

Workers are required to be available for work, if they want to get paid, but the company is not obliged to pay them unless there is work to do.

The Daewoo company says that it is looking for mature people who have finished full-time employment, and are available for work. Daewoo's human resources director, Peter Ellis, says that to meet the company's servicing obligations required a lot of support.

'We do not want people just standing around,' said Ellis. 'We

are looking for a lot of zero-hours contracts.'

A proposed list of names would be kept at each dealership and drivers would be contacted when needed.

A spokesperson for Daewoo said that the issue was a 'tricky one', but that the group saw the arrangements as a 'benefit to staff'. 'I do not see this as exploitative. We see it as a benefit,' the Daewoo representative said. People would normally be expected to work an hour in the morning and a further hour in the afternoon.

Almost every town has employment agencies that specialise in this kind of work. Drivers, restaurant staff, cleaners, warehouse workers are on agency books to be called in when there is work but only paid for the hours worked.

# No slave labour! No benefit cuts!

BY NICK BAILEY

UNEMPLOYMENT benefit offices around the country were closed Friday 30 August, the third in a series of strike days. CPSA union members in the offices are fighting the introduction of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

JSA replaces income support and unemployment benefit from October. It is an attack both on claimants and workers in the unemployment offices.

It is designed to push claimants off benefit into low paid jobs,' says a CPSA leaflet. 'If you refuse such a job, break your "Job

the terms of a prospective employer, or are sacked or leave your job voluntarily, a series of sanctions can be imposed of between two and 26 weeks with NO benefit.'

One worker in an unemployment benefit office told Workers Press: 'I think the action was quite a success. Very few people turned up for work.'

It hasn't been widely publicised in the press. The CPSA is stressing the effect of the JSA on our members having to administer the system, but we are against it anyway, although we're supposed to be politically unbiased.'

The CPSA is not the most

are pretty demoralised at present with the threat of redeployment and redundancy in the air. We've been campaigning on the health and safety at work issue, among other things.

There are four main aims of our action:

- no compulsory transfers;
- no job losses;
- no deterioration of working conditions;
- installation of safety screens.

'Social Security secretary Peter Lilley has already announced cuts of 25 per cent in expenditure over three years and our members' fear is that this can be even worse.'

I spoke to claimants while picketing on Friday and generally they have been quite supportive despite recent disruption to benefit cheques.

I would urge people to support the march and rally on Saturday 7 September (see front page). It's organised by various unions and unemployed groups who are opposing JSA so that some connections can be made between the employed and the unemployed.

'Rumour has it that there may be further three-day strikes this month but this hasn't been finalised.'

London Against JSA, PO Box 2140, London, E15 5LJ

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# Inside left

## A son's fate

WHEN *The Secret World of American Communism*, edited by Harvey Klehr and others, appeared in the bookshops last year, a glance at the publicity, seeming to suggest that America's 1950s anti-communist witch-hunts were right after all, was enough to put me off delving further.

I was mistaken. The book is the first in a series which Yale University Press is bringing out, drawing on hitherto secret Soviet archives. We don't have to endorse the editors' interpretations to find it a useful resource.

Seeing my pieces on Vladimir Copic, the XV International Brigade's Yugoslav colonel, done to death by Stalin's regime, a reader suggested I look at the *Secret World*, a big section of which comprises documents relating to the XV (Abraham Lincoln) Brigade, in which American and British volunteers served.

It helps solve a mystery, not about the commander, but concerning a young English volunteer, called Featherstone. After not hearing from his son for some time, the lad's father went to meet International Brigade wounded who had been evacuated. At the station he asked each man if they knew anything about his son, but nobody could tell him anything.

Among the documents in *Secret World* is a long list, drawn up in 1938, of 'suspicious individuals' in the XV brigade, including 'Wm. Henry Featherstone, battalion 57', whose offence was that he 'wrote homeoluminous letters' (page 166). Again we find this 'WH Featherstone' listed as a 'bad individual', detained at Castell de Felo prison near Barcelona, on the strength of an 'intercepted letter' (181).

So that was why his father did not hear from him, then or ever again. (Incidentally, the commander of the prison, taken over when brigade headquarters retreated to that area, was Colonel Copic's younger brother.) On 7 December 1938, some 300 members of the International Brigade arrived back at Victoria Station, to be welcomed by relatives and friends. William Featherstone was not among them.

Sixty years on from the outbreak of Spain's civil war, as we honour the heroism and sacrifice of those who, whatever their banner, answered the call to fight fascism, we should not shrink from asking questions. As time takes its inevitable toll, we must be grateful that some veterans leave their memories to future generations.

There are others, who were not just ordinary fighters, and know more than mere documents can hold. But despite glasnost and the fall of the Stalinist edifice, much remains to be told. If we don't like seeing this history in the hands of anti-communists, then it shouldn't be left to them.

## Defending Karadzic

ABOUT four years ago, while Serb forces bombarded Sarajevo, *Living Marxism* billed an 'anti-war' exhibition 'From Hiroshima to Belgrade'. It wasn't just shaky geography. 'Hands off Serbia!', they cried. I called them 'Milosevic's Marxists'. I underestimated them.

In the area controlled by Serb nationalists in Bosnia, Milosevic's supporters are being terrorised by erstwhile ally Radovan Karadzic's thugs. In the September *Living Marxism*, attacking Western 'Ballot-rigging in Bosnia', Linda Ryan concedes that indicted war criminal Karadzic 'might not be the Western liberal's cup of tea'.

But he is 'the Serbs' choice', she says, any interference a transgression against democracy. Who, in the so-called Republika Srpska, would dare contradict her? Those who are not cowering indoors are buried in mass

## Hong Kong/China

# Clock ticking for British

ALAN CLARK reports on a short visit he recently made to Hong Kong and comments on Clive James's 'Postcard from Hong Kong' recently broadcast on Channel 4

IN UNDER one year's time, Hong Kong, the little Britain in the South China Sea, reverts to Chinese rule. China has been courting capitalism for many years now, and for them Hong Kong has to be the icing on the cake or the jewel in the crown.

Hong Kong is an exciting, if not a busy, vibrant and fascinating place, but I did wonder what the Beijing authorities would do to alter it when they take over in 1997.

The Chinese 'have always regarded Hong Kong as a den of capitalist decadence,' said Clive James in his recent 'Postcard from Hong Kong' (Channel 4, Tuesday 27 August). 'Maybe they have a point. Hong Kong has more Rolls Royces than any other city, per capita, in the world.'

According to James, loans were made to Hong Kong, which created debt. The British got a long lease because of it and stayed on for their payback. To China, it became an insult the more Hong Kong boomed.

As you wander around you have this eerie sense on *déjà vu* — apart from and not unimportantly the thousands of Chinese people and the heat and humidity.

