



Workers Press

WEEKLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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NEW STRIKE

BAN



LifeLine Services Workers marched in London on 26 May 1993. Will they be banned?

GOVERNMENT plans to make strikes in the essential services' illegal is a threat to the rights of all workers and those fighting the oppression of the capitalist state.

Leaked documents, summarised in last week-end's 'Observer,' say that those in the cabinet drafting the bill believe that it should contain measures to 'make it easier for those who want to work during industrial action.'

In other words, Major and his friends are proposing a scabs' charter.

More is in the pipeline. Last week's Tory Party conference announced that the government planned to remove the immunity of unions calling strikes in the 'essential services', even where a stoppage was preceded by a lawful ballot.

Unions calling such strikes would be liable for damages to employers and individual customers who considered they had been inconvenienced or suffered losses. In other words, any strike action in the public sector could involve the unions being

THE EDITOR

stripped of their funds.

The leaked cabinet paper shows that the government is worried about the recent upturn in strikes — on the London Underground, the railways and the Liverpool docks, for example.

Tory ministers have admitted that it is near-impossible to find a watertight definition of what is an 'essential service'. The government therefore intends to remove immunity from damages where a trade union action had 'disproportionate' or 'excessive' effects. This would give the courts carte blanche to interpret the law in whatever way they chose.

The latest Tory proposal is an attempt to restore the position as it was at the start of the century when the courts ruled that the unions were liable to pay damages to the

bosses for losses resulting from strike action.

It was this legal threat to the unions that brought the Labour Party into being in 1906.

But the situation today is vastly different than it was 90 years ago.

Can those rights be won back through the election of a Labour government?

As the discussion in the Tory Cabinet put it: 'the official Opposition had made some play of its apparent readiness to contemplate measures on industrial action in the essential public services.'

It is more than a 'play'. Today the Labour Party leaders support the retention of all the basic laws which have been passed against the trade unions since 1979. They say openly that they are in favour of compulsory arbitration for disputes in the public sector.

Indeed, Blair and company strive to convince Big Business that they, and not the Tories, are the real party of law and order, the party that will sweep the homeless off the streets and deal with militant strikers and protesters.

There is no way today that the attacks on the unions can be countered by electing

Labour MPs to Parliament, however many workers may still think or desperately hope that this is the case.

The position of Britain in world economy has declined severely since 1900. It now relies even to keep afloat on imported capital, slave wages, the suppression of all trade union rights.

This is why Blair and company promise no reforms for the ordinary people of this country. The crisis of capital forces them to press home with their attacks against the standard of living and the rights of the working class and all those fighting capital.

It is clear that to defend its unions the working class must now turn to the formation of an organisation that can unite its struggles against the ruling class and its state.

In other words it needs a new political party.

But this cannot be a parliamentary party of the sort that the Labour Party has always been.

The new party that is now needed will be one that seeks to unite all the various struggles of the working class and the oppressed with the aim of overthrowing the power of capital.

JOIN PAN-AFRIKAN FREEDOM FIGHTERS ASYLUM CAMPAIGN!

Deportation of African political activists: (Aibong Southey, Kwame Sampong, Esther Lehou.)

PUBLIC MEETING:

Wednesday 23 October

7pm — 365 Brixton Rd, London SW9

UNITE THE STRUGGLES!

CRISIS IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT —

THE NEED FOR A NEW SOCIALIST PARTY

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Workers Press

For a new paper

A NEW movement needs a new newspaper. That was the overwhelming feeling of a 50-strong meeting in London on 10 October.

It is a sign of the new situation that at two days' notice trade union, political and environmental activists turned up in such numbers, especially to an afternoon meeting.

There was a feeling in the air that something new was born on the weekend of 28-30 September. These were the three days of solidarity with the 500 Liverpool dockers who, one year earlier, were sacked for refusing to cross a picket line mounted by young dockers fighting against the return of casual labour.

The weekend's events were jointly planned and organised by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee and Reclaim the Streets. Fittingly the march, rally, music, discussions and picket were held under the title 'Stop the Clampdown - Reclaim the Future'.

From the outset the dockers have encouraged and fought for support for their struggle from all quarters in the labour and trade union movement throughout Britain and internationally. In the run-up to their anniversary weekend, for the first time, they found new allies who are already doing battle with the state and capital against destruction of the environment and injustice carried out against the poorest and most oppressed in society.

* * * * *

WE in Workers Press have entered into this struggle enthusiastically and with confidence in the way the dockers' leadership have carried out their fight. As part of the London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers we encouraged and welcomed the decision of the Campaign Against the Criminal Justice Act to move their planned demonstration on 28 September from London to Liverpool as an act of solidarity with the dockers.

Earlier, on 16 March, a conference attended by 200 people agreed there was a need for a new socialist party which the working class itself would build - the recall conference will be held on 23 November. In the meantime the Workers Revolutionary Party congress in July decided to propose to this recall conference that a transitional organisation be set up. The WRP would then cease to exist and would put its resources, including Workers Press, into this transitional organisation.

We see no future for the development of Marxism unless it emerges from the closed circles - big or small - and takes its responsibilities side-by-side with struggling workers and youth. Clearly 'Reclaim the Future', uniting the dockers and the direct action fighters for justice, is a step forward for the whole working class.

It was therefore only natural that, at the 10 October meeting, we initiated a discussion on a paper for the new movement. It is in this context that we discuss the future of Workers Press.

A Workers Revolutionary Party central committee meeting on 13 October gave its full agreement to the decision: that all those in the fight against state oppression, for workers' rights and with a belief that we must reclaim the future TODAY should come together to act on the decision that a new newspaper be launched for this fight.

The meeting for this action is on 24 October, 2.30p.m. at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square Holborn.

Dockers: to be or not to be official?

THE QUESTION of whether or not the Liverpool dockers' struggle should be made official has been raised in Workers Press.

The answer given to this question must focus on whether or not the independence of the class from the trade union bureaucracy will be furthered as has happened in the dockers' fight.

If by 'official' is meant handing over the leadership of the struggle to the lackeys in the Transport and General Workers' Union bureaucracy (Morris and Co.) then our answer to the question should be a resounding 'NO'.

If by 'official' is meant receiving financial and other support from Morris and Co. whilst the leadership of the struggle, its class independence and democracy, etc. remains in the hands of the dockers themselves then we must say yes to making the fight 'official'.

It is the class independence of the dockers that must be retained and developed. The labour bureaucracy would tie down the dockers' fight if the struggle is taken over by the T&G bureaucrats then it will be 'put on a pedestal' only in order to sell it down the proverbial river.

**Workers' 'officialdom' yes!
Trade Union bureaucrats' officialdom no!**

Martin Shaw
Hull

Continued illusions

PHIL Bowen, representing the 'Revolutionary Platform' of the Socialist Labour Party, argues in Workers Press (28 September) that social democracy lives on in both the Labour Party and the SLP.

He urges readers to join the SLP to fight, and presumably remove, the social democratic leadership.

Perhaps the best way to challenge social democracy is to state what it is. In its hey-day, before the First World War and the October revolution, social democracy was a strategy for achieving socialism.

Social democrats thought that parliamentary reforms nationalising industries, introducing free public education, health, welfare and housing, and maintaining full employment were a step on the way towards a socialist society.

When Stalinism and fascism implemented this programme, social democracy retreated to the idea that socialism was identical to bourgeois democracy plus a commitment to nationalisation, full employment and a welfare state.

By abandoning this commitment, the Labour Party has now ceased to be a social democratic party.

Apart from the SLP, the only UK electoral parties that still give social democracy some credibility are the Scottish Nationalist Party and Plaid Cymru.

Now allied with former Stalinists, social democrats differ amongst themselves only whether their programme should be implemented on a large or small national scale: in Europe, in an isolated Britain, or separately in Scotland, England or Wales.

Continued illusions in social democracy reflect the frustrations of those trade union leaders and members of the intelligentsia who have lost any influence on capital's policy of containment of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie has abandoned

to its old policy of commodity fetishism introducing policies encouraging privatisation, casualisation and unemployment.

Rather than attempting to recruit workers to potentially destructive nationalist parties, Marxists would be better demonstrating that a humane alternative to capitalism is possible.

They would be better asking workers how they think a rationally planned democratic classless society might be brought into being world-wide.

Paul B. Smith
Glasgow

Bob Pennington remembered

I WAS sad to hear of death of Comrade Pennington.

I first met Bob in the early 1960s when I went to work in London.

He, at that time, was an organiser for the Socialist Labour League (SLL), the forerunner of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

Nobody who met Bob would easily forget him. He had a very lighthearted approach to life, which, I felt inspired others to think his way politically. He was the first comrade to warn me about the methods of the late leader of the WRP.

I didn't totally agree with him at that time, but it turned out he was justified by later events.

Bob finally broke with the SLL and joined the International Marxists and continued his struggle for socialism. Unfortunately I never saw him again as I left London shortly after that period.

I remember with warmth going to his house on several occasions for a meal, and meeting his wife and daughter.

These were always happy occasions. I hope they are both well and if, by any chance, they read this letter, I would like to give them my condolences and wish them the best regards for the future.

Ian McLaughlan
Edinburgh

Absolutely marvellous

AFTER twelve months everything goes a little bit stale - its the same thing day in and day out. Even when you go on demonstrations and delegations it gets stale.

But having Reclaim the Streets coming down to Liverpool as an organisation was absolutely marvellous.

It was a tremendous boost to us to see those thousands of mostly young people - particularly when we actually saw them on top of the Rat House [this is what the dockers call the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company headquarters] and in the cranes. It's given us such an unbelievable lift.

What we didn't realise was that the police would follow them after the end of the actual demonstration - which lasted until after 5 p.m.

We didn't give these people the protection we should have done.

To our knowledge, 35 of these young people were picked up and put in prison cells.

They were very badly treated - beaten up and all sorts. Next time we will protect them properly.

If anyone says to me that they are a load of disaffected kids, it's rubbish. I would love to see them in Liverpool again.

