

SOCIALIST

APPEAL

£1

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

Issue No.16 - October 1993

Solidarity Price £2

Inside:

- **Middle East -
Lasting Peace?**
- **Labour Party
Conference
Reports**



Racism

What it is

and how to fight it

Russia on the Brink - see page 16

For Whom the Bell Tolls?

"Given the right leadership, the British people could equal the best in the world."
Norman Lamont.

The Mighty Helmsman is planning to make his mark at Tory Party Conference in Blackpool. From far away Tokyo, he announced that all internal "stupid internequine squabbling" must cease forthwith. As expected, this proved to be the cue for every malcontent, including Our Ex-Chancellor Norman, to come forward and put the knife in.

John Major's standing in his own party and in the country has never been so low. There's widespread speculation he will be challenged for the Tory leadership. *"Throughout the Conservative Party"*, commented the *Times* leader on 17th September, *"the dead bell sounds. Somebody is done for. Probably it is the Prime Minister... A nostalgia for leadership is everywhere apparent."* Major has never looked so vulnerable. He is more unpopular than Thatcher at her lowest ebb.

Labour Lead

According to a recent ICM poll in 'The Guardian', Labour is 18 points ahead of the Tories - the biggest lead since the general election of April 1992. Labour is on 45%, the Tories on 27%, and the Liberal Democrats on 24%. In Scotland the margin is much greater. Despite the claims of some of a huge rise in nationalism ("Lithuanian proportions") if the Tories won the election, Labour stands at 53%, SNP 23%, and the Tories on 13%.

Following on from their by-election disasters, the Tories are stumbling from one crisis to another. This is nothing to do with Major's personality, but the political, social, and economic malaise surrounding the Government. Electorally, they are being reduced to a rump mainly confined to the South East. These are no 'local difficulties' or aberrations, but represent a fundamental shift in the mood and consciousness of the working class and the middle layers of society. The perception that the Tories will bring back prosperity has all but vanished, as mass unemployment eats into layers previously unaffected. This is at the root of the Tory crisis.

In Thatcher's final year, only 18% thought the NHS safe in her hands. Since then it has fallen to 13%. In relation to how people perceive the class nature of law, an overwhelming majority - 77% to 40% - believe there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. According to the

ICM poll, as the Tories prepare to push through the privatisation of rail, coal and post, Tory voters turn out to be 46% to 41% against the whole idea of privatisation! This is of enormous significance for those who have been arguing consistently in the labour movement for public ownership. The concept of socialist planning has never been so popular, where a majority of 46% to 28% agree that *"more socialist planning would be the best way to solve Britain's economic problems"*, which even commends itself to 24% of Tory voters.

Shift in Opinion

This represents a massive shift in opinion since the general election. It flies in the face of all the right-wing 'modernisers' in the leadership of the Labour Party, who are canvassing pro-Tory views and policies. It is also a crushing indictment of those on the right wing of the labour movement who maintain that Labour can only win with a deal with the Liberal Democrats. The poll demonstrates clearly that if Labour put forward a bold socialist programme, based on Clause Four, as a solution to unemployment, homelessness and poverty, they could sweep to power on a massive majority.

The position of the Tories will be even further undermined. The slow economic recovery has forced the government to plan drastic cuts in public expenditure in November in an attempt to reduce its £50 billion budget deficit. The recession in Europe is threatening to stymie Britain's slow growth. The Tory Government has now announced, despite rising inflation, a pay freeze for five million public sector workers for next year, unless they can negotiate deals on increased productivity, ie., an increased work-load and redundancies.

Wage Ceilings

Howard Davies, the CBI's director-general, said gleefully this move would have a useful effect on expectations in the private sector, where six in ten workers already expect no pay rise this year. For him and his big business friends this will mean increased profits. Who else would gain by a wage freeze?

The knock-on effect of last year's 1.5% limit on public sector pay is estimated to have cut private pay settlements by about 1% to around 2.3% in manufacturing. At the same time, according to Incomes Data Services, boardroom increases averaged 12%. Others, like Lord Young, former Tory minister and chairman of Cable and Wireless (77% increase), got much more.

The threatened clamp down on pay has provoked bitter reaction from workers. De-

spite the cosy relationship hoped for by John Monks with the Tory government, union leaders, under pressure from the rank and file, have threatened a spring offensive. Alan Jenkinson, general secretary of UNISON, said there was little doubt that this policy would lead to industrial unrest. *"The Government only just got away with it this year, but they are unlikely to get away with it again."* The pay announcement has stiffened the resolve of firefighters, who are balloting for industrial action over the government's renegeing on their pay formula. The TUC has begun to co-ordinate the re-



John Monks

sponse of the public sector unions. If they stand together they can defeat this crisis-ridden Tory government.

The Labour leadership should use the growing support for Labour in the country to build a mass campaign to drive the Tories from office.

A Labour Government, based on clear socialist policies, including the nationalisation of the major monopolies, banks and insurance companies, could proceed to draw up a plan of production using the full resources of Britain. This would make the promises of full employment a reality.