The street names are very familiar sounding: Salisbury Road,

Cameron Road, Lockhart Road, Russell Street, and so on. The phone boxes, post boxes, traffic signs and lights also look familiar. Even the road vehicles keep to the left where in the Chinese People's Republic they drive on the right, like most of the rest of the world.

Shop names are English too, and many people are called David, Michael, etc. What China intends to do about all this must make some cringe in fear.

You can't help but be amazed at the sight of the harbour. Boats of every size and description criss-cross the harbour without, apparently, being aware of the dangers seen from on shore as they miss one another within an inch of crashing.

But the biggest surprise is at night when you stand on the Kowloon side, the mainland, and look across at the island of Hong Kong all lit up, or stand at the top of Victoria peak and look down. These views were absolutely breathtaking, sights I shall not forget.

## Massive port

A short boat ride from Victoria harbour is a massive port — huge cranes ready to unload the barges and ships docking there. You can see there why this dock and others could be so important to China.

It either sees it as a threat to its own ports, like Shanghai, or an opportunity en route to the West.

Clive James, of course, meets with people that you, I or the normal

Hong Konger would never meet. For example, Kai-Bong and Brenda Chau with their house dripping with gold. This pair even had their sterling silver tea set coated in gold just to match its surroundings.

Another immensely rich Hong Konger on James's programme was David Tang. He says he's Chinese and wears clothing to prove it. Like the Chaus, he hopes the Chinese won't chuck him out because of his opulence, money or views.

According to Tang, the difference between the Chinese and the British was that 'We Chinese are richer than you are now. We of course never had an aristocracy, so we are not so class conscious. Throughout British history trade has always been regarded as rather vulgar, whereas it is our life-blood.'

Perhaps this was his way of currying favour with the Beijing government. Why get kicked out right away when there is probably still more money to be made after 1 July 1997?

One big problem for the British ruling class in the run-up to the handover is what to do with the Chinese dissidents who fled to Hong Kong after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. The *Hong Kong Standard*, an English language newspaper, recently said the West had responded poorly to requests to take some of the dissidents stranded in Hong Kong. Canada, France, Denmark, Sweden and the US have not committed themselves to taking a single one, it reported.

But seeing there aren't that many,

why can't Britain take them in? There's no doubt that the Chinese government will want to stamp its authority on Hong Kong in some way.

## Counting the seconds

A *Financial Times* book review of Michael Yahuda's *Hong Kong — China's Challenge* summed it up this way:

'The massive clock which records the seconds remaining until Hong Kong reverts to China has become a familiar landmark in Beijing's Tiananmen Square since it was installed at the height of the controversy over the democratic proposals of Hong Kong governor Chris Patten in 1994.

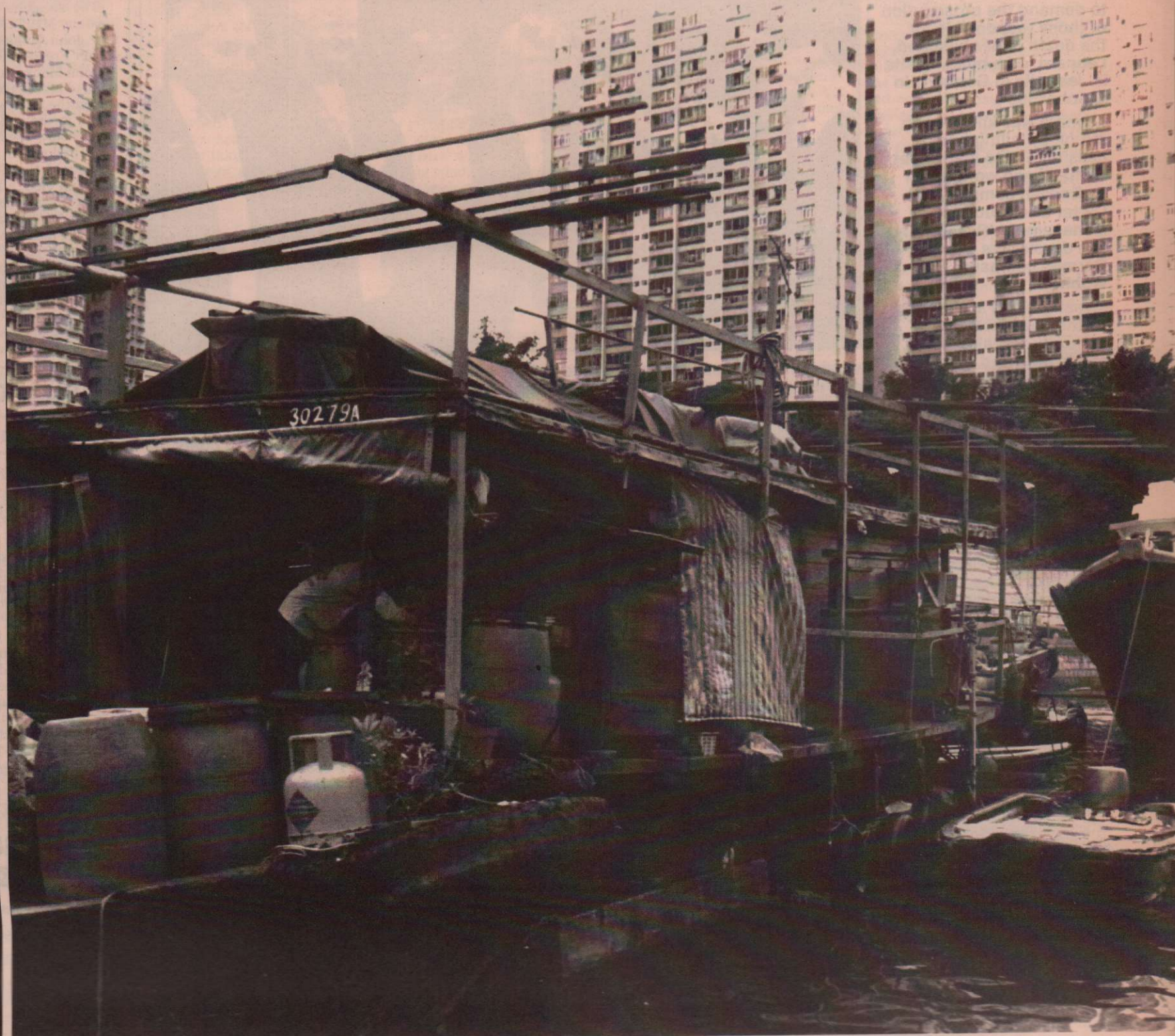
'More visitors probably think of its remorseless flashing as a warning to Hong Kong of its inexorable fate.'

But according to Yahuda, it's also ticking for China too.

James met with Bath's Tory reject, defeated at the last general election, Chris Patten, who claimed he would do all he could to defend those who don't have a British passport and have to stay whatever happens.