Terry Woods
Sacked Liverpool docker

WE WELCOME LETTERS

SEND THEM TO: WORKERS PRESS,
PO BOX 735, LONDON SW8 1YB
— OR PHONE 0171-387 0564

Letters longer
than 500 words
WILL be cut

A falsification?

WHEN I read your article on Cable Street (5 October), I did not know whether to be very sad at the writer's ignorance or very angry at his falsification of facts.

I refer specifically to the paragraph:

'The event was heralded as a victory at the time by the... (CPGB) even though the policy of their leadership in Britain was to ignore the threat and instruct its members to stay away.'

Has the writer or yourself ever talked to the veterans or read the facts in the newspapers of the time? Have you such a hatred of the CPGB of the 1930s that you prefer to spread inaccuracies to a younger generation?

I am sending you a few of the facts of this time - you may not believe me but you can check the records and you will know I write the truth.

(1) In 1935 when all anti-fascists were getting increasingly alarmed, the executive committee of the CPGB appointed an organiser to work against racism and fascism. With the backing, particularly of the London district of the CPGB, all the anti-fascist organisations in east London met and ran meetings, a publicity campaign, including chalking the streets, to rouse everyone to rally against Mosley's attempt to march through east London.

They used the Passionaria slogan 'No Passeran' - 'They shall not pass'.

On 4 October anger and excitement and determination brought out the people against Mosley. George Lansbury and the *Daily Herald* told the people to stay off the streets and let the fascists have free passage.

In spite of police brutality - many people were arrested and injured, some severely so - by 4 pm the fascists and police gave up their attempts. The people had succeeded in stopping the fascists.

Gloria Findlay
Ilford

WRP and new organisation

ON 13 July 1996, the Workers Revolutionary Party declared that it will in the near future dissolve organisationally to form a transitional Marxist organisation. Then, in turn, it will lead to the formation of a new party.

It does not simply justify saying because there is a crisis in the 'working class' it should build a new Marxist organisation.

One can ask: what was wrong with the WRP and the theoretical, political and economic basis it has stood on? Still more, the size of the organisation

tion whether big or small will not bring about [a change] legitimately to it in itself.

Of course the WRP does not say anything new. It believes in the 'Fourth International', which was founded over half a century ago.

One is perplexed. Why should it dissolve itself into a group into a new Marxist organisation whilst holding the same tenets?

This approach is a fallacy. One says [like] a Christian one adheres to Marxism. Is it not true that there are many different Christian believers as Marxist brads? How can we unravel this entangled web? What is our criteria?

We are fortunate enough to look at the *Manifesto of Communism*. There, Marx, by way of criticising those brands of existing socialism arrived at distinguishing himself from them to call himself a Communist.

If we look back less than a decade ago, we see that at the level of economy there was no difference between what the ex-Soviet Union [had] on the one hand, and what its one group of opponents - social democracy or bourgeois economy reforms [had] on the other.

At the level of democracy, all brands of ex-Soviet opponents attacked it for lack of democracy - you can remember that rubbish, namely: socialism with a human face?

Therefore it was not accidental on the basis of such terrible deviation from Marx's critique of capital, both the ex-Soviet bloc and its opponents supported anti-working class and anti-revolutionary regimes in the four corners of the world.

It is suffice to mention that the opponents of the ex-Soviet Union called on the Labour Party, in the decade of 1960 to implement socialist programmes! Who believes that the bourgeoisie will peacefully abdicate the wage labour system?

Again, what was the difference between those who [put] faith into the peaceful transformation of capitalism and thereby the abolition of the wage labour system [sometime] in the future, and those who preached to the working class that they should wait until the world socialist revolution opens up before them because any attempt to [fight for] the socialist revolution now will go no other path than that of the ex-Soviet Union. Is it true? Of course not.

Today, any group who claims, as Communists, who set, as their immediate task, the abolition of the wage labour system, and on this basis criticise other organisations, who claim to be working-class organisations, will have the potential of growing into a big, true Marxist body, opening up a brighter future before the working class and humanity.

M. Amy
No address given

WHAT'S ON? WHAT'S ON? WHAT'S ON?

2 Nov. 9 pm - 2 am - Benefit for Reclaim the Streets featuring FREETOWN AND FIN DE SIECLE. Canterbury Arms, Canterbury Crescent, Brixton, SW9.

5 Nov. Assemble 9 am - STOP THE COPEX ARMS FAIR. Non-violent, sit-down blockade and ceremony in remembrance of all torture victims. Littleworth Common (off A307, Portsmouth Road, opposite Sandown Racecourse).

12 Nov. - Day of Solidarity with McLibel defendants and McDonald workers - Picket your local store. For leaflets and information 0171 713 1269.

23 Nov. 11 am Direct Action Conference in Brighton (details 01273 685913)

23 NOV. 11 am - 5 pm Recall Conference - NEED FOR A NEW SOCIALIST PARTY, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1.

London Support Group for Liverpool dockers meets every Thursday, 7.30 pm Kings Head, Swinton Street, off Grays Inn Road (near Kings Cross station).

Hillingdon Hospital Support Group meets every Sunday 11 am Uxbridge Civic Centre.

PLEASE SEND US DETAILS OF EVENTS WHICH WE CAN INCLUDE

IN THIS LISTING EACH WEEK:
Phone 1071 387 0564, Fax: 0171 387 0569
or post to PO Box 735, London, SW8 1YB

Sick pay victory for short-term workers

BY PETER GIBSON

BOSSES attempting to get round the employment protection laws have been dealt a blow by a court of appeal decision. Just over a week ago it ruled that a worker on a three-month contract was entitled to state sick pay because she had worked for nine months for the same employer.

Many employers use short-term, zero hours or part-time contracts and then claim that the workers are not covered by the employment laws because they are not full-time workers. This is now demonstrated as not true.

Despite its implications for millions of workers the national press killed this story. Maybe this is because they are aware of the impact it could have on the rate of exploitation and the very good profit of the employment agencies.

Part-time cleaners in the Health Service on £3-£3.50 per hour; warehouse workers on similar pay; lorry and van drivers, 45 per cent of whom are employed by agencies; over one million workers in the catering industry. Many in these and other industries have been told they are not covered by employment protection laws because they are not on full-time employment contracts.

But the judges in the court of appeal have ruled that this may no longer be the case.

The employment agencies and those bosses who will only employ people on short-time or casual contracts now face a problem. Their super-exploitation of men and women may be curtailed and they may, as a result of this court ruling, have to pay sick pay.

Also, they may have to accept that all the other employment laws apply. Or it could happen — as in the past when a court ruled in favour of workers — that the the House of Commons changes the law to allow the super-exploitation to continue.

Hounslow UNISON fights the cuts

HOUNSLOW Branch of Unison, representing 3,500 workers in the west London council, has decided to organise a mass lobby of the council on 29 October in protest at the latest round of cuts in jobs and local services.

Savage

This meeting will make a final decision on the cuts and, as well as the council workers, the union is calling for a huge turnout from all sections of the community.

This decision reflects the mood across the country as more and more sections of workers are preparing to fight back against the savage slashing of council expenditure which threatens all the essential services.

The call for the lobby was

agreed at a mass meeting of the Hounslow Unison members on 15 October. It was also agreed to give consideration to holding a strike ballot of some or all of the members if the council finally decides to close Isleworth Day Centre and the Chiswick Child and Family Centre.

As well as continuing to oppose cuts in services and jobs and supporting those councillors who refuse to go along with them Hounslow Unison says it will energetically explore the issue of Trusts and keep the membership and the community informed of this.

It has called upon Unison in London and nationally to organise against the cuts and support the actions of the Hounslow membership.

Brixton group pre-empt police brutality

BY J. VANCE

BLACK activists are at the heart of a new community organisation which has been set up in the south London area of Brixton. Operation Heru's Eye (OHE) is described in a press statement as a key response to the expressions of xenophobia, racism and fascism that the anti-immigration policies of 'Fortress Europe' are increasingly fanning.

Covering the borough of Lambeth, OHE is also seen as a community grassroots response to the actions of the police as they implement 'operation eagle eye', the brainchild of Paul Condon, chief constable of the Metropolitan police.

Police harassment of black youth has dramatically increased since Condon announced his scheme and sections of the black community are determined not to passively wait and see who will follow Brian Douglas and Wayne Douglas as the next victims of police brutality in the area.

OHE is a joint initiative of the Brixton Community Law Centre and the Peoples' Empowerment Network of Lambeth. It has the support of the Black Quest for Justice Campaign and the Justice International Trust of Law-Related Education.

A unique feature of its monitoring work will be the training of youth, and particularly black youth, to operate on the streets with video camcorders, audio recorders and cameras.

They will attempt to record the activities of racist and fascist thugs as well as the police, immigration and other state security personnel.

All evidence will be made available to other interested local, national and international organisations for scrutiny and appropriate action.

● OHE will be officially launched on 25 October at 11 a.m. at a press conference at the Brixton Law Centre premises, 506, Brixton Road, London SW9. For further information call Ms. Janet Rousou, 0171 733 5996 or Kofi Mawuli Klu, 0171 924 9033.



Young black people demonstrate against police violence

Trade unions support Asylum fight

One of the most divisive and anti-working-class aspects of the Tory's racist Immigration and Asylum Act was highlighted by a decision of the October meeting of the Southern and Eastern Regional Council (SERTUC) of the TUC.

The meeting supported a motion from the important Region 1 of the Transport and General Workers Union which welcomed the active intervention of SERTUC in recent demonstrations against the Asylum Act.

The motion went on to say that the Act 'will endanger the rights of all workers who may be forced to inform on colleagues. It will encourage employers to make unwarranted checks on workers from ethnic minorities and may diminish these workers' job opportunities.'

It called on SERTUC to campaign in workplaces against the Act and to

their workplaces in line with this vicious legislation.'

This decision points to one of the ways forward to unite workers in the struggle to smash this legislation. Under the leadership of Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs and church dignitaries the campaign against the Asylum Act has been reduced to acts of charity — providing food and shelter for the refugee families made destitute.

The section of the Act which calls for bosses to check the employment rights of a workforce is a charter for racism as only non-British will be investigated and it can also be used as a pretext to get rid of trade union activists.