The wealth produced could grant everyone a living wage, and provide the resources for a massive programme of public works, hospitals, schools, and other essential services. Homelessness could be swept away when the resources are taken out of the hands of building profiteers and a construction programme of a million houses a year is launched using the skills of the half million unemployed building workers.

Such a prospect would win mass support and sweep away the Tories once and for all. It will not simply be a case of the "dead bell" for Major, but the whole bankrupt system he represents.

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The deadline for receipt of articles for the next issue is October 29

Tower Colliery Under Threat

British Coal is going in for the kill. They plan pit sell-offs in five regions including South Wales. As part of the Tories' plans to privatise the coal industry, British Coal management is attempting at present to either slim down the operation or contract work out to private contractors.

They have informed the NUM at Tower that they want the loss of 200 jobs. This will, they claim be on a voluntary basis. But only 17 have applied to finish up on redundancy or ill-health.

We have been told that if there are insufficient volunteers by October 31, then management will introduce cost-cutting measures that will reduce miners' wages by half. In other words we have been threatened if the men don't volunteer for redundancy, they will be faced with huge cuts in living standards.

BC management have also threatened to

contract the workforce out or even mothball the pit if they are unable to cut costs sufficiently. This is an axe held over the heads of our membership.

Tower Colliery is the last deep mine in South Wales owned by BC. The NUM at Tower will stand firm to resist these privatisation measures and pit closures that threaten to totally devastate the area. A closure would destroy the community. This is no idle comment. The impact study conducted by the Clynnon Valley Labour Group estimated that closure would mean the loss of £10 million from the area. The knock-on effect would be horrific. We have no alternative but to stand firm, remain united and fight this management butchery.

**Phil White, Chairman,
Tower NUM**

Conference Meeting Success

Socialist Appeal made a real impact at this year's Labour Party Conference. Some of our readers may have seen BBC cameras focus on our front page message "Defend the Union Links".

And that was the central theme of our fringe meeting addressed by Ruth Fallon, delegate from Halifax CLP, Perry McMillan, a local UCATT member and by Ted Grant (pictured right), a regular contributor to *Socialist Appeal*.

£403 was raised for our Press Fund at the meeting and in addition readers who were delegates or visitors distributed a special leaflet and sold over 85 copies of *Socialist Appeal*.



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Middlebrook Mushroom Workers say...

We Will Fight On

In November 1992, 89 part-time female workers were dismissed by Middlebrook Mushrooms, a subsidiary of Booker plc for taking industrial action. The industrial action began because even after accepting a wage freeze and over 300 redundancies the company wanted to slash pay and cut conditions even further. Sacked mushroom picker *Denise Wright* spoke to *Socialist Appeal*:

"The girls are strong. We've had six go back after three months but that's all out of the 89 of us. It's hard, we've all got families. Financially it's also hard - we've a lot of single parents and main breadwinners amongst us as well. The tribunal hearing went against us which devastated us to be honest, because we believed, because we know we're right that, stupidly, the law defends those who are right. But obviously we learned to our cost that it doesn't. The anti-trade union laws have tied our union heavily on what they can and can't do for us. We've leaflets and things which we can't even hand out 'cos of the different laws.

We were frightened when we got the result that we'd crumble and say we'd had enough - but it's just made us more determined to fight on. We're going to up the boycott campaign. It's made us stronger and pulled us back together at a time we were getting tired.

Some ladies had letters the same day as they got the result from the tribunal to go back to work. Some of them ladies, not retiring age but at the older end, have little likelihood of getting another job. But we've heard last night that they stood up and said in the press that they're sticking out and they're not going back. It seems as if the company is trying to pick a few off and split us up but it's not working."

Letters of support and donations should be sent to: 'Sacked Mushroom Pickers', TGWU, Bevin House, George Street, Hull HU1 3DB.

No Sell-Out

The Thameside Construction Committee, a rank and file building workers pressure group, is calling on the TUC to force the AEEU to withdraw from a single union no-strike deal as an earlier TUC ruling decreed. The deal, signed with Mobil in late 1992 led to the derecognition of the MSF and the GMB and was agreed over the

heads of the AEEU members at the Coryton Refinery.

The Committee now claims, that despite earlier agreement, the AEEU never had any intention of pulling out of the deal as ordered by the TUC and is demanding the TUC force the right wing AEEU leaders to abide by basic trade union principles.

Oldham Left

Tory Lies, Hypocrisy, Sabotage

No Labour leadership, no socialist programme, no Labour government! That was the theme of Dennis Skinner's recent public meeting in Oldham.

Dennis was giving the Arnold Tweedale Memorial Lecture, an annual event for Oldham's labour movement.

Around 300 people filled the room to hear Dennis lambast the Tories for their lies, hypocrisy and economic sabotage, and the Liberal Democrats, who he correctly denounced as "Tories in disguise" led by "Paddy Backdown".

Special treatment was given to past and present Labour leaderships for their "abject failure to grasp the bull by the horns" and take on the Tories in the interests of the working class. Two hours later Dennis received a standing ovation and Oldham's Left was in no doubt what our task was - to fight for socialist policies for Labour and a leadership prepared to fight tooth and nail for our class.