'We owe it to them to put some panes in the window before we go so there's a chance of their way of life being protected,' said Patten. 'I think China in 1997 will want to take over hearts and minds as well as real estate.'

I don't think ordinary Chinese



Those grovelling for a living in small boats in Aberdeen harbour, will hardly notice the Chinese takeover



# colony

Hong Kongers have much to fear from the takeover.

Those already living in poverty in tiny tenement flats with the whole family sharing two small rooms, or those grovelling for a living in small boats in Aberdeen harbour, will hardly notice. They might prefer some bricks around those panes of glass though!

Those who might fear the Chinese are those with money — but maybe they haven't got much to fear either.

James seemed to differ. He reported that 6 million people lived in Hong Kong and not all of them own Rollers. According to him, up in the bulging apartment block nobody has any plans to stay poor (who does?). 'They're here to make it,' said James.

It seemed to me watching the programme that some have 'made it' faster than the rest will ever dream of doing, especially under Chinese rule.

I think 'Postcard from Hong Kong' could have been a far better programme if James had talked to some ordinary Hong Kongers about their fears and worries instead of only talking to the rich.

The British flag is looking very tatty these days and it's about time it came down in one of the last colonial outposts of the British Empire and real Hong Kong people were left to get on with their lives in the way they want.



It either sees it as a threat to its own ports, like Shanghai, or an opportunity en route to the West

Photos: Alan Clark

# CIA-Contra crack attack on US cities

BY DANIEL ROBERTSON

THE story of CIA involvement in supporting the extreme-right Nicaraguan Contra terrorists has already produced some sensational revelations.

These have included weapons sales to Iran's clerical fundamentalists to raise Contra funds and rumours of drug smuggling. Now a story has begun to emerge that could top them all.

The Californian *San Jose Mercury News* has revealed that the crack cocaine epidemic that has brought chaos to black inner-city areas across the US was the result of a covert fund-raising scheme for the Contras. The suspicion that a campaign of social control bordering on genocide was intended is a worry to many American black activists.

Cocaine has long been a popular 'recreational' drug for the middle classes in the US, reflecting its high price and allegedly limited addictive effects. The energy 'high' it produces has been used by hard-pressed yuppies, rock stars and bored sensation seekers.

As a middle-class drug it attracted limited punishment — offenders might experience a few months in jail at worst. But suddenly in 1974 it started to appear in the black ghettos of Los Angeles in a highly purified but very cheap form with frighteningly addictive effects.

A drug formerly only obtainable for \$5,000 an ounce could now be obtained for as little as \$10 a portion. School children were sharing their lunch money to buy this highly addictive drug that can drive its victims to extreme violence.

The result was massive social destruction, accelerating black-on-black crime and 'drive-by' killings, and the criminalisation of large numbers of young black men.

Punishment for crack possession was not the few months suffered by

middle-class white cocaine offenders, but steep sentences of many years, often 100 times the penalties meted out to rich whites. Clinton has refused to reduce this racist disparity.

Crack possession has been used as justification for imprisoning large numbers of young blacks. It has made a major contribution to the massive rise in crime in the USA over the last 15 years.

Some states are now spending more on imprisonment than on education, with privatisation of prisons producing rich pickings for big business. A large majority of the new prisoners are black or Hispanic.

If present trends continue a majority of young black men will be in prisons or labour camps within 15 years. Is this US capitalism's answer to its failure to provide jobs for its exploding 'under class' — drug addiction and prison camps?

## Invention

Crack had been invented in California in the 1970s by locals mistakenly trying to simulate 'free base'. This is a South American impure, cocaine derivative that can be smoked. They accidentally discovered an easy way of producing a concentrated and highly addictive smokeable form of the drug that became known as 'crack' or 'rock'.

Kits for making crack soon became available throughout the USA, but the real epidemic of addiction was to follow a decade later.

Central to the story is Oscar Danilo Blandon, a Nicaraguan former rich slum- and land-owner under CIA-backed dictator Somoza, drug-runner and fund-raiser for the Contras, latter-day undercover agent for the DEA (US Drug Enforcement Agency), and CIA 'asset'.

Blandon appeared in Los Angeles in the early 1980s just as the Contras were beginning their CIA-organised

campaign to overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

The House of Representatives in Washington DC, still smarting after the defeat in Vietnam, had passed an amendment to the 1983 Military Appropriations Bill forbidding support for the Contras, so the CIA had to operate using secret, illegal means.

This was several years before Oliver North organised arms sales to Iran as a Contra fund-raiser, and other secret means for finding funds had to be organised.

Blandon originally tried to raise funds by conventional means, through a local pro-Contra group, but with little success. But soon he found a lucrative money-spinner.

Teaming up with another Nicaraguan exile, Norwin Meneses, he flew to meet the Contra chief, Enrique Bermudez, a known CIA protectee. Meneses is known in Nicaragua as the 'King of Drugs'.

The Colombian connection was made and soon Los Angeles was flooded with cheap cocaine and weapons. The main customer was 'Freeway Rick' Ross, the crack king of LA.

The trick of turning cocaine into crack was soon discovered by Ross with devastating results. His profits could top millions in a day.

Local gangs — the Crips and the Bloods — became rich on this enormous trade and amassed substantial armouries to defend their patches, frequently achieved with violent gun battles.

Poor communities across America have experienced immeasurable suffering as a result of a flood of crack that has engulfed city after city.

US airforce bases were allegedly used by the aircraft bringing in these cargoes of death.

These drug smuggling activities went unpunished by the authorities throughout the period of the Contra war, despite several prosecutions. They always somehow managed to avoid a successful prosecution.

Only in recent years has Blandon's continued drug smuggling become a punishable offence — now that it has lost its political purpose and thus CIA protection.

Numerous investigators, including journalists, have had their activities obstructed. An over-enthusiastic DEA investigator was sacked when he got too close to the truth.

## Protection

Federal prosecutors have blocked access to official documents detailing Blandon's CIA links — his history is clearly being protected. The CIA were fully aware of what they were doing — but to American imperialism black lives are expendable and black energy best diverted into mutual destruction.

The story has emerged as a result of the recent prosecution of Ross for drug dealing, with Blandon as a major prosecution witness. Blandon, now recruited to the DEA as a means of avoiding imprisonment following several run-ins with the law, has been involved in recent years in setting up a 'sting' operation for his former business partner Ross.

The Contra war has long since ceased and agents like Blandon are no longer of political use — they can be used for other purposes.

Ross's attorney, Alan Fenster, has called for a new trial in the light of revelations of CIA involvement. Ross claims that he was effectively only a conduit for US government policy.

Blandon, who has pocketed \$166,000 in pay-offs from the US authorities, is now back in

Nicaragua. He served only two years in US prisons for offences that would have earned anyone else life.