In a statement on asylum seekers the SERTUC executive welcomed the recent decision of the High Court against three London councils. This judgement ruled that there

lun seekers are not made destitute while pursuing their claim.

The judge said that the National Assistance Act of 1948 imposed a duty on the authorities 'to provide the bare necessities of life' to people who are fleeing from some of the most oppressive regimes in the world.

Following this judgement SERTUC has called for the reinstatement of social security benefits for asylum seekers. It also called for 'central government to find finance to fund the effects of this judgement, rather than expect already hard-pressed local authorities to bear this burden'.

SERTUC pledge to continue to campaign against the Asylum Act, to support trade union members effected by this legislation and to press a future Labour government

A Series of talks and discussions on his book

'The Power of Ideology'

will be given by the noted Marxist,

Professor

Istvan Meszaros,

in the library of

Conway Hall, Red

Lion Square,

London, WC1

(tube Holborn)

The first of these will

be on

Thursday 31 October

at 7pm.

Support the Liverpool Dockers and their families

Friday 25 October 11.30am-5.30pm

Drake International

504 High Road, Wembley

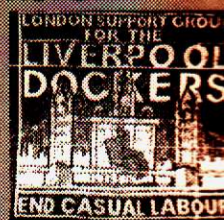
Drake International is currently supplying casual (scab) labour to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board who over a year ago sacked 500 Liverpool dockers. These men are still on strike. Their crime? Refusing to cross a picket line which included many of their own sons. The scabs are working for £400 per hour without holiday or sickness entitlement, and without a guaranteed working week.

Reading this leaflet, you may feel "This has nothing to do with me", but you would be wrong.

Government-backed attacks taking place on workers' and trade union rights in the mines, printing, and now the docks are spreading into office work of all kinds. Bank, insurance, media, shop and local government workers are all facing the imposition of individual contracts on a weekly or even daily basis, forcing people into working longer hours for less pay and worse conditions of all sorts particularly the loss of holiday and sickness rights.

Behind all this is the threat of dismissal hanging over peoples' heads. It is companies like Drake International which will be only too pleased to fill your job if it happens to you, with casual labour. The dockers of Liverpool are currently in the forefront of the struggle to stop the employers taking back entitlements that have been built up over many years. You could be next!

For more information about this picket, ring 0181 806 0249



How dare you defend us!

WITHOUT relaxing its efforts for the Liverpool dockers (consisting entirely of attacks on their stewards and supporters) David Hyland's International Communist Party has broadened its activities on Merseyside, with a meeting on re-education in Sri Lanka; or rather, to promote its leaflet, on 'The political significance of Militant Labour's refusal to oppose the attacks on Sri Lankan Trotskyists'.

One mustn't lose sight of the main issue which, for Hyland, David North and others, in the International Committee of the Fourth International, is never how can we unite behind workers in struggle?, but always, how to 'expose' everybody else.

How dare say Militant can speak for itself. But ten years ago, the Workers Revolutionary Party issued an international call for the release of two members of the International Committee's Sri Lankan section, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), whom the Ceylonese government was intent on imprisoning. Protests were made at Sri Lanka High Commissions in Britain and Australia. We had a resolution of support from the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign (Mendis faced deportation to Sri Lanka). We picketed Air Lanka (see Workers Press, 13 September, 27 September, 1 November, 6 December 1986).

Hyland's International Worker (28 November 1986) rejected our support for the RCL, accusing WRP secretary Cliff Lighter of having 'worked consciously for its physical destruction'. On 20 December, when the WRP demonstrated inside Air Lanka, the Hyland Light Industry gave out a leaflet 'Condemning for defending their comrades! Such farce performances should not deter us from defending Sri Lankan Trotskyists. The comrades like North and Hyland, need all the help they can get.

North's Australian section is the Socialist Labour League. In October 1990, left-wing former Labour MP George Peterson protested to New South Wales Police over the arrest of one of its pamphlet sellers. Writing to the SLL however, also criticised its sectarianism. Proving his point, the SLL replied with a page pamphlet: ITAL George Peterson: Servant of the Capitalist State ENDITAL.

An ICP statement on 27 September addressed on Liverpool dockers to 'draw political lessons' from their strike and break with the union. 'Should you decide to take this road', re-iterated Hyland. 'I can assure you that the International Communist Party would help you in every political and practical assistance its resources allow.' I'm surprised dockers have not leapt at this generous offer. Of course, they've had no examples of ICP help so far.

Complaining there's a campaign against it by 'middle class radicals' (ourselves and Militant), the ICP statement. This took its most sinister form in the lying article by Charlie Pottins in December 23 ITAL Workers ENDITAL intimating that the ICP and its comrades in the International Committee of the Fourth International are CIA agents.'

My article noted the ICP's attack on support from the International Longshore Association (ILA) because the US had a 'history of working with the CIA'. It recalled that Gerry Healy - whom expelled in 1985 - had smeared David North, his former protege, as 'CIA' - which we rejected. These were the only accusations of the CIA. I did say that whether these people were working for, it isn't the working class. Evidently the ICP, which is always calling opponents traitors, prefers facing imagined attacks on handling real ones.

Charlie Pottins

The silent ark

The Silent Ark by Juliet Gellatley with Tony Wardle, Publ. Thorsons (HarperCollins), 1996. Paperback, £6.99. REVIEW BY DANIEL ROBERTSON.

IN this angry book Juliet Gellatley has clearly tied destruction of the environment and problems with human health to the tremendous cruelty inflicted on farm animals using factory farming methods and identifies the big business perpetrators responsible.

The book is partly autobiographical, describing Juliet's life as a campaigner, but also a manifesto for more humane treatment of animals.

Crisis

Concern for animal rights has become a growing political issue, fuelled by the BSE crisis which proves that the bizarre practices of capitalist farming threaten the well-being of human consumers as well as the animals.

The total lack of concern for the human health implications of BSE - commercial interests are completely dominant - reflects the lack of concern for the welfare of farmed animals. Anything goes if it contributes to profit. Reading this book will be an eye opener that will change the readers' views of diet for ever.

Unfortunately, as with many of the things that profoundly affect our lives, most of us have little knowledge of the history and politics of the food on our plates. We tolerate so many injustices because of our ignorance of their impact. This book sets out to change that.

The dominating impact of the meat culture on the world economy is vast and malignant. This is reflected in the statistics of meat production. Almost 40% of the world's grain harvest goes to feed animals, but only 1 kilogram of meat is produced from 10 kilograms of grain.

'Compassion is one of the greatest human traits and it has been diminished to the point of frailty. If our children are to grow and prosper then we must reassert it and we must be aware that it is incompatible with our present society. Changing the world has to start with first changing ourselves and then the system under which we live.'

The book asserts 'Because of our complete control over the economies of developing countries we require them to produce fodder to feed our animals while their children starve to death. Meat is ultimately linked with famine and starvation.'

'Through the stranglehold of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund we impose both our philosophy and our economics on cultures which have survived for centuries, legitimising greed and destruction.'

Cancer

But do we really need such a meat-dominated diet? There is plenty of evidence that meat consumption is causing a wide range of diseases from cancer to heart attacks. Vegetarians lead longer and healthier lives.

According to the British Medical Association 'Vegetarians have lower rates of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, large bowel disorder and cancers and gall-stones. Cholesterol levels tend to be lower'.

A survey in the US found that meat originated cancers were costing 250,000 deaths and medical bills of tens of billions of dollars a year. The book quotes numerous surveys that prove the advantages of a vegetarian diet. But this does not stop organisations like the Meat & Livestock Commission from flooding the media with misleading

adverts promoting meat as some kind of up-market health food.

The power of big business and its government allies prevent consumers from being protected from this great threat to health, simply because enormous profits are at stake.

Human beings, like other higher apes, have the jaws, teeth and digestive tracts of vegetarians. Our bodies have not evolved to cope with our present Western diet. Every human culture in history has had to cook meat before eating it. Natural meat eating species will take their food live and raw - no human would do this except in desperation. In fact we prefer that the horrors of meat production be kept well hidden from us.

The book describes some of these horrors. The use of the word 'factory' to describe modern capitalist farming reflects its barbarism. Animals are products on a factory production line.

The methods by which they are raised and then slaughtered reflect the drive to keep costs down and profits up. 'Pigs are tethered in barren stalls, so deprived of stimulation that they frequently go mad. Calves only days old are separated from their mothers, transported to crates where they can barely move and are purposely made anaemic in solitary confinement. Chickens, naturally restless, strutting creatures, are crammed five to a wire cage little bigger than a microwave oven.'