Steve Pearlman

Nice work if you can get it!

If you have difficulty deciding how many noughts are in a million let alone a billion, it may be hard to actually envisage being a billionaire.

The richest man in Britain - according to *Business Age* - is Paul Raymond the "sex business entrepreneur". Apparently he owns 65% of central Soho, which is at least 374 properties (I wonder whether he paid his poll tax?). He has vast publishing interests in France and also a large publishing market in Eastern Europe where he is shipping millions of copies of porn magazines and selling them at up to five times the UK cover price. His publishing companies are worth over £100 million in the

U.K. and probably the same again in the rest of the world. So much for the wages of sin! Poor old David Sainsbury has been pushed into the number two slot (don't worry David, I'm going to do my big shop tomorrow). He owns almost 22% of the shares which are worth over £1.4 billion. He was able to give £167m worth of shares to a charity (saves on the tax bill!) and was the SDP's biggest backer when they first started. The rest of the family are staunch Tories including cousin Tim who is the Minister for Industry. It pays not to have all your eggs in one basket.

Peter Newman

Fire Fighters!

As the FBU special conference voted for a ballot on industrial action, Socialist Appeal spoke to Tom Lyall, an FBU member in Newcastle.

Can you briefly outline the background to the dispute?

Yes, the situation is that we won a pay formula after a strike in 1977-78 which linked our earnings to a fairly complex pay formula, but, basically, what it did is it ensured firefighters were paid the upper quartile of male manual workers...So what in essence it's bought us is industrial peace for 15 years and that's shown by the simple fact that here we are looking set for only the second national fire service strike and it's over pay, it's over the breaking of a formula for a very, very small amount.

Our dispute is with the employers over our pay formula. Right from the start of our dispute it has been our goal to achieve our pay formula, regardless of what the formula produced. It's going to cost the local authorities a lot more to provide fire cover for a one-day strike.

What support are you getting at the moment?

The support, at this moment, is extremely high. The membership understand the argument. They've been well informed throughout the whole campaign. Now they're saying that the FBU have been telling the truth. The government have been telling lies and the employers have stuck in between. It isn't a question of jam tomorrow. That's what led to the first fire service strike, constant promises that were being broken and if the employers break this agreement we will see the second fire service strike.

The imposition of the 1.5% we feel is horrendous. That is an issue that the TUC should be taking on board as a whole.

There's a possibility that the employers might say that they'll honour the pay formula but in return there's got to be cuts. What would your attitude to that be?

Well our attitude to cuts would be exactly as it's been since the return of the Tories. We'll fight every cut that is suggested, every cut that is attempted to be imposed...it's not just about pay, it's not just about firefighters' remuneration. It's about fire cover, it's about the standard and level of fire cover the people out there deserve and we'll fight every attempt to reduce that fire cover.

Cuts affect not just firefighters but all workers in local and national government. Would you seek to link up with the local authority and civil service unions?

Again, that would be a decision for our membership. We are obviously in total support of the argument against any cut in any department. It's central government that's responsible for all the cuts in local authority spending. Obviously what we need is for us all to work together for the return of a Labour government.

Which way do you see the dispute going now?

The ballot started on October 4th. The result will be announced on November 1st and, if it is a Yes vote, then I can see the first one-day strike taking place somewhere around the eighth of November.

Do you know what preparations the employers and government are making in the event of a strike?

It's the employers who have the responsibility for fire cover and the employers have drawn up contingency plans to use the Green Goddesses but I was quite amazed when Michael Howard refused the local authority requests to foot the bill for the use of the armed forces and I think we'll see a situation where a number of authorities will not provide any fire cover whatsoever because they literally cannot afford to pay for this alternative sub-standard fire cover.

At the time of going to press the outcome of the pay formula appeared to be suggesting the rise would be around 1.5%. The media suggested this meant an end to the dispute but FBU negotiators said the amount was not central to the dispute whereas defence of the pay formula was.

Hard Times?

Are you working in public services? Fed up with the prospect of no wage increase this year? Well perhaps you are in the wrong job. Why don't you become a company director. Their earnings were up by 12% last year, "this was nearly three times the average increase gained by the workforce generally" according to the *Financial Times*.

The largest increase was at Carlton Communications. The chairman's payments (they don't get wages like the rest of us) went up by 84.2%. He got a rise of more than £530,000!

Another good thing about being a company director is you don't have to worry about productivity, you still get your pay rise and bonus even if company profits are falling. If being a company director doesn't appeal why not work for the World Bank. They will give you a salary and benefits "that is internationally competitive". They will even find a job for your partner. If that doesn't suit, you could take part in a "unique challenge in housing". No that doesn't mean that you will be setting up a scheme to build cheap housing. The MOD is setting up an organisation to manage its married housing stock so "it can be funded by money raised in the markets and be outside the public sector". (I think this means that they are going to privatise it). This seems to be a really good deal because "remuneration will not be a limiting factor".

If you don't mind going down the salary scale a bit, the government is setting up two new research councils. The salaries might help to keep the wolf from the door until something more lucrative turns up. You could be one of the three Chief Executives on salaries of between (only) 60 and 90 thousand pounds - and guess what, they are an equal opportunities employer too!