The contrast with the lengthy sentences of young blacks caught with tiny quantities of crack could not be greater. He has caused a sensation by admitting that his drug running was conducted to raise cash for the Contras.

The implication is that the US authorities must have known of his activities and did nothing to prevent the resulting social catastrophe.

Meneses, well known to the FBI for his drug smuggling and murderous history, has never been successfully prosecuted for his activities in the US, despite being implicated in 45 investigations. He is now also back in Nicaragua, where he has been imprisoned on drug charges, but faces early release this summer.

Enrique Miranda, a former colleague of Meneses and his accuser in the trial that got him imprisoned, has gone public on the CIA's role in cocaine smuggling. He has since 'disappeared'.

Nicaraguan legal authorities are baffled by these men's immunity from serious prosecution during their long involvement at the centre of the US crack epidemic.

Anger is spreading through black communities in the US as they realise the enormity of what has happened.

The full implications of what US imperialism has in store for its poor — increasingly targeted for welfare cuts that will further accelerate the slide into criminality — are laid bare by this sickening story.

*San Jose Mercury News* has a very extensive World Wide Web site on this story at <http://www.sjmercury.com/drugs/> where there is updated news, pictures, videos, sound clips and copies of supporting documents. Internet coverage has played a major role in preventing censorship of this story in Nicaragua, which now has a right-wing government embarrassed by its implications.



## Edinburgh International Festival

## Hard-line surrealism, soft-core satire

BY TERRY BROTHERSTONE

A VIOLINIST — who in real life, I understand, is Charlie Chaplin's nephew — played his instrument while suspended upside down or swinging violently over a piano, which, as it poured forth its music mechanically, had apparently been supplied also with the power of independent movement.

One naked man gargled with a kind of rhythmic desperation as a dominatrix seemed to urinate endlessly into his mouth. Two others were imprisoned in a fridge while, time and again, its door was violently opened and noisily shut.

There was a diva with golden hair the length of a cricket pitch, looking like a Wagnerian heroine whose head had been dipped in over-enthusiastic fertiliser. An opera singer with a small model ship on his head sang on top of a wardrobe. The wardrobe, along with the fridge, a larger model galleon and a pair of huge stiletto-heeled shoes finished up suspended above the eight human performers who were clad in PVC.

If theatre is about challenging the established order of things, the Spanish composer Carles Santos, and his troupe of Catalan surrealists, put the second week of the 50th Edinburgh Festival right on track. Their *L'esplèndida vergonya del fet mal fet* ('The Splendid Shame of the Deed Badly Done') was a concatenation of deeds done rather well.

But some, I am glad to say, cared enough to declare it shameful and walk out. Others booed, and cried 'Rubbish!' Most gave the show a remarkably enthusiastic ovation, without, I suspect, knowing quite why.

As European civilisation appears to plunge into ever-greater madness, this is a celebration of the power of theatre to re-order expectation. Unders-

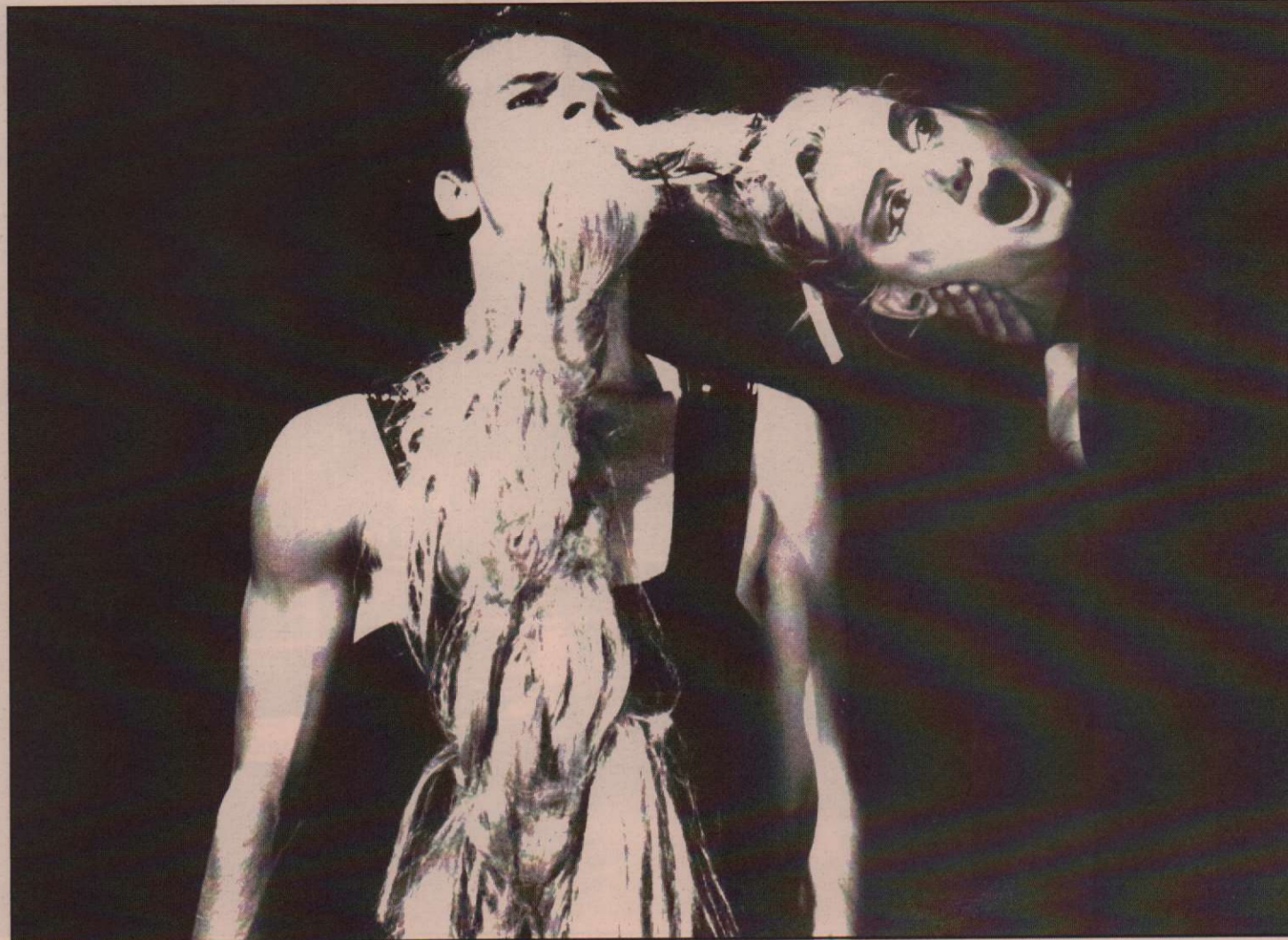
From *L'esplèndida vergonya del fet mal fet* by Carlos Santos

Photo: Keith Brame

tanding is not the point. Looking with fresh eyes at everything else in the Festival (and indeed in the world outside) is. Surrealism lives in the performing arts.