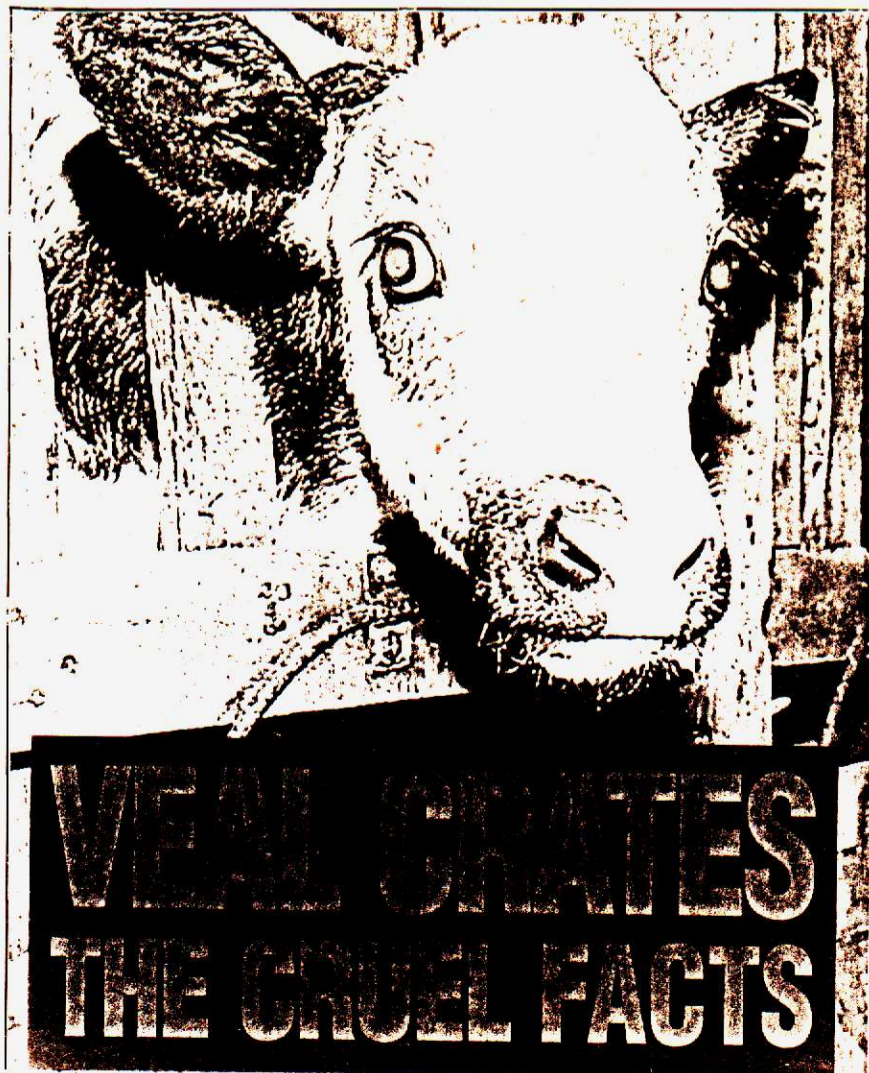
'It all culminates in the barbarity of slaughter where cruelty is casually dispensed on an unimaginable scale - spinal columns of conscious sheep severed with the probes of a domestic screwdriver; paralysed bullocks urged to stand with 70,000 volt shocks to the testicles; fully conscious lambs slashed across the throat because time is of the essence.'

The author's response to this cruelty includes promoting vegetarianism. Workers Press readers will have varied views on this conclusion, but a read of this book cannot but convince that choices in diet are political actions.

Capitalism gives all aspects of life a political content. The growing crisis into which it plunges both humanity and the environment means that we all have to consider our own personal response. For most readers this takes the form of a political response. But in part this must mean reviewing the way in which we lead our personal lives, including our response to knowledge of the cruelty and damage that lies behind meat production. Read the book and make your decision.

The author has agreed to lead a discussion on the issues covered by her book for the Socialist Science Forum. Why not join our mailing lists to be kept up to date on our activities and join our discussions on issues such as this. Write to Daniel Robertson c/o Workers Press.

Juliet Gellatley is the founder of a campaigning animal rights group called Viva! (Vegetarians International Voice for Animals), which can be found on the Internet at <http://www.veg.org/veg/Orgs/Viva/info.html>, where you will find information about Viva!, news about campaigns, book reviews, vegetarian recipes, and much else. Their address is PO Box 212, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 4SD. Viva! was established to take a more critical campaigning role than organisations such as the Vegetarian Society that have tried to follow a Blair-style approach to big business.



Life Imprisonment - IN THE BATTERY CAGE

THIS hen spent her life in a battery cage so small she could not even stretch her wings. Four other birds were crammed in with her.

Naturally, hens want to peck and scratch at the ground. They also want to dustbathe, perch, exercise and make a nest for their eggs. In her barren wire cage she could do none of these things.

As you can see, after a year in a battery cage, this hen had hardly any feathers left. The other hens had pecked her feathers out in frustration.

Compassion in World Farming

'Veal Crates - The Cruel Facts' and 'Life Imprisonment - In the Battery Cage': two leaflets campaigning for compassion in animal farming

THE OTHER ONE'S GOT BELLS ON IT

Bronwen Handyside reports

The Tory MP found lying face down on the footpath in Bournemouth at the Tory party conference explained that the pain killers he was taking for a back injury were to blame.

Sir Nicholas Scott assured interested journalists that he might have had a few drinks, but it was the combination that had laid him low.

This is the same Nicholas Scott who, earlier this year, was banned from driving and fined £600 for being drunk in charge of his motor car, and failing to stop after an accident in which he attempted to drive over a three-year old child. He had just emerged from a small celebration in Chelsea's Farmers' market.

On that occasion, Nicholas Scott was accompanied by his secretary, who did her bit to improve London's tourist trade by shouting at bystanders that there was no need to get upset because the child and his father were 'foreigners'. (French, apparently)

In Bournemouth, Scott was unpeeled from the pavement by the local police, who took him back to his hotel. 'Very kind of them' said the grateful MP.

As a Liverpool docker pointed out with some passion at their weekly mass meeting, the Bournemouth police officers' treatment of Scott was rather different to the savage beatings doled out to environmental campaigners on the 'Reclaim the Future' demonstration in support of the dockers in Liverpool on 30 October.

Poverty causes child deaths

Nicholas Scott's refusal to let a three-year old foreigner get in the way of his next appointment bring me to a study recently released by researchers from the Institute of Child Health in London.

Their report shows that while the number of child deaths from accidents has fallen significantly among the higher social classes, it has hardly improved at all amongst the worst-off. Child deaths in fires have actually increased among the poorest.

'The risk of residential fire is strongly related to the type and quality of housing. Fire risk is greatest for those living in the poorest council housing and in temporary accommodation.

The number of families declared homeless doubled between 1980 and 1981, with the number of families housed temporarily increasing nearly five times.

Driving an old, cheap car lacking modern safety features also eans your children are much more likely to die in if you have an accident.

So although government health targets to reduce child deaths are well on the way to being met among the children of the wealthy, they are 'highly unlikely' to be achieved among the children of manual workers.

The report shows that between 1979 and 1983 the injury death rate for children in the lowest income families was 3.5 times higher than for those in the highest social class. By 1989-1992, this difference had increased to five times.

So — not only are poor children more prone to suffer illness and death than the offspring of the rich, they are also more likely to die in accidents.

It reminds me of a 'Private Eye' cover I saw a few years ago, which showed Margaret Thatcher then

Prime Minister, bending over a child in a hospital bed and cooing 'And what do you want to be if you grow up?'

Poverty in Liverpool

Workers Press has explained how the Liverpool dockers are fighting for far more than their jobs.

A few facts and figures about the town of Liverpool itself will shed more light on the social crisis they are up against, and the deepening gap between the rich and the poor.

The unemployment rate is more than 21 per cent in two-thirds of Liverpool's wards. Seven wards have jobless rates of more than 30 per cent, while three wards have a rate of 40 per cent.

The death rate for Liverpool as a whole is 20 per cent worse than the national average — but that figure does not tell the whole story. In the better-off wards of Grassendale and Childwall, life expectancy is eight years longer than in the working class areas of Vauxhall and Everton.

Death rates from heart disease are 12 per cent better than the national average in Childwall, but 74 per cent worse in Vauxhall. Even more startling is the difference in the death rate for lung cancer — 19 per cent better than the national average in Grassendale, and 178 per cent worse in Everton.

This picture is repeated in cities throughout Britain.

The witty judge

Last week a High Court Judge said he found it impossible to believe that when Parliament passed the Asylum Act it intended that genuine asylum seekers be left 'destitute, starving, at risk of illness or even death'. It is difficult to believe that he did not have his tongue in his cheek.

The judge threw cash-starved local councils into chaos by ordering them to supply refugees with the necessities of life.

It is estimated that 10,000 people have been sleeping rough, in church halls, or with friends since being left destitute by the Act.

The 'Observer' (13.10.96) reports the case of a 37-year old Kenyan woman found suicidal and sleeping in public toilets. She had been exchanging sex for food and shelter with a man until she became pregnant, and he threw her out.

Work makes us sick

And for those of you lucky enough to have a job — work related stress has become the most serious health hazard faced by British workers, according to a TUC survey of health and safety representatives.

The stress was a result of longer hours of work, violence and bullying in workplaces, and new management techniques.

The TUC announced it was launching a campaign over the problem. I wonder if they will include all-out support for the Liverpool dockers and the Hillingdon hospital workers who have fought for over a year to defend workers from the very conditions the TUC's researchers have identified as causing stress?



A contemporary photo of poverty stricken Russians searching through rubbish for food — repeating conditions of the 'third period of Stalinism'.

Nightmares in the pit

'The Foundation Pit', a novel by Andrey Platonov, The Harvill Press London, 1996. REVIEW BY TOM OWEN

THIS novel is an awesome, bleak and nightmarish work, set during the period of forced collectivisation and 'the war against the Kulaks' (land-owning peasantry) in the Soviet Union in the late twenties and early thirties.

This era, referred to as the 'Third Period' was one in which the Stalinist bureaucracy took a sharp 'leftist' turn, introducing forced collectivisation. This 'left turn' was also reflected internationally and led to the splitting of the German working class which allowed the Nazis to seize the power.

'The collapse into barbarism'

These policies in the Soviet Union were catastrophic; causing famine, the starvation and the removal of whole populations, and a collapse into barbarism. All these events were justified through a strident rhetoric terrifyingly at odds with the real world.

It is this nightmare which is the stuff of Platonov's novel. It is a horrifying political allegory, but unlike the allegory of Orwell's 'Animal Farm', it carries the unmistakable and harrowing print of experience.

The central and overpowering symbol of the novel is the 'foundation pit', the enormous foundations and footings of an integrated commune which is to replace the old village. The workers who delve in this enormous pit are half starved, half psychotic and in one form or another alienated from themselves.

Platonov is not an Emile Zola or another naturalist who vicariously revels in the brutalities of the world. Neither is he a bewildered anti-communist. Son of a railway worker, he was a Bolshevik who fought with the Red Army in the Civil War. He became an electrical engineer and a land reclamation expert.

During the Second World War he served as a war correspondent. He

died in 1951 of tuberculosis contracted from his son, whom he had nursed after the latter's release from the 'Gulag'.

I first came across the work of Platonov some ten years ago — a collection of short stories and a magnificent novella, 'The Djin'. Like many of his contemporaries, he demonstrates an almost obsessive concern with the richness of language and the possibilities of style.