Quotes of the Month

"The facts are there is a history in our country of trying to divert the American people from time to time. Any time things get complicated in this country, we like to start a little war. Historically, there's a tendency to do that; there's a pattern here - it's just as basic as human nature."

-Former US presidential candidate, Ross Perot

"I have to say I have not the slightest intention of giving you any information why I reached the decision I did... To sum up, I would please ask in future you direct your enquiries to me personally but I can assure you you will certainly not receive any answers."

- Chief Constable of Merseyside replying to the chair of the Police Complaints Authority, who had asked why charges were dropped against two officers alleged to have been involved in an assault.

After Labour's conference in Brighton, Alastair Wilson assesses the week's debates, votes and speeches.

One Manoeuvre, One Vote

Labour's 1993 Conference represented on the one hand a big shift to the right, and on the other a beginning of a move to the left on behalf of the rank and file and the trade unions. The whole process was contradictory. It was an extremely polarised event.

This was epitomised by the debate on One Member One Vote (OMOV), where the NEC's constitutional changes scraped through by the narrowest of margins. The proposals for 'levy plus', where parliamentary candidates would be selected by individual party members and affiliated trade unionists who would be able to join the party for a reduced rate of £3, were only carried by a majority of 3%. This was only possible when the delegation from the industry and services union, MSF, broke their mandate - by 19 votes to 17 - and abstained. Their 4.5% of the conference vote made all the difference. It has been suggested in the *Guardian* that Roger Lyons, the general secretary of MSF, could be rewarded by a peerage by John Smith for services rendered. The Conference was very contradictory. While presiding over the removal of Tony Benn from the NEC, which he had sat on for 35 years, conference delegates voted to overrule the NEC on a number of issues, including the NUM resolution on pit closures demanding a campaign of resistance by the Labour and trade union leaders. It also stated "Conference reaffirms its commitment to Clause iv of the party constitution and

declares that the next Labour government "will take back into public ownership the British coal industry..."

The NEC is the most right wing in the history of the party. Starting with Eric Heffer in the mid-1980s, the hard left have been completely removed. It reflects the shift to the right of the labour and trade union leadership as a whole. The Executive is totally out of touch. On some technicality it has opposed the removal of VAT on fuel that the Tories are attempting to introduce, with just four members in support! At the same time it refuses to cut defence spending.

Constituency Parties

The victory of the right wing in the constituency section does not reflect the real position of the active layers of the party, but resulted from the ballot of inactive members who are largely influenced by the media and where there is no left campaign of explanation. It represents the dilution of the active rank and file into the mass. This, at a time when the membership, and also levels of activity, are at their lowest for a generation. But this will change on the basis of events.

However, even then the vote for Gordon Brown fell by 100,000, and the arch right-winger, Spellar managed to scrape only 4,000 votes.

Nevertheless, we have the clear contradiction at the conference of a right wing NEC and a leftward moving rank and file. It is no

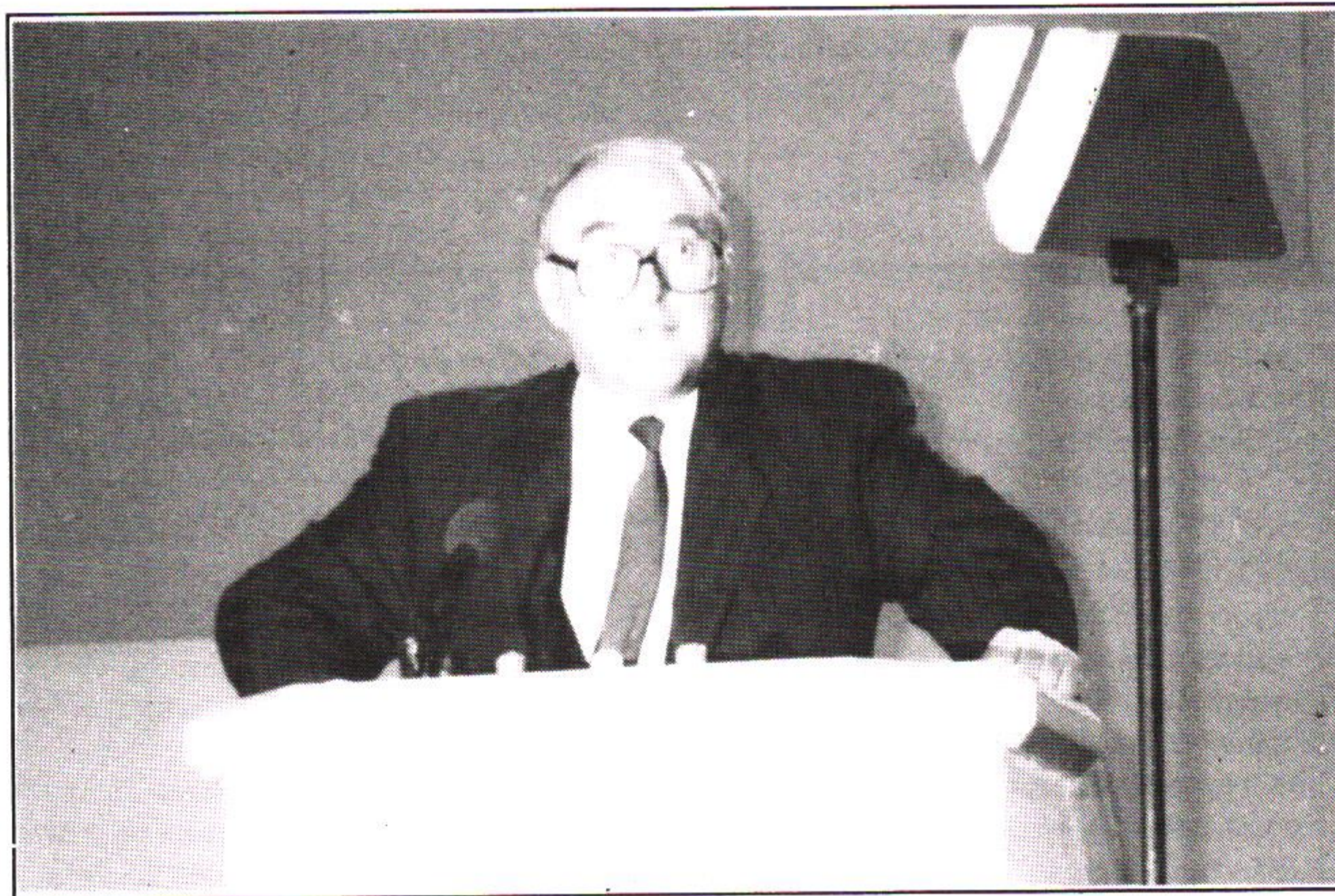
accident that Benn, Skinner, Scargill and Prescott got spontaneous standing ovations at the conference. This represents the underlying mood at the present time. The proposals for full-blown OMOV, which was John Smith's original aim, were overwhelmingly rejected. The AEEU resolution putting forward this view was defeated by 26% to 70%. This was the original proposal to turn the Labour Party into a British version of the American capitalist Democratic Party. That has clearly failed.