FROM Tokyo too came a challenge. Modern Japan, like the avenger MacDuff in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, was 'untimely

ripped' from the womb of history. Japanese culture can give the sense of a people who have known disaster and need to create the conditions for reflection on meanings beyond those immediately apparent from everyday experience.

**Renyo** ('Far From the Lotus') is the final part of a Butoh trilogy. Butoh has roots in panto-

mime; modern, religious and show dance; the Japanese theatrical forms, *kabuki* and *noh*; and international performance art.

The Tomoe Shizune and Hakuto company perform with such perfection that, although their movements (dance is the wrong word) initially seem alien and ugly, they quickly command total attention.

They defy routine criticism because their work is about a set of relationships each individual must determine for himself or herself — relationships between life and death, mind and body, tradition and modernity, performance and audience.

The colours are black and red, earth-brown and swirling orange. The sound is of water,

trickling and in torrent, or of pulsating, repetitive music. And the human focus of it all is based on balance and control. Every part of the body from foot to face is at the performer's command.

IF Butoh is an expression of how perfectly honed movement can be an international artistic language, so too, in its Western-based way, was the work of Martha Graham. The American choreographer — who has been called 'the mother of modern dance', who tutored Hollywood stars in movement, and who when required put Rudolph Nureyev in his place — died, aged 96, in 1991.

Her company survives largely to preserve what can be reconstructed of her repertoire, and in Edinburgh performed dances premiered between 1914 and 1950. It runs the risk of turning the most alive of the performing arts into a set of museum exhibits. Its current male dancers sometimes seem stronger in athleticism and nostalgic respect than feeling.

But Graham conceived her best parts for women (led by herself), and when the company's female team dance parts of her 1936 anti-war piece *Sketches From Chronicle*, academic interest is transformed to real excitement. There were hints of this earlier in Katherine Crockett's rendering of the short and starkly modernist evocation of grief, *Lamentation* (1930), and at moments in other dances.

Graham was also a pioneer of the idea that modern dance can be political, as well as touching, erotic and exhilarating. Her tribute to the victims of the Spanish Civil War, *Deep Song* (1937), was performed by her pupil and colleague, Christine Dakin, in a second programme I did not see.

LOCAL colour in Edinburgh was provided by a piece of populist theatre, John McGrath's *A Satire of the Four Estates*. This is an ingeniously designed, brightly scored, and professionally performed romp, the title of which alludes to Sir David Lyndsay's 16th-century *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estates*, famously revived by Tyrone Guthrie at the second Edinburgh Festival in 1948.

The modern version lacks the bite and dialectical tension in the original, which was written to warn the pre-Reformation Scottish court that social breakdown threatened unless corruption in church and state was rooted out. McGrath too easily assumes the agreement of his audience for his central proposition that some measure of independence for a 'new Scotland' will create the political conditions for a more humane society that will be an example to others.

The 'fourth estate', the gutter press, we are asked to concur, now represents the main threat to this vision. It is embodied here in Lord Merde (John Bett), an Australian tycoon everyone can identify as a villain without being asked to think to hard.

Written in rhyming couplets, which are well sustained and occasionally witty but eventually jar, McGrath's *Estaites* scores with a few satirical sallies (against former industrial militant turned Thatcherite STV boss, Gus MacDonald, for example) but the palpable hits are too rare.

In my view, too, the political and historical analysis is disturbingly naive, conceding mightily to Scottish nationalism. And it is ironic that the show depends in a rather crucial way on highland dancing girls from one of Edinburgh's notorious *cosa nostra* of private schools.

Strapping toe-tappers, nimble of limb, they are; but their role in the piece as saviours of the 'new Scotland' makes one somewhat fearful of what this future political location might be like.

## Book review

## Althusserian prejudice and puritan distaste

TERRY EAGLETON's catchy title *Heathcliffe and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* provides a tenuous link with the historic trauma of the Irish Famine of the 1840s.

Although the Brontë's father was an Anglo-Irish Anglican priest, none of the sisters wrote about Ireland or the Irish.

Charlotte and Emily did create enduring images of the colonised 'monster': Rochester's mad wife Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, and the Liverpool founding Heathcliffe in *Wuthering Heights*.

But Eagleton is forced to acknowledge in footnotes that Heathcliffe is not Irish; the ethnic references in the text are to that 'Lascar', 'gypsy' or 'Spaniard'. He also neglects to discuss the demonisation of the working-class Luddites in Charlotte's *Shirley*.

DESPITE such literary opportunism in his opening essay, Eagleton has produced an impressive, scholarly work addressing several key issues in Irish and European cultural history.

Regarded as a radical literary critic and leading academic Marxist, Eagleton has a theoretical forebear in the French Stalin-

ist Louis Althusser, who reprimanded Marx for his 'unscientific' obsession with dialectics.

Althusser posited that superstructural phenomena like art, literature, law and religion are ideological free-floating systems which nevertheless capture human beings in an endless historical trap from which there is no escape, no possibility of real, revolutionary change.

In his early work Eagleton defines literature as ideology. This implies that literature and art carry out the same conservative and state-enforcing function as religion and law.

THERE may well be radical priests and lawyers, but that does not mean that they fill the same roles as artists, poets or novelists.

These latter distinguish themselves insofar as they demand a certain kind of freedom as a necessary form of being.

The nature of that freedom has always been problematic but it has enabled some human beings to subvert, break through or penetrate what Eagleton describes as 'ideology'.

TO EAGLETON's credit, he eloquently destroys the revisionist (i.e. Tory libertarian) historians, both English and Irish, who dismiss the Irish Famine as a piece of Republican mythology, or maintain that it was a necessary, painful entry of Irish society into 'modernity'.

The Great Hunger has been described as the 'Irish Belsen'. In less than four years, between 1845 and 1849, Gaelic Ireland was abjectly, destroyed, through

starvation, forced labour and mass migration.

The Irish peasantry bore this monstrous burden of colonial capitalism and lost a generation, rights to land, language and folk culture.

What emerges after the 1850s is a 'modern' pre-industrial but capitalist society.

The Catholic Church set its face against pagan and folk religious remnants. Traditional tillage and land ownership was replaced by large-scale pastoral production. A dense railway network was created. Dublin and Belfast expanded with an emerging urban middle class and proletariat.

Irish culture is shaped by trauma, a sense of irredeemable loss and deeply conservative instincts. Paradoxically, this very conservatism makes Irish nationalism such a visceral force.

Politically reactionary in later life, Yeats wanted to recreate a myth of Celtic aristocracy and cultured peasantry, scorning the 'foul rag and bone shop of the heart' and the 'passionate intensity' of those engaged in the anti-colonial struggle.