His early success was short-lived. Stalin regarded him as 'scum' and ordered Fedeev, who was to become general secretary of the Writers' Union, to 'give him a good belting for future use'.

Platonov's novels remained unpublished until the 1980s and his last work, 'The Technical Novel' has only been released from the KGB's 'literary archive' in the early nineties.

The refinement and revolutionary optimism of his early work are transformed or to put it in a more academic way, 'transvalued'.

This is not just a turning upside down of political perspectives and linguistic style, but a far more complex and delicate dialectical process.

Platonov confronts a major human tragedy, a political disaster wrought by a counter-revolution masquerading as a revolution. The criminal utopian fantasy of 'socialism in one country' establishes its dictatorship through error, the lie, betrayal, the slogan, the gun and the concentration camp: those underpinnings of slavery which parade themselves as the 'leap from necessity to freedom'.

'The deep irony of the political lie'

Platonov has to deal with and confront the deep irony of the political lie, the way in which the language of liberation, the symbols of emancipation and a historic ideology have been reduced to the trappings of petty officialdom, empty sloganeering, and the rationale of a murderously inhumane project.

The reversal of optimism is devastating, neither cool intelligence nor despair can be seen to

predict the outcome. The processes are sometimes predictable, other times mysterious. Some resort to cynicism, some to *deja vu* (it's happened before).

Others retreat into a personal grievance that gnaws at their being.

'Starkness and brutality of language'

The question of style, always a social issue, is not as neat a reversal; the starkness and brutality of the language leave you with a sense of loss and waste. Platonov's descriptions of the bleak natural world and physical environment his characters inhabit still have that startling quality of 'defamiliarisation', of the Russian Formalist device, 'oestrenenia', of 'making things new'.

That was seen as a positive estrangement of the world out of the mundane, the ordinary and the commonsense, familiar world of the pit, its absurdity and strangeness penetrates the living fibre.

The natural world has become alien again, a hostile, unremitting force, human beings become objects, unable to think but colliding in the most brutal fashion. The male peasants survive in coffins, ordering their wives to force feed them. Casual killing is attributed to the power of the fist (the irony being that Kulak in Russian means fist or then, the grasping hand).

Language itself, the most intimate human action, has been separated from the self and no-one can communicate other than on the basis of meagre survival.

The only possibility of hope in the novel is the survival of an orphan waif, and she dies and is placed in a makeshift coffin.

She is a 'Cordelia' of Twentieth Century Russian literature, breathing and unbreathing, living and dying; an embodiment of hope and despair.

Platonov is a great, though unknown modern tragedian. He has experienced humanity reduced to what Shakespeare called a 'forked stick'. Nothing can ease the pain of his work, nor its haunting images. But it is a book that has to be read.

In defence of dialectics

MARXIST dialectics lie buried beneath the rubble of the Berlin Wall, so what are their crushed practitioners to do?

So writes John Hardman, historian of 18th-century France, in last week's *Times Literary Supplement*. We need have no doubt that Hardman believes this recently modish statement to be true. Well, he would, wouldn't he?

Reviewing *Class and State in Ancien Régime France* (Routledge, £40) by one of those 'crushed practitioners', David Parker, Hardman claims that 'one winces at such statements as "Versailles was . . . dedicated to the redistribution of the wealth squeezed out of the labouring population"'.
On reading this, 'one winces' for the supercilious Hardman. For where else was the wealth of pre-Revolution France drawn from save the toil of its labouring population, either in metropolitan France itself or in its colonies of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St Domingue (later known as Haiti)?

Surely this academic has heard of serfdom and the *corvée* or forced labour system in France? And surely he has heard of plantation slavery?

I said Hardman's contemptuous reference to 'Marxist dialectics' was 'recently modish'. For there are clear signs that the fickle wind of fashion is now starting to blow from a different airt, if I may use a good old Scots word.

Eight months ago, as was noted in this column (17 February) the *TLS* carried an article on Marx's criticism of Gladstone that was refreshingly free from the then customary — indeed, almost obligatory — sneers about the 'burial' of Marxism and the defeat of its 'crushed practitioners'.

And, in this very same issue of the *TLS* where Hardman so dismissively buries Marxism with his pen, Hugh Kenner, who professes English at the University of Georgia, enthusiastically reviews what he calls a 'diverting book' by the professor of English at Wesleyan University, Connecticut — a book candidly described as 'Marxist' on its dust-jacket.

On first reading, it's mildly engaging; by the time his discussion is finished it's become a tale to conjure with', gushes Kenner of Richard Ohmann's *Selling Culture: Magazines, markets and class at the turn of the century* (Verso, £24.95).

For a theory that has been so conclusively 'buried' and whose 'practitioners' have been so pulverescently 'crushed', Marxism is showing quite astonishing powers of recuperation.

LIKE a great many other academics, John Hardman uses the term 'Marxist dialectics' to mean more or less what he wants it to mean. And he seems to have chiefly in mind the Marxist approach to history.

After remarking in passing that '[n]ot all dialectics are Marxist', which is true enough, he proceeds to lavish praise on 'a dazzling series of theses and antitheses' contained in another book under review, 'dividing and combining kaleidoscopically over a two-century span'.

Here is the professoriat at its most shallow, most vulgar, and most ignorant. This bedazzled gentleman has heard somewhere that dialectics has something to do with theses and antitheses. So he drags in these unexplained technical terms to show how learned he is, while scrupulously avoiding the fundamental question: what is the philosophical difference between the dialectical method of Marx and those non-Marxist dialectics that so excite this reviewer's admiration?

Marx and I, wrote Engels in 1855, two years after his friend's death, were pretty well the only people to rescue conscious dialectics from German idealist philosophy and apply it in the materialist conception of nature and history.'

In other words, there are two kinds of dialectics: idealist dialectics,

which views spirit or mind as primary and the material world as a reflection of our thought; and materialist dialectics, which views matter, in its various forms of motion and development, as primary and our thought as a reflection of the material world.

Just as he winces at anything resembling a class analysis of the production and distribution of wealth in pre-revolutionary France, so our historian cannot bring himself to utter that dread word 'materialism'. And there is of course a sound class reason for his reticence.

As a scientific method — the only scientific method — of studying nature, society, politics, and culture, the materialist dialectics of Marx is not some abstruse mystery, but a powerful tool and weapon in the hands of the working class, that class which it has recently been so fashionable for preening intellectuals to dismiss, along with Marxism, as 'crushed' if not yet totally 'buried'.

Materialist dialectics is both a tool for understanding the world and a weapon for changing it. This method strikes at the very heart of the complacent, 'common-sense' metaphysical outlook which sees the world as a collection of rigid, fixed, separate things, unchanging and eternally isolated from each other, which holds that opposites, such as cause and effect, always totally exclude each other, which assumes that the way things seem to be is how they really are.

The very first sentence of Marx's greatest work, *Capital* is already a challenge to this metaphysical outlook:

'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities", its unit being a single commodity.'

The key phrase here is 'presents itself'. For Marx is summarising the appearance of wealth under capitalism. He then proceeds to analyse this appearance at great length, and to reveal, with a formidable wealth of argument and detail, what is really going on, what is the hidden essence of capitalist exploitation.

From appearance to essence: this is the road that science takes. Natural science uses chemical reagents and other material means to conduct experiments along this road, to establish the laws that govern the various forms of motion of matter. But the laws that govern the development of human society are discoverable only by what Marx called 'the force of abstraction'.

'In its rational form', Marx wrote in 1873, the dialectical method 'is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time, also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.'

That's why, like so many before him, John Hardman thinks Marx's dialectical method has been 'buried' and we Marxists have been 'crushed'. As the crisis of capitalist society deepens, the Hardmans are in for some nasty shocks.

Corrections

There were three printing errors in last week's column. In the 20th paragraph, lines 1-2, *jos Criollos* should read *Ojos Criollos*, and in lines 6-7 *Escenas Camestres* should read *Escenas Campestres*. In the last paragraph, line 5, 'Negroe jib' should read 'Negroe jig'.

Peter Fryer

For the poor. a two-class world

Some reflections from Paul Henderson, secretary of Leicester Trades Council, on his recent return from the United States

THERE IS a distinct feeling that the United States is sitting on a time bomb. The ratio of the top twenty per cent of American incomes to the poorest twenty per cent is now nine to one. In the words of J. G. Speth, an administrator who presented the latest report of the United Nations Development Program: 'For poor people in this two-class world, it is a breeding ground for hopelessness, for anger, for frustration.'

There are a number of demographic problems in addition to and connected with the growing poverty gap. One such problem is the ageing of the population.

This is reflected in the prison system, where there is now a significant and expanding number of geriatric inmates many of them incapable of looking after themselves. The question is increasingly raised: 'what are we to do with these prisoners?'

The medical system is sustained largely by individuals paying for their own health care, or more commonly through insurance schemes which naturally aim to make profits.

Equally problematic is the situation of people who have jobs and therefore money, but are unable to pay the escalating costs of medical care.

Organisations trying to resolve this problem deal mostly with employed people, by getting employers to finance their workers and the families of these workers into an insurance scheme. Health Management Organisations (HMOs), in some ways similar to a combination of British NHS Trusts and organisations like BUPA have taken over whole sets of employees and their families, and have produced a large number of 'horror stories'.

One woman whose daughter had sickle-cell disease, changed her job and found herself and her daughter transferred into an HMO with her new employer. The HMO told her that her daughter would have to be transferred from her current highly specialised doctors to a suburban general practice.

In spite of expert advice, the suburban doctors insisted on a cheaper but ineffective method of treatment and the HMO refused to accept the expert advice. The daughter died shortly after from a stroke, which the course provided by the specialist doctors was specifically designed to prevent.

The issue of euthanasia is currently being fought out in the courts. Although only the lunatic right has so far suggested that euthanasia could be one solution to the growing social crisis, the outcomes and implications of such legal struggles need to be watched with care.

The majority of the most oppressed groups — the poor, the prisoners and rapidly growing categories like the homeless —

contain a high proportion of blacks and Hispanic.