It was left to former left wingers like Tom Sawyer of NUPE and Jimmy Knapp of the RMT, to cobble together a compromise formula of 'levy plus' in an attempt to get Smith off the hook.

Smith was forced to back this compromise to avoid a humiliating defeat. He was also forced to jettison his me-too policies of following the Tories and put forward in words some radical policies such as full employment, a minimum wage, trade union rights, and so on. This represents a volte face compared to the past period. He has been forced to change and offer reforms to the rank and file. **If he had failed to do this, there would have been a revolt in the rank and file.** He was forced to partially reflect the anger, frustration and even fury that is simmering in the mass of workers. In this way he hoped to woo the trade unionists and party members into supporting OMOV.

Radical Programme

In effect the Tory Party Mark-Two plan has been abandoned for the moment, in favour of this 'radical' programme, first put forward at the TUC. Under the pressure from the ranks the trade union leaders were forced to come out for full employment. In turn, under their pressure Smith was then forced to come out for the same. In other words, there has been a recoil from the old position of the so-called modernisers. However, these promises remain vague, and it will be up to the movement to provide flesh to these plans. The debate on OMOV has split the party open. It has been a heated debate at all levels concerning the character of the party. Whether the compromise 'levy plus' would be adopted by conference was touch and go. Delegates were faced with an intense campaign by Walworth Road, full-time officials and MPs, to force them to break their mandates and support Smith. The



John Smith

whole issue was posed as a vote of confidence in the leadership. In the debate, Smith intervened directly. Larry Whitty, who was due to reply for the NEC, was removed and John Prescott wheeled out to put everything into winning support. Prescott's speech was overwhelmingly concerned about keeping the links, and then said how a defeat for Smith would be treated in the Tory press! The NEC had deliberately attempted to confuse delegates by proposing a whole series of constitutional amendments on other issues like for instance, women's representation. According to the MSF spokesperson, it was precisely the mixing up of different propositions that was the pretext for the union abstention, and the success of the 'levy plus' amendments. The apparent overwhelming victory of the right-wing was therefore won after pulling out all the stops and being engaged in blatant manoeuvres. Trade union general secretaries from USDAW, RMT, UCW and MSF deliberately defied the democratic decisions of their conferences against OMOV. In the end, over one sixth of the trade union vote, some 17% was cast unconstitutionally to ensure victory for John Smith.

Pyrrhic Victory

In reality it will prove to be a pyrrhic victory. Any attempt to extend the 'levy plus' or move towards full OMOV will be resisted tooth and nail. This has been made clear by John Edmunds straight after the debate. Smith was forced to say everything would now be geared to promoting Labour policies on jobs and other social issues. Will these new changes make a fundamental difference? We do not believe they will. We

On the basis of events the Labour Party will be shaken from top to bottom. The Tory attacks and economic crisis have resulted in a massive shift in consciousness. We are witnessing the first steps in the emergence of a neo-left in the labour movement



Tony Benn

must avoid impressionism and see the process developing under the surface of events. Reality, said Hegel, has two sides. It is essential not to get thrown off balance by ephemeral developments. Firstly, the reason why the method of selecting parliamentary candidates was targeted by the right wing was not to protect the position of MPs at the present time. Even under the old system of selection there would not have been any changes, given the domination of the machine by the right. They were pushed through to prevent reselections of MPs if the party shifted to the left in the future.