Yet, as Eagleton argues, the poet represented a disquieting threat to what Edward Said calls the 'consolidating' ideology of British imperialism.

However much Marxists may recoil at the Yeatsian vision, we must recognise that his project was to create a new national culture independent of the British state.

AS ONE who has stomached Althusser's ditching of dialectics, Eagleton has a problem dealing

Peter Fryer is currently unwell. Workers Press wishes him a speedy recovery, and, along with his regular readers, looks forward to the return of his 'Personal Column' as soon as he is fit and able to write.

■ *Heathcliffe and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*, by Terry Eagleton, Verso Press, London 1995

Tom Owen



# Australian Tories launch attack

BY MIKE COOKE

**WELFARE, education and health are the budget targets of the recently elected Tory government in Australia, led by Prime Minister John Howard. The Coalition of Liberals and Nationals put forward its first budget on 20 August, after the mass protest on 19 August in Canberra.**

## Social security

WELFARE rights groups say that more than 30 per cent of the expenditure cuts in the budget unfairly target people on low incomes.

Cuts to social security include forcing migrants to wait two years before they become eligible for benefits. This measure, along with cuts in rent assistance and a review of entitlement, is to 'save' the government \$745 million in the next two years.

The plan is to hit the unemployed hard. Unemployment is set to remain around 8.4 per cent in the coming year, according to the government.

A further \$1.5 billion has been slashed from programmes designed to help people back to work.

Tory employment minister Jocelyn Newman has described the 'Working Nation' training schemes for the long-term unemployed as a 'cruel hoax'. But she offers no alternative except driv-

ing some of the most vulnerable people in Australia into destitution.

The tougher tests of job-seeking activity will force the unemployed to look endlessly for jobs that do not exist. From 1 January, the government will increase the penalty time from two to six weeks for the first breach of the job-seeking criteria and 13 weeks for the second.

Despite government rhetoric about encouraging people to 'save' money, people are to be forced to run down their savings before being able to get the dole.

Before a family with more than \$10,000 in the bank, or a single person with over \$5,000, had to wait four weeks before becoming eligible.

The new government rules have halved the threshold. Further, people will have to wait a week for each \$1,000 over the threshold before being entitled to the dole.

Those forced out of work by industrial 'rationalisation' will have to live off their redundancy money for 14 weeks before qualifying. And those who move into areas with 'lower employment prospects', such as rural or outlying areas, may now be forced to wait up to 26 weeks.

A 'dob-in-a-dole-bludger' telephone service is to be set up for employers who want to complain about the attitude of job seekers. 'Dole-bludgers' are the archetypal Australian doleys who, according to the right-wing media playing on the prejudices of middle-class simpletons, sit on the beach all day while dreaming up yet new scams to rip-off the

system. Despite government claims of widespread fraud it is counting on savings of only \$7 million in the first year and \$18 million in the second from 'anti-fraud' measures.

Rental assistance is to be cut to single people sharing homes by \$24 a fortnight on the grounds they are 'family', whether they are related or not.

The earnings credit scheme that allowed people to earn up to \$60 a fortnight from part-time or casual work has been abolished, along with the employment entry scheme where people on finding work were given a little extra cash to buy the right clothes, work boots and so on.

Those moving from an invalid support to a disability support pension will be required to undergo a medical examination, which is likely to adversely affect visually-impaired people.

## Health

THE Coalition government policy is to shift as many middle-to high-income Australians from using Medicare and pharmaceutical benefits schemes to privately-funded medicine.

The 20 August budget has been promoted as the start of 'restraining' health-care expenditure.

Medicare and the other health benefits are labelled 'middle-class welfare' and yet the direction is to ensure that it is only the well-off, so-called 'middle Australia', that will receive any civilised form of health care.

■ Single earners with taxable

income above \$50,000 (\$100,000 for couples and families) would be charged a higher rate of Medicare levy while single earners with a taxable income of less than \$35,000 (\$70,000 for couples and families) will be offered a reduced private insurance premium or tax rebate.

Further:

■ Hospital funding grants to the states is to be slashed by \$73.5 million in 1996-97.

■ Medicare fee schedules are to be frozen for a year at the 31 October level and for some services rebates will be reduced or abolished. This means doctors will be more likely to want to treat private rather than Medicare patients.

■ Dental services to the disabled and elderly are to go.

■ Testing services are to be opened up to private providers and expenditure on them is to be capped.

■ Drugs will cost more to users of the health service, with concessionary patients charged \$3.20 and general patients \$20.

■ Capital grants to nursing homes will go and patients may now be charged an entry deposit. Residential subsidies will be means-tested. The elderly may be forced to sell their homes or face being left without nursing home care.

■ States are to be given responsibility for public health programmes, which means that the care received will depend on where people live.

The government reckons the private health insurance rebate and higher Medicare levy will make for a 1.5 per cent increase in

private health fund membership. It is currently around 33 per cent, down from the 68 per cent membership level in 1982, despite the Labor government's own attempts to push more into private funding.

Private health insurance funds are expanding, gobbling up resources that should go to looking after the ill. There are currently 88 such funds.

And premiums are increasing much faster than inflation. A report released in March 1995 by the Australian Tax Research Foundation showed that the annual family payments of one fund rose 104 per cent in real terms between 1986 and 1993.

## Education

UNIVERSITY operating grants are to be cut 5 per cent and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), whereby students have to pay part of their education costs on a loan basis, are to be increased.

HECS is to be reorganised within a new three-tier system and the repayment rate increased.

There is also a plan to allow 25 per cent on top of government/HECS-funded places to be full fee-paying.

Additional cuts of \$450 million were also made to student funding. This adds up to \$2.4 billion in cuts to higher education, more than a quarter of all budget cuts.

■ From 1997, student money will be subject to a stricter means-testing of parental income, up to the age of 25. The mature student rate will only be given to those over at the start of the particular course.

Most students living away from home will have to take out supplementary loans to survive, which will be paid back at the same rate as HECS.

Migrants will not receive any payments for their first two years in Australia. The income threshold for student earnings will be reduced.

From 1998, student money and unemployment benefits for young people under 21 and full-time students under 25 the plan is to combine them into a common Youth Allowance, means tested according to parental income.

Students earnings on top of this allowance will be decreased from \$230 per fortnight to \$60. This proposal is to be finalised early next year after a 'consultation process'.

The implications of the education pre-budget statement released on 9 August are stark.

Up to 30,000 undergraduate places are likely to be lost. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) estimates 1,000 administrative jobs will go. The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) expects significant job losses. Individual attention to students and teaching quality will go.

Universities in Western and South Australia may merge, and

many faculties will close. Post-graduate study is set to be cut by up to one-third at some universities.