At the top, this is a very nervous society, understandable given the ethnic distribution of poverty and the proximity to Mexico and South America. A few days spent in San Antonio, Texas, 100 miles from the Mexican border, felt like living in an armed encampment, with five huge military air force bases ringing the city.

For the nightly amusement of Texans the cameras follow the border patrol as they play searchlights on the river looking for forlorn groups of people fleeing from Mexico. TV advertisements from the Republican Party point out how the Clinton administration wants to spend 'even more of your money on illegals'.

A pervasive and institutionalised racism was brought home when Microsoft Corporation had to withdraw its latest English/Spanish language software, and issue an apology. This most Politically Correct of all Politically Correct companies had issued a computer dictionary giving synonyms for the word 'Indian' as 'savage', 'barbaric', 'uncultured'.

Even if we assume that the economic system can provide some kind of productive work for people into the next century, a most dubious assumption, the US population is not reproducing itself at anything like the rate needed to provide young workers to sustain even the most basic services. The Democrats look like winning the coming elections only because a majority of those who will vote dislike the Republicans more than they dislike the Democrats.

Nevertheless, there have been changes to the social forces 'in the frame', so to speak, not least of which are changes in the trade union bureaucracy and in the working class.

To the fury of the Republicans, some leaders in the trade unions have thrown their substantial financial weight behind the Democrats. Ostensibly the bureaucracy is showing its opposition to the anti-trade union stance of the Republicans, but behind their move may be a response to a small but growing movement among American trades unionists and others for a genuine 'third party': a party of Labour.

There is little doubt that a party formed to defend the interests of the US working class in the present time of economic crisis would find itself in head-on confrontation with the state. In these circumstances, it is quite understandable that the reformist trade union bureaucracy would seek by all means possible to head off such a movement by boosting the Democrats.

Nevertheless, moves are afoot to found such a Party. A conference held in June 1996, organised by the Labour Party Advocates, to set out the framework for this Party. Some 1400 delegates from dozens of unions and 45 states came to Cleveland to establish a national labour party.

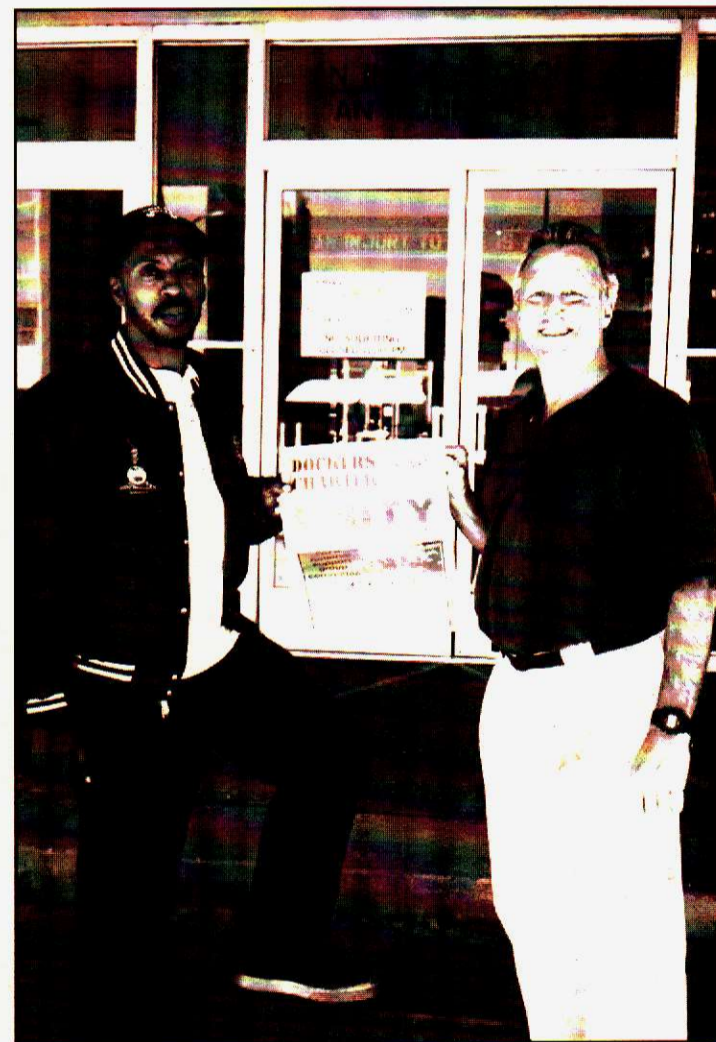
Without going into the limitations of their programme, which offers radical and socialist policies within a frankly reformist framework, the silence from the media and the two main parties was deafening. The national press as well as the three national TV networks completely ignored this quite unprecedented and unusual event.

More perceptive observers recognised that this act of collective blindness was mirrored by many leaders in the trade unions. This included John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO a new leader and 'rising star' in the movement who pledged \$35m to the Democratic Party election funds.

Sweeney apparently refused to

movement in the United States, preparing for what may be an important historical break from the pattern of American politics. The existing one ties the unions to one of two capitalist parties, with predictable consequences.

The other side of this particular coin, however, may be to the advantage of the working class in the United States and, for that matter, in the world. There is no party to which the working class can be said to owe any particular allegiance. Thus, in fighting in defence of its interests, the US working class has great potential to maintain its independence, in freedom from parliamentary manacles. This may be a considerable asset in the situation now opening.



In the meantime, let Jack Heyman, a leader in the ILWU and a colleague from the San Francisco dockers have a say. . .

address the Cleveland conference, on the grounds that US workers should put their weight behind the election of a Democratic government. Sweeney knew that the conference had already declared it was not planning to stand candidates in the forthcoming elections.

Four important but small unions, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers; the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers; the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees; and the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union directly sponsored the conference.

The ILWU has shown the kind of contribution that a small but conscious union can make in its support of the Liverpool dockworkers. It is not surprising that this union should be amongst those prepared to take a principled stand in relation to the independence of the working class

US capital must now slash social welfare, as the Clinton regime has begun to do.

The inevitable social explosions as these anti-working class programmes are put into effect will no doubt be influenced by the fact that some of the poorest people in the United States are politically conscious and articulate emigrants from US-supported dictatorships like Guatemala, and regimes where a broadly socialist movement was unseated through CIA 'dirty tricks' campaigns, like Nicaragua.

The turmoil in the United States is part of a world development of great consequence, in which we should be prepared for major changes in the ways in which capital rules, and the ways in which workers resist these changes, gradually building the instruments through which to turn defence into attack.

The need for a new socialist party

All power to the Labour Government!

By Chris Knight

Member, London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers

MIKE Howgate thinks I've 'to some extent' been allowed to dominate Workers Press (letters, 28 September).

By the end of his intemperate letter, all qualifications are dropped: together with other visiting aliens, I've succeeded in 'body-snatching' the entire editorial board.

I first came across Mike four years ago during the Pit Closures campaign.

What I noticed about him then has since been amply confirmed. Howgate is one of those 'Trotskyists' who, when he sees a picket-line, has to reach for his textbooks. Before deciding whether to join, he needs time to undertake an extended in-depth theoretical analysis of the constitution of the picket, its realistic prospects for success, its activists' ideological stance, the ideological purity or otherwise of its supporters, its historical background — and its significance in the light of competing views as to precisely what Marx meant on page 539 of Vol. II of *Capital*.

INTEMPERATE

All this, of course, may involve months, years or even an entire lifetime of 'sober analysis'. Perhaps this explains why I have never yet seen the man on a picket line.

Mike Howgate, in other words, while lacking a Ph.D., is nonetheless an incorrigible academic — one of a number of similarly intemperate individuals who, in their tiny groupings, have become afflicted by the horrible disease known as 'post-war Trotskyism'.

Affecting the brain, this virus makes the victim spend his entire life peering into the brains of fellow-sufferers to check whether what's inside matches precisely the ideological pattern in his own head.

If there's a fit, so the victim imagines, he'll be happy: he'll 'build the revolutionary party' in solidarity with his identikit replica.

But the match must be precise, down to the very last punctuation mark. Since a mismatch at some level can *always* be found, the sufferer in due course triumphantly 'exposes' it.

He then swears, forms a new faction and continues on his way. . . This disease, until recently had no known cure. Whether victims gave up politics, died, went mad or turned to gardening were among the many variables; the one changeable certainty was that sufferers, once afflicted, would forever be cut off as if on

another planet — never to return to the warmth of comradeship in struggle of life within the working class.

Several months ago, I was therefore astonished to discover a group among whom self-recovery seemed to be well on the way. Leading comrades within the Workers Revolutionary Party, although still calling themselves Trotskyists, and although derived historically from probably the maddest sect of all, were behaving like rational, good-humoured, sociable, courageous, instinctively communist, working class *human beings!*

They were not only standing on picket lines in Liverpool and elsewhere: they were playing a useful role. Instead of focusing only on hectoring, paper-sales and attempts to beam up new recruits to their private planet, they seemed to be part of the same world as the rest of us. They were striving to win the practical struggles they were involved in.

They were taking the necessary organisational measures, forming friendships and alliances, enjoying conversation, drink, music, dance and those other social pleasures which make working-class life worth living, resisting those who would deny us such enjoyment — and thereby striving might and main for victory for our whole class.

Mike Howgate terms this extraordinary happy turn of events a 'turn away from Marxism and towards spontaneity and petty-bourgeois anti-authoritarianism'.

Doubtless Mike has in mind such incontrovertible facts as that RECLAIM THE FUTURE is an extremely broad alliance, that certain of its musical and artistic creations are irrepressibly spontaneous, that not every juggler, or gantry-climber is a Marxist-Leninist and that it includes penniless young people from 'middle-class' backgrounds who enjoy being ungovernable as they party with, form friendships with and struggle with their newly discovered comrades within the working class.

SPONTANEITY

I won't deny any of this. But what Mike forgets is that the class character of a movement is determined by its leadership, its programme, its objective position in society and by its direction of motion. As a self-

professed Leninist, Mike ought to know this well.

RECLAIM THE FUTURE will jump through no-one's ideological hoops, so don't try holding them up. For their own reasons, quite without the need of lectures from anyone, these young people have consciously *chosen* to ally themselves with the dockers and other organised workers against what they see as 'the powers'.