Rule Changes

Secondly, although rules can play a part, they can never block a leftward moving rank and file taking action if they are determined to do so. In the future, as in 1979-81, the rank and file, where they are blocked, will change the rules again. This is most likely after the experience of a right-wing Labour government.

On the basis of events, the Labour Party and trade unions will be shaken from top to bottom.

The crisis of capitalism in Britain and internationally is bearing down on the working class. The illusions of the past are being undermined. The previous undermining of socialist consciousness in the minds of workers and the idea that the capitalists could deliver the goods and improve living standards is all but shattered. The continuing mass unemployment and the attacks on living standards and the welfare state by the Tories, has resulted in a massive shift in consciousness. However, given the effects of the boom, it is at a lower level than in the past. We are witnessing the first steps in the emergence of a neo-left in the labour movement.

Although the Campaign Group has been effectively marginalised, confined largely to the PLP, divisions have begun to open up in the Tribune group between the established right-wing Tribuneites and the radical wing around Peter Hain. This is a harbinger for the future. On the basis of events this section can split off and fuse with the Campaign group, leading to the re-emergence of the left. The present ferment over the trade union links, and the leftward move of Edmunds, under the pressure of the ranks, is a pointer to the future. If this process is beginning to take place in Opposition, then under a future Labour government, a government of crisis, the situation will polarise very rapidly in the labour movement.

The developments in the Labour

Party will mirror the shifts and processes in the class struggle. The partial victory of the right wing, at the present time, is very shaky. It has been at enormous cost.

Far from being a push-over, as first thought when Smith won the leadership with over 90% of the vote, the battle to maintain the trade union links has turned the party upside down, and still the right wing had to back down from their original proposals. It has enormous significance for the future.

It is false to start writing obituaries for the Labour Party. On the contrary, a new period is opening up that will see the party being transformed and re-transformed, where the working class will reclaim their organisations and turn them into effective instruments for transforming society.

Capitalist Crisis

The partial reaction at the tops of the labour movement is based on the economic boom of 1982-90. The developing crisis of capitalism will completely undermine their position. There is no comparison with the dark reaction of the 1950's where the Labour Party was dominated by the extreme right wing in the unions: Lawther of the mineworkers, Deakin of the TGWU, and Lord Carron of the AEU. Now the ferment has pushed rightwingers like Edmunds to the left. A whole new situation is going to open up. In those events that will unfold, the Marxists will play a vital role in putting forward at each stage a clear programme that will take the struggle forward. Armed with clear ideas and perspectives the British working class will be victorious.

Alastair Wilson



Nuclear Energy: Future Generation?

By Kevin Ramage

Previously kept afloat by subsidy, Britain's nuclear energy programme is now fighting for its life. In July the government pledged a fundamental review of its nuclear strategy.

For more than three decades Tory and Labour governments attempted to justify the nuclear programme in the face of fierce opposition. Economic costs were fiddled to "show" how nuclear power was cheap. Radiation leaks, especially at Windscale (now Sellafield) were deliberately underestimated. Now the Tories are having second thoughts about nuclear power.

Environment

This has nothing to do with any latter day conversion to concern for the environment. It has everything to do with the ending of the demand for huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons and the economics of privatisation. A nuclear reactor uses

uranium as its fuel. When sub-atomic particles called neutrons strike the uranium atom, it splits into two parts releasing more neutrons and a huge amount of energy. These neutrons go on to strike more uranium atoms resulting in the initial stages of a chain reaction which results in a huge release of heat energy which is then used to produce steam to drive turbines which generate electricity. The chain reaction produces a complex mixture of fission by-products of which plutonium predominates. Thus the first reactors were built not specifically for energy but to produce plutonium for use in atomic bombs.

Toxic Waste

The plutonium waste produced is one of the most toxic substances known. A golf-ball size lump is enough to wipe out a city. It has a half-life of 22,400 years, which means that it takes this long to lose just half its radioactivity. Even today, more than seven years since the Chernobyl disaster, some areas of the Lake District and North Wales are not safe for animal grazing.

Exposure to even the smallest amounts can lead to cancer. There is now clear evidence (which for years has been denied)

of the existence of clusters of victims of cancers such as leukaemia living in close proximity to nuclear plants.

Radiation Leaks

Recent press articles, fed by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) are now attempting to suggest that radiation from nuclear power is somehow "safe" because it is at lower levels than naturally occurring background radiation.

Faced with these arguments, the labour movement should be clear: the smallest levels of radiation exposure can cause cancer. There is no "safe" level of exposure.

According to the *Guardian* (16 September 1993) the average annual dose of radiation in Britain is 2.6 milliseiverts. Half of this is a result of radon gas seeping from the soil into homes and offices and some of the remainder is accounted for by x-rays and other medical uses and natural cosmic rays - which regular long distance air passengers face increased exposure to.