Up to 38,000 potential post-graduate students could be affected by axed courses or increased fees.

Carolyn Allport, the national president of the NTEU, said: 'The government has made it clear that it will not provide funding for staff pay rises, which it has acknowledged are well deserved. When this is factored into the equation, the cuts are in the order of 10 per cent.'

John Nolan-Neylan, president of the National Union of Students (New South Wales), said:

'With 25 per cent of university places up for sale, and assistance to just 0.17 per cent of places [through scholarships] provided for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, only the privileged will benefit from this budget, at the expense of the remainder of society.'

In the compulsory education sector private schools are to get increased public funding at the expense of public schools.

## National savings

DURING the election campaign the Coalition said it wanted to increase 'national savings'. What the Tories mean by this is that people should increase their personal savings.

But what is behind the 'national savings' crusade is the need for people to 'provide for themselves' in terms of unemployment, health care, pensions and so on.

It is part of the international drive of capital to smash up social provision of services through the capitalist state and cast the burden on the working class.

Those who are unemployed or old are surplus to capital's requirements and must be forced to provide for themselves. If workers don't 'save' when they are in work, so much the worse for them.

The government budget 'Statement 2' complains that the 'trend decline in recent years has been a sharper trend decline in household saving, offset partly by an increase in corporate saving' although this 'may reflect movements in the distribution of national income between wages and profits'.

That is, the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer.

THE relationship between the working class and capitalism has profoundly changed in the advanced capitalist countries like Australia (and Britain).

The resulting earthquakes in the class struggle throughout the world create new conditions for the working class in its struggle against capital.



One of the angry protesters at the Canberra parliament on 19 August being bundled off by police

## The need for a new socialist party

We print another response to the initiative taken by the Workers Revolutionary Party towards the building of a new socialist party. Each week we aim to print a selection of views on this. Anybody interested in taking part in this discussion should mail, fax or e-mail (see back page) contributions which should be 300-400 words in length.

For more information about the steering committee and its plans for the future contact the coordinator, Steve Ballard, 0181-889 7255

## Looking back and forward

CONCERNING the discussion on the crisis in the labour movement and the need for a new socialist party, my mind goes back to the discussions which took place on the general committee of Harrow Labour Party after the national party's landslide victory in 1945.

I recall discussions about the Labour Party conference and how it was going to be possible to carry through the policy without changing the whole way the system of government worked.

It is relatively easy and straightforward to set up and organise a working-class party dedicated to working-class politics and to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' government.

This does not just mean the election of a sufficient number of representatives to form a majority government.

The whole question of participation in elections needs to be examined to see what if any benefit can be obtained for the party and the class.

This must necessarily mean weeding out from all layers of government administration all those who are really interested in continuing to serve the capitalist state. This must include most (if not all) senior civil servants, members of the judiciary, and police, army, prison service and immigration service personnel.

It has been estimated that there are more Quango appointees — all firm supporters of capitalism — than there are in elected office.

We must examine closely how to achieve a workers' democracy. The Soviet Union had what on the face of it was a very democratic electoral system, yet it permitted Stalinism to flourish.

In the Soviet Union the bureaucrats were all members of the Communist Party. Did this give that party control over the bureaucracy or did it give the bureaucracy control over the party?

What would be the role of trade unions in the state machinery? Remember that the British state's bureaucrats are members of unions such as the TUC-affiliated First Division Association (the trade union of 'Yes Prime

Minister' bureaucrats like Sir Humphrey). Labour leader Tony Blair has just put the FDA's secretary into the House of Lords as a Labour baroness.

We do not want the typical trade union full-time official as a government bureaucrat. Whose side would they be on? Whose side are they on now? Probably, their own.

It would be quite impossible to have the kind of discussion we had in 1945 in today's Labour Party, because there is no perception of the need or the ability to change the way society is organised. There is no conception of the need or the ability of working-class men and women to take control of society or their own destiny.

I hope these comments may generate some discussion which I look forward to participating in and any new movement in the future.

Ron Spurway  
South London

■ NEXT MEETING:  
Wednesday 9 October.  
Details Steve Ballard,  
0181-889 7255.

## Coming soon

AUSTRALIA's Coalition government stepped back from the politically explosive imposition of Medicare 'co-payment' charges for health services. The main target of such a measure would be pensioners, the largest user group of health care.

Co-payments were originally conceived by the last Labor government and were advocated by the National Commission of Audit.

But there is wide public support for Medicare and bulk billing, which would be undermined by a co-payment.

The Institute of Public Affairs has calculated that a \$5 co-payment with the introduction of a 'safety net' would save the government more than \$1 billion a year. Last year this

body called for budget cuts of \$15 to \$16 billion over two years.

Much of the savings would come from discouraging 'unnecessary' visits by pensioners to the doctor. Early medical intervention will be deterred by the \$5 payment, according to the Doctors' Reform Society.

An added benefit for the cost-cutters is that many pensioners would die before treatment, further reducing the Australian medical bill.

The DRS says the estimated 15 per cent drop in Medicare usage would also result in doctors providing more health screening and regular check-ups to maintain their incomes — services that would be provided only to wealthier people paying more \$5 co-payments.



# Foreign troops out of all Kurdistan! Imperialism out of the Middle East!

**THIS week's US imperialist missile blitz against Iraq has got nothing to do with concern for the Kurdish people. It is meant as a lesson, not just to Saddam Hussein. It is a warning to all the different nationalist leaders in the area — including the warring Kurdish groups — that US imperialism is still boss.**

Commentators (even the right-wing *Evening Standard!*) pointed to the upcoming presidential elections as the reason behind Clinton's barbaric cruise missile onslaught on south Iraq. But these are merely accidental matters. The whole drive of imperialist policy in the Middle East is to suppress the legitimate demands of the people, workers and peasants, in the interests of big business, particularly the oil business. Imperialism will use all the

**BY MIKE COOKE**  
weapons in its arsenal, including military might. National oppression in the Middle East is the essential expression of imperialist oppression in the region. The US uses its links and money with the Kurdish nationalist groups to divide and rule. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which is now col-

laborating with Iraq, has been used by the US in the past. Clinton and the US ruling class are forced to demonstrate to these nationalist leaders that they must do nothing to threaten 'stability' or the price of oil on the world's markets. In just 15 minutes a total of 27 missiles were unleashed on alleged 'air defence' targets by B-52 bombers flying halfway across the world from the Pacific, and from US ships in the Gulf. Each missile cost £1 million — this from a nation that, on the grounds of cost, has just made

changes to its welfare aid programme that will plunge more than 1 million children in the US into poverty. Iraqi government sources said that the attacks had killed five people and wounded 19 and that most of the rockets had missed their supposed military targets or been shot down. The western powers deliberately exaggerate the accuracy of their missiles in order to deny the deaths of civilians. Indeed, when a second brutal US cruise missile attack was launched the following day, with

the full support of John Major, the British prime minister stated that the first onslaught had not hit all the targets that had been 'hoped'. He showed no remorse that missed targets meant dead human beings. And that other weapon of the West — the embargo imposed on Iraq since the Gulf War in 1991 — again hits ordinary people, driving them into starvation and abject poverty, not Saddam. And why were the missiles fired on south Iraq even though Saddam's invasion force was in the Kurdish areas in the north?