They see themselves as part of our class. Over the past few months particularly, they have explicitly accepted the *leading role of the self-organised working class in the struggle for a better world*.

DEMONSTRATED

They have accepted this not just in some paper resolution in some little sect's office. They have demonstrated their self-discipline and commitment in practice — in spearheading the recaliming of key points within the port of Liverpool on 30 September, in being part of the successful halting of all container shipping in and out of Liverpool on that day, and in being savagely beaten up by the Operational Support Division in attempting to return home after their courageous actions.

They have signed up, comrade Howgate, not on paper but in broken collar-bones and blood. In the light of this, let no-one — police, media, Bill Morris or 'Trotskyist' — try placing a wedge between these young people and the dockers.

As Mersey Port Shop Stewards' Secretary, Jimmy Davies, put it at the packed and exuberant mass meeting in Liverpool TGWU headquarters on 4 October:

'I didn't see the banners of the Transport and General Workers' Union fluttering from the rooftop of the rat-house (HQ of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company). I didn't see Fords or Vauxhall banners, I *did* see the banner of RECLAIM THE STREETS.'

Or as shop steward Mike Carden put it: 'The reality is that the official trade union movement wasn't there. RECLAIM THE STREETS were there. So I say this to Bill Morris, and I say this to the politicians. It's simple. You support workers in struggle. You support the dispossessed. You support those facing racial and other discrimination.

'It's all or nothing: you are either there, or you are not. Whether an action is official is irrelevant. It's the action which counts. And so now we know who our supporters are. Our supporters are the people who support us. No-one else'.

The entire mass meeting of dockers stood to give a thunderous standing ovation to the young people from RECLAIM THE STREETS who had just entered the hall. It's a pity, comrade Howgate, you couldn't get out of bed early enough to be there.

As for 'spontaneity', Mike's charge is just laughable. When,

ists for a New Party' but in essence it will remain the WRP — a small grouplet endeavouring to become big. We are back to Healy's 'party building' mentality.

I am in broad agreement with Geoff Pilling's idea — 'Movement Towards Socialism' (Workers Press, 14 September). He says, 'it expresses the transitional nature of the organisation'. Also it is without the somewhat sect-sounding ring to it, a la 'Marxists for a New Party'.

Surely we are fighting to build an organisation that will draw in the widest layers. Taken as a movement, with its inevitable inner contradictions, it would be both inaccurate and absurd to call it 'Marxists for a New Party' or any similar name.

Would another Marxist group attract these widest layers. I think the opposite — it

in recent British history, has a more consciously organised and disciplined action been part of a major industrial dispute? If Leninism is the preparation of revolutionary leadership in action, then this local dress-rehearsal was a model.

Details of the port occupation were planned in secrecy and with almost military precision. Those involved were a disciplined body of closely trusted class fighters, mostly young, many of them women.

Information was disseminated on a strict 'need to know' basis. For security reasons, those centrally involved — myself included — remained until the last moment unaware of crucial details of the plan. In outwitting the police, occupying the port, breaking the media blockade, hitting the MDHC share price and lifting the dispute onto a new plane, we



The wolf beats the drum — Liverpool 28 September 1996.

achieved our stated objectives. If Mike knows of some better way to overcome the limitations of 'spontaneity', we'd all love to hear from him soon.

In my personal view, what is unifying us within RECLAIM THE FUTURE is an increasingly clear understanding that we live under a class dictatorship. Maybe not everyone feels this way. However, just about everyone I've organised with and spoken to has expressed such a view. Mike's comments notwithstanding, I've not found much simple-minded anti-authoritarianism around. Mainly, people are aware that if you live under a class dictatorship, the only possible answer is an *alternative class dictatorship* — that is, *dictatorship by an alternative class*.

Increasingly there is the awareness that we ourselves are that class, weighed down by recent terrible defeats, betrayed and abandoned by our own organisations, just beginning to move again and to find ways of adequately representing ourselves.

I believe that what we are forming now is the beginnings of a genuinely revolutionary party.

Far from another sect, it is something quite powerful and extraordinary — the embryo of a parallel union to the unions, a parallel movement to the labour movement, a parallel party to the Labour Party. Call us a street party, a port occupation party, a picket party or a re-

will keep them away!

A broad organisation with an appropriate name to express its inner nature would be more attractive to bring in those layers who are coming forward to oppose the state in different spheres.

The transitional organisation will form a very fertile medium within which and through which Marxists can and must fight to build a mass revolutionary party and reconstruct the internationalism of Lenin and Trotsky, i.e. of the class.

Marxists would form an organisation of revolutionists within the Movement Towards Socialism and fight to establish their leadership of it. We simply cannot expect the new transitional organisation to be based on Marxism. To do so would be akin to expecting the real world to correspond to our de-

volutionary party — it doesn't matter. The main thing is that ALL the groups and tendencies with no stake in the present system are being given the option of joining together in one big alliance.

STRENGTHENING

Equally important is that we don't try to speak or act for one another, but are *self-organised*, in ways which mean that we are strengthening ourselves and also (a lesson we have learned from RECLAIM THE STREETS) *enjoying* ourselves.

It is obvious to me that insofar as we are going to be taking on the state, we will have to be disciplined and organised, as the Bolsheviks and their anarchist allies were in Russia in 1917 and as our forces tried to be in Spain during the civil war.

At their recent mini-International Conference in Liverpool, the dockers tentatively discussed the idea of an international dockers' and transport workers' alliance.

The principle is simple: we don't confine ourselves to working inside the official movement. We will continue to work inside, but we will also tell our leaders at every point:

'Do your job, break with the enemy class, represent our class — or make way for those of us who will!'

In my own small class-struggle organisation, *Labour Briefing*, we will doubtless be applying the same tactic to our new prime minister should Tony Blair assume office.

Either Blair forms a *Labour* government, or he will be in trouble with his party, in which case we Labour 'loyalists' and 'traditionalists' will have to act independently of him in bringing our movement to power.

The way I see things, if a party has gained an electoral mandate, that fully entitles it to state power. Doubtless there will be legal disputes, with the outcome to be decided, in the final analysis, in the factories and indeed in the streets.

I look forward to 'New Labour's' political defeat, to the simultaneous victory of 'Old Labour', to the abolition of the monarchy, to the proclamation of a republic, and to the establishment on that basis of a real Labour Government.

Then with state power in our hands, we can start to sort out the aristocracy and the super-

rich. My expectations that before the century is out, we will have formed such a government — *by the workers, for the workers*.

In conclusion, I stand by every word I wrote on the front page of Workers Press a month ago. Each and every line has been vindicated by recent events. Mike apparently thinks the current dispute in Liverpool to be of no great significance. I suppose he would, wouldn't he? After all, if you are going to stay in your armchair, you need to invent some excuse.

HISTORICAL

Mike further claims that the dockers must 'wince with embarrassment' to hear their fight bracketed among the major class battles in the history of the labour movement. I am puzzled by this.

I happen to know the Port Shop Stewards Committee personally; several have become close friends.

The dockers know the immense national and international significance of their struggle. Mike, please come up to Liverpool and check out your story with real dockers, not the ones you have constructed in your head.

Mike is welcome to his own views, but I am delighted to have been given this opportunity to differentiate them starkly with mine. The dockers are engaged in a titanic battle; with their international blockade, they are responding to the globalism of capital with the beginnings of a global answer of their own. They must not go down to defeat. Together, we can win. I am confident that as a class, we will win.

RECLAIM

Our future banners and slogans are those being born in this struggle: Reclaim the port, reclaim the streets, reclaim our unions, reclaim the labour movement.

To these I would add that we need to reclaim Marxism back decisively from the university academics and academic politicians, restoring it as Leninism — that is, as an action guide for our class.

Then, hopefully, we can not only win this dispute, but together begin reclaiming our common humanity — and our planet.



Enter the dragon!

sires and not evaluating the concrete conditions as we meet them as Marxists. Therefore when we say that the new party must be based on Marxism, this must mean that we fight to win people, within the ferment of the transitional organisation to Marxism and revolutionary theory. It does NOT mean that we make a proclamation that the new transitional organisation will be based on Marxism and then expect all and sundry to join. It simply won't wash!

In all seriousness, how many will come in? They will treat the organisation as just another sect.

I joined the Socialist Labour Party to fight for Marxism inside it. Its constitution precludes any real, open, genuine, internal working-class democracy. I was forced to resign because the branch would not back my stand against the lead-

ership on this. The SLP has a constitution and atmosphere within which no revolutionary can 'breathe' and freely express him/herself.

We must ensure that the new organisation is completely open to affiliation from other organisations of the class, is free of the Stalinist brow-beating tactics of the SLP and its internal democracy is in the best traditions of the class and second to none.

In conclusion, I would advocate that the new transitional organisation be called 'Movement Towards Socialism'. Marxists could then fight within it, and through its activities, campaigns etc. to build the mass revolutionary party which the class historically needs to create socialist society.

Surely this would resolve the contradictions manifest in the discussion.

The broadest possible movement

Sean May
Hull

THE DISCUSSION on the 'new party' express a richness of views which can only be healthy for the new organisation.

The different viewpoints must be addressed. Looking through them it seems there is a polarisation on the subject of the name of the new organisation.

There are those calling for 'Marxist' to be

in its name and those who are not. This is certainly not a secondary issue.

In all seriousness, if we call the new organisation 'Marxism for a New Party' then will it project itself as the broadest possible movement of the class which we are fighting to build? I think not. Quite the contrary, it will give the impression of just another Trotskyist sect fighting to build itself into a mass party.

Names must reflect the nature of things. Where a name so obviously contradicts the named the latter becomes a parody of the former.

The Workers Revolutionary Party may dissolve into 'Marx-

NETANYAHU BOASTS — BUT FIGHTBACK HAS BEGUN



Arafat shakes hands with Netanyahu as Israeli troops kill Arabs

US Middle East envoy Denis Ross played for time last week, trying to keep Israeli and Palestinian negotiators talking while Israeli prime minister Netanyahu insisted on new 'security arrangements' before his government withdraws troops from Hebron, as promised by his predecessor.