Using this data, NRPB Secretary Michael O'Riordan has claimed in "*Radiation Exposure of the UK Population*" (HMSO) that

Russia overreacted in the face of the Chernobyl catastrophe:

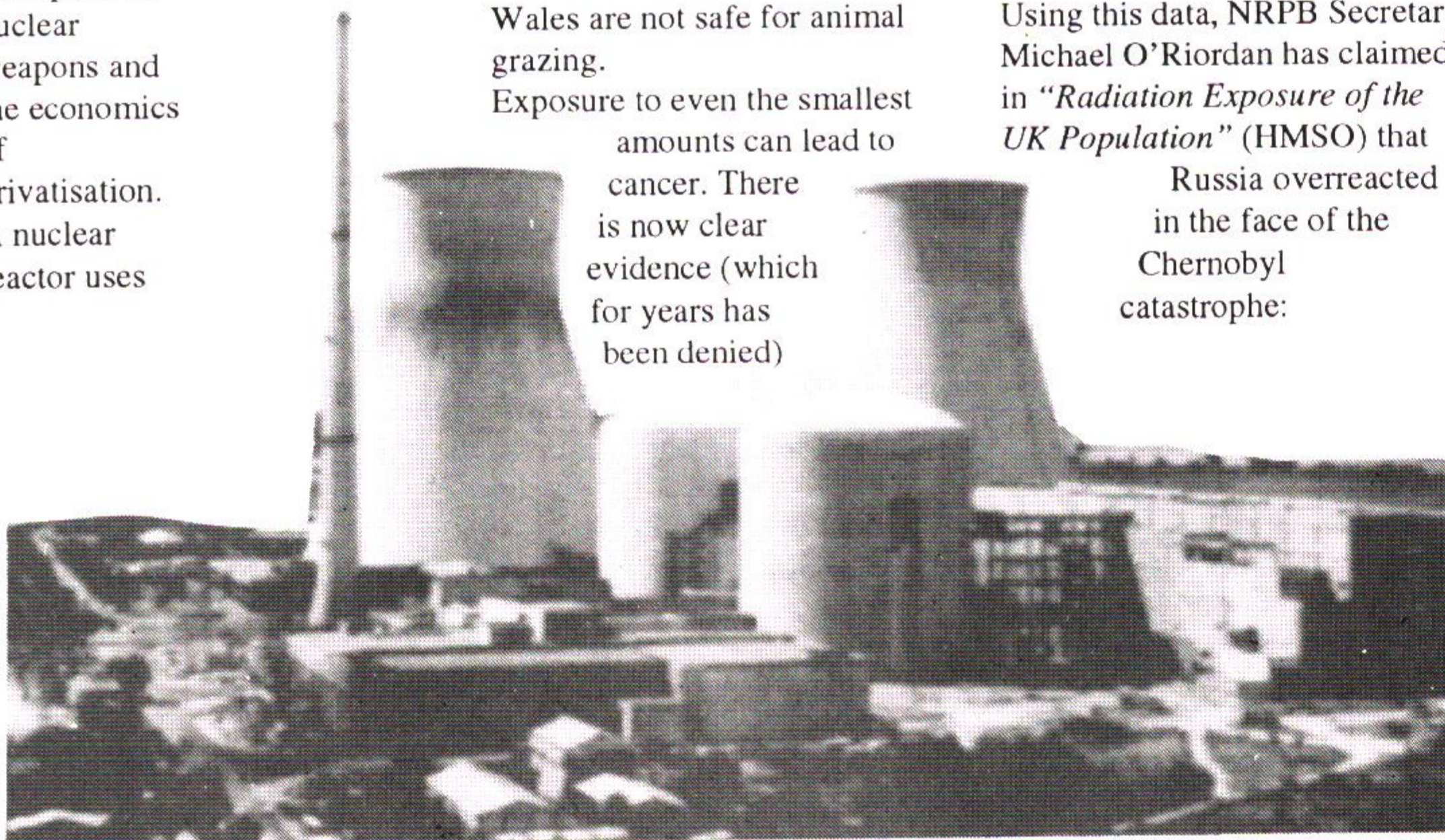
"The Russians have evacuated populations where they were likely to get less (radiation) than people get in Cornwall every year from radon."

"In our business thank goodness, we rarely encounter fatal accidents. In my whole life in this business I have never come across anyone who had a fatal accident. I have read about a few accidents in South America and Chernobyl."

Chernobyl Deaths

He should tell that to the local people of the Kiev area, where the local authorities have attributed 8,000 deaths to the Chernobyl accident. That is so far with many more suffering a lingering death from radiation induced cancers of the next decades. He should tell it to the parents of leukaemia suffering children in the Sellafield and Dounreay areas where local rates of leukaemia incidence are eight times the national average. And this man is in charge of the body that is meant to be our nuclear safety watchdog! Some exposure to natural sources of radiation may be virtually unavoidable but that is no reason or excuse for increasing risks. Indeed urgent research and action is needed to reduce exposure risks from radiation sources such as naturally occurring radon gas seeping into houses in certain areas of Britain.