It was the Iraqi seizure of the Kurdish city of Arbil in the UN-designated 'safe haven' which was used as the reason for the blitz. Clinton is not in the least worried by the plight of the Kurdish people. His concern for them and the 'safe havens' is a sham. He did not lift a finger when the Turkish army terrorised and razed Kurdish villages in the war against the PKK guerillas. Indeed the US and the western powers have stood by as the Turkish government conducted a vicious war against the Kurdish people. And the people of the so-called 'safe havens' will be sacrificed as they were in Bosnia if it suits US purposes.

## Air France workers oppose African expulsions

PROTESTS against France's tough immigration policies have included a pledge from an Air France union to prevent a government plan to fly out two planeloads of African people. Several thousand people marched through Paris on Wednesday 28 August to support African immigrants demanding residence permits. Demonstrators chanted: 'We all are children of immigrants.' The CFDT union said it had learned of a government request to charter one of the state-owned airline's planes to fly illegal immigrants back to Tunisia, Niger and Zaire. It described the plan as 'a fresh violation of human rights.' The CFDT's Air France branch is intervening immediately, at all levels of Air France management, to prevent the airline's planes and staff from being used in such police operations, the union said. CIMADE, an organisation looking after immigrants, said the government was also planning an airforce flight to Mali and Senegal. France 3 television said

15 Africans facing expulsion orders were taken from a detention centre to Evreux air base north of Paris. An air force plane from Evreux returned more than 50 immigrants to Mali, Senegal, Zaire and Gabon three weeks ago. Some 500 people protesting against the deportations marched through the central city of Lyons and a further 400 demonstrated in the western city of Rennes. Protests in support of immigrants have increase since police raided a Paris church three weeks ago and dragged out some 300 Africans, 10 of whom had been on hunger strike. Four of the Africans were deported on a previously scheduled charter flight and 66 have received expulsion orders, some 20 of which could legally be enforced at any time. Another 49 have been promised residence permits following a review of their cases on humanitarian grounds. Immigrants have called for a demonstration on 18 September at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, eastern France.

## Cyprus hunger strike

Anne Muir is currently on hunger strike outside the Turkish embassy in Belgrave Square, London, protesting against the recent brutal killings of two young Cypriots by Turkish forces and demanding the removal of Turkish troops from Cyprus. She is a member of the National Federation of Cypriots in Great Britain which has organised this non-stop, 24-hour fast. Anne replaced Sotoris Theodorocopoulos and Linda Karmaika who went 14 days without food and others will take over from her after a similar period as they maintain a permanent vigil. Similar protests are taking place in Cyprus and attempts are being made to have them also in the United States and



Melbourne, the city with the second largest Greek speaking population after Athens. Anne said: 'We want a united Cyprus and a return of all refugees without conditions. All property which is occupied by illegal settlers must be handed back to the rightful owners.' She particularly called for a boycott of holidays in the north of Cyprus. 'Show your solidarity for the people of Cyprus — do not use their stolen homes and properties for your holiday!'

Only in the fight against the exploitation by the big capitalist powers can a leadership be built that unites the working class and peasants of these areas and brings peace. ■ Foreign troops out of all Kurdistan! ■ Imperialism out of the Middle East!

# The man from NatWest in Belgrade

**BY CHARLIE POTTINS**

FORMER Tory Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, in his new £250,000 a year job with the National Westminster Bank, has been seen to see a valued customer — Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, the man who launched the war in Bosnia. It was Hurd who adamantly opposed lifting the arms embargo to let Bosnians defend themselves, declaring that this would 'only create a level killing field'. Sowing media myths about 'age-old hatreds' and people all intent on killing each other, the Foreign Office threw its weight behind Lord Owen's partition plans. Hurd went to Belgrade with French Foreign Secretary Alain Juppé in the autumn of 1994. They told Milosevic that Serb forces could take eastern Bosnia, including the towns of Gorazde, Zepa and Srebrenica. When Srebrenica fell, with the massacre of thousands of its menfolk, in which units from Serbia participated, Whitehall spin-doctors blamed the Bosnians, and the Tory media were told to portray Milosevic as a peacemaker.

NatWest, said to be experts on privatisation in eastern Europe, has sent Hurd, who resigned from the government last year and joined the bank a few months later, to Belgrade on business in July, although the news has just surfaced. So far as we know, the Old Etonian doesn't speak a word of Serbo-Croat, but clearly he and Milosevic understand each other, and discussed deals worth many millions. Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, a former diplomat when Hurd was at the Foreign Office, is also working for NatWest now, and was on hand to help in the talks, according to Tanjug news agency. A spokesperson for NatWest Markets, of which Hurd is deputy chairman, said last week: 'We have been appointed to advise the republic of Yugoslavia on the external debt and on the privatisation of the PTT [the telephone system]. I would expect that Mr Hurd would have had some involvement.'

Although sanctions on Serbia have been lifted it cannot approach the International Monetary Fund yet, so the British bank will help find other sources of finance. Meanwhile a report from Kosovo, the mainly-Albanian inhabited region which Milosevic has under military rule, says that more than 350 Bosnian prisoners of war and refugees from Srebrenica were forced to work in the once-British owned Trepca mines. **Quoted** Kosova Communication on 28 August also quoted German radio news reports that some 1,500 prisoners of war from other regions were working there. The mines were closed in February 1989 when Serbian troops suppressed a strike and occupation by the Kosova miners, opposed to the removal of the province's autonomy. On 25 January, the Serbian authorities announced that work

had resumed at Trepca and claimed 280 'ethnic Albanians' were employed there. The Bosnian government has apparently confirmed that prisoners from Srebrenica are employed in Trepca, and the Belgrade Helsinki human rights group is looking into the matter. The Serbian government has tried to move reluctant Serb refugees from Krajina to Kosovo, to strengthen its hold. A shadowy Liberation Army of Kosovo has claimed responsibility for explosions in the province, and this has been the pretext for extreme Serb nationalists such as Vojislav Seselj of the Serb Radical Party to campaign there. ■ Workers at the Zastava arms plant, linchpin of Serbia's arms industry, have been on strike since 21 August, and some have started a hunger strike. The workers are fighting for unpaid wages, and demanding the sacking of the general manager, who on 27 August told 3,500 workers to take forced leave until 2 September, when the plant's problems would be discussed with government officials.

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