Netanyahu boasted on his return from Washington that he had made no concessions to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The two had posed outside the White House, shaking hands interminably for the benefit of television cameras and President Clinton's re-election plans. The world's media were briefed to talk about the 'special chemistry' generated between them.

Hanan Haroob, five months old, died from a more real chemistry — the tear-gas bomb thrown into her bedroom at Shuafat refugee camp, near Jerusalem, by Israeli border police.

The youngsters who marched behind 12-year old Ashraf al-Mansur's coffin with his little

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

brothers, carrying a Palestinian flag, were likely dreaming of the kind of chemistry that might help them shake off Israeli rule. Ashraf, who was tending his family's sheep on a hillside near Sair, in the West Bank, was shot dead by Israeli soldiers about the time that Netanyahu and Arafat were shaking hands. They said he'd been throwing stones.

Eighty people were killed, and more than 1,000 wounded, in two weeks of confrontation directly caused by the Israeli government opening a tunnel under the Dome of the Rock and al-Aksa mosque, Islam's third most holy site, on 24 September. But popular anger had been mounting for some time, over Netanyahu's backing

for Israeli settlers' expansionism, spearheaded by retired General Ariel Sharon.

Israeli troops in Hebron area are guarding settlers who have carried out repeated provocations and terror, including the massacre at the Hebron mosque two years ago, when at least 58 Muslims were killed while at prayer. In the Gaza strip, supposedly under Palestinian autonomy, Israeli commanders said 'indiscriminate shooting' by soldiers and settlers had caused the bloodshed.

While negotiations resumed at Erez crossing point, following the Washington photo-opportunity, many Palestinians were stockpiling food in readiness for curfews and a prolonged struggle. Palestinian police, many of them ex-PLO fighters, who upset plans

and salvaged some honour by returning Israeli fire, in defence of their people, said they were ready to resist Israeli tanks if necessary. Arafat has since ordered the police not to open fire at the occupiers.

The new Intifada has breathed some life back into the Israeli peace movement, with big demonstrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Some 200 army reservists signed a petition saying: 'We will no longer take part in the oppression of Palestinians, and in the guarding of settlements'.

Among those signing was 21-year old staff sergeant Shaul Olmert, whose father Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert is a stalwart of Netanyahu's Likud party. 'My political opinions are no secret', said Olmert junior.

German transport workers support Liverpool dockers

THE German transport union, (OTV) conference carried a resolution on 1 October for solidarity with the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers.

The union, equivalent in size to the Transport and General Workers Union, is committed to substantial monthly financial donations as long as the dispute is supported by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), and to widespread publicity and industrial pressure in all German ports on shipping companies trading with Liverpool.

Moving the resolution, seafarer Jurgwen Soencksen said: 'I have been a seafarer for 31 years and I am chairman of the works committee at Hapag-Lloyd shipping company. There are two reasons for moving this resolution.

'The first is emotional: for a seafarer a name like Liverpool awakens associations with other places like Bombay, Hongkong and San Francisco.

'The second has, I think, a trade union-political importance even if it is only 500 dockers who are involved in Liverpool.

'For a year and a half I was a radio operator on a container ship and my shipping company was in Liverpool.

Reduced

'When one sees this industrial city — when one sees a port in which 10,000 dockers worked reduced to 500 men — then something becomes clear.

'With some despair but also with some courage the dockers in Liverpool have resisted the inhuman deregulation policy.

'This not only concerns the dismissal of the dockers; it is not only that they risk losing all income and pension rights. Above all they are fighting against a return to the working conditions of the 1800s, namely casualisation.

'Since 1989 the Thatcherite deregulation policy has led to exactly this system being reintroduced in all British ports. The only one that fought successfully against it was Liverpool.

'There is something else: in 1986 for the first time in 90 years, we had a seafarers' strike and when we appealed to the British dockers for support they gave their solidarity entirely as a matter of course, without any preconditions.

'In return, I am today still grateful — it made a very strong impression on me. I say we and the OTV stand in debt to the British dockers.

'Our support is also very important just now, since after one year the dockers are very much in need of financial support.

'But victory is in sight because dockers worldwide are carrying out boycott actions to exert pressure on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company — the employer, in which the British government holds a 13 per cent share.

'In this situation not only is our moral support required, but also total practical support. Naturally this struggle cannot continue for ever.

'I appeal to the executive to ensure that the promises of finance are turned into reality. Just as we are a threat to Daimler here, I ask you to demonstrate our solidarity with the Liverpool dockers.

'The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and other transport unions are watching this union congress.'

Meeting condemns Afghan terror

HUMAN rights activists, MPs and scholars, at a seminar on Islam in Action, organised by the Kashmir International Front, have condemned the murder of former Afghan leader Dr Najeebullah and others by the so-called Taliban militia, after it captured Kabul.

In a unanimous resolution, they also condemned the Taliban movement for depriving Afghans, especially women, of their fundamental freedoms, and said those responsible should be 'indicted for crimes against humanity'.

'The meeting believes that the so-called Taliban Militia are a creation of Pakistan intelligence agency, ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) and financially supported either by drug trafficking or by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and US administrations', the resolution continued.

The meeting, chaired by Mrs Najmussahar Bangash of the World Pashtoon Anjuman, recognised that the conflict in Afghanistan 'is neither tribal nor a feud between Pashtoons and non-Pashtoons'.

It condemned UN officials who left Dr Najeebullah and his brother undefended, though they

were in a UN-protected compound when the Taliban seized them. The two were hanged in public by Taliban, which also outlawed women from going to work and attacked them on the street.

Declaring its abhorrence at these crimes, the meeting called on people in Afghanistan and throughout Asia and the world to unite against fundamentalism, which it said 'not only negates basic democratic and human rights, but also everything that is human and decent... it also defames Islam as a religion and presents it as cruel and barbaric, and thus plays into the hands of imperialist powers'.

'The meeting recognises that ISI (Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan) is playing a similar role in Jammu and Kashmir by setting one Kashmiri against another, and carrying out atrocities through their surrogates against the Kashmiri masses. They are also denying fundamental human rights to the people of Gilgit Baltistan.'

Calling for no recognition to a Taliban government the meeting resolved to carry forward an international campaign for human rights.

Vanunu — ten years in solitary

BY DAVID DORFMAN

SUPPORTERS of Mordechai Vanunu, who has spent ten years in solitary confinement for trying to warn the world of Israel's nuclear war plans, held a two-day conference in Tel Aviv last week, and sent a delegation to try and see Vanunu in Ashkelon prison.

Vanunu, a technician at Israel's Dimona nuclear plant from 1976-1985, became convinced the plant's capacity was not for peaceful purposes, and that Israeli governments weren't seriously pursuing peace with Arab neighbours. Himself from a Moroccan-Jewish working class family, he'd already attracted the attention of Israel security services by expressing sympathy for the Palestinians.

In September 1986, Vanunu flew to Britain and revealed in the *Sunday Times* that nuclear weapons were being made at Dimona. Experts reckoned that Israel possessed between 100-200 warheads,

making it the world's sixth nuclear power.

Soon after the story appeared, Vanunu disappeared. Persuaded to leave London by a woman Israeli agent, he was kidnapped in Rome and bundled back to a secret trial in Israel, where he was sentenced to 18 years for 'treason'.

Mordechai Vanunu is being kept in a nine by six-foot cell, permitted only a daily lone walk in the prison yard, and a monthly half-hour visit by his family. To its shame, because Vanunu broke Israel's 'criminal law', Amnesty International refuses to adopt him as a 'prisoner of conscience', although it has called for his release, recognising his rights have been violated.

● The Campaign to Free Vanunu and for a Nuclear-Free Middle East says Mordechai Vanunu would be pleased to receive cards and letters, books and magazines, from friends abroad. His mail is censored however, and he may not be able to reply. Write to him at Ashkelon prison, Ashkelon, Israel. For details about vigils at the Israeli embassy in London, etc. call the Campaign at 0171 378 9324.



Workers like these face an uncertain future

GERMANY: FIGHT OVER SICK PAY

WELL OVER 100,000 workers took illegal strike action on Tuesday 1 October to defend the right to 100 per cent sick pay guaranteed by national and regional agreements.

BY BOB ARCHER

The works council covering the Daimler Benz company reported that 100,000 Daimler workers alone had joined the action at fifty plants across the country.

Six hundred delegates from the OeTV public service and transport union joined a protest rally of 10,000 Mercedes-Benz carworkers outside a car factory near Stuttgart.

About 12,000 Ford carworkers in Cologne also joined the stoppage and held a rally. Some 9,000 other Ford workers in Germany also took strike action that day.

In Bochum in the Ruhr region 7,000 Opel car workers also struck work and held a rally.

Twelve thousand workers struck at Opel's headquarters in Rüsselsheim.

A few weeks ago the German government passed a series of huge public spending cuts, including slashing the employers' obli-

gation to pay 100 per cent of wages for workers on short sick-leave. By law, employers now only need to pay 80 per cent of full wages to sick employees.

But large numbers of workers are covered by legally-binding national and local agreements which also guarantee the wages of sick workers.

Some 90 firms have declared they will renege on the agreements. It is clear that the 'German model' of labour relations is cracking up under the strain of world competition and the moves to a common European currency.

However, a number of firms like Porsche and Audi carmakers and the electrical and electronics giant Siemens have backed off from imposing the cuts.

Reporters claim Daimler Benz lost 200 million marks worth of

production during the strike action. Workers are refusing overtime and weekend working until the cuts are restored.

Helmut Lenz, chair of the works council at a Mercedes plant in Stuttgart, told the rally there that 'sick-pay is not a luxury. We are not swimming in money like the top managers'.

He accused conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl of 'laying the basis' for the cuts and said that Daimler were applying the 'personnel policies of Rambo' by imposing the cut without consulting workers and the IG Metall union.

'We promise the Daimler board this is only the beginning'

Gerhard Zambelli, who runs the IG Metall engineering union in the South West region, said he had learned from Daimler management they would cancel existing agreements on Christmas and other bonus payments.

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