The first wave of atomic power plant building in Britain took place in the 1950s and 1960s with the building of ten Magnox power stations. Three of these are now being decommissioned as they reach the end of their working life and fail to reach safety standards. The other seven will follow in the next few



years. From being energy producers, they will become net energy consumers as resources are used in dismantling, and in maintaining permanent security at the sites.

Dungeness B

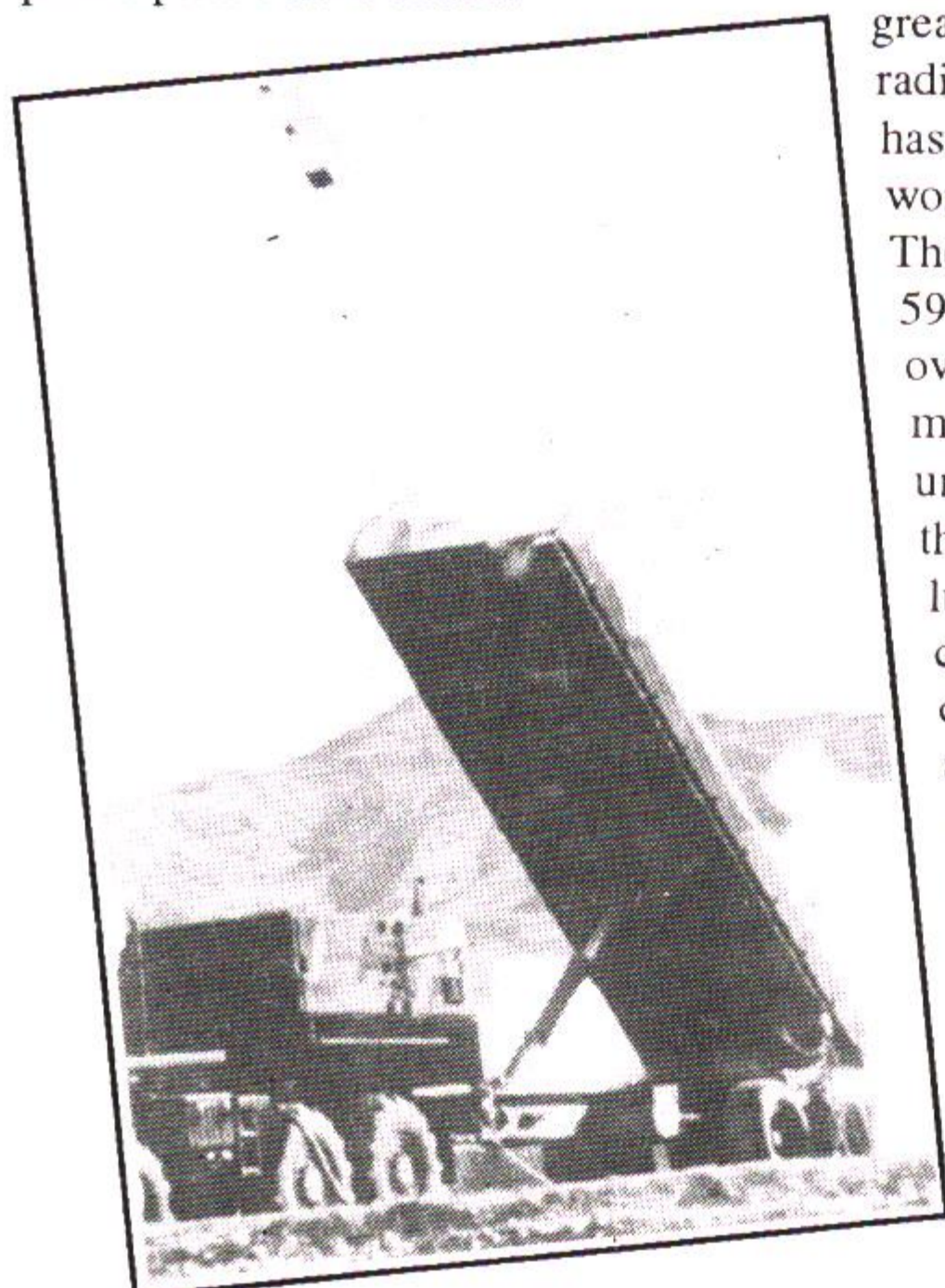
The second programme, the advanced gas-cooled reactor programme, was launched in 1965, and led to seven much larger and more powerful plants. The programme was a technical nightmare, with huge development delays. Dungeness B took nearly 20 years to produce power.

Finally, in 1980 government ministers agreed to finance a new generation of 10 pressurised water reactors. Only one was started, Sizewell B, which is only now nearing completion.

The Tories motives for the development of nuclear power were clearly stated in a leaked cabinet minute from 1979:

"A nuclear power programme would have the added advantage of removing a substantial proportion of electricity from the disruption by industrial action of coal miners and transport workers."

However, with the end of cold war nuclear weapons stockpiles and with them the need for weapons-grade plutonium, and the weakening of the miners since the defeat of the 1984-85 strike, the original reasons for the development of nuclear power plants have ended.



Ironically, the privatisation of the rest of the power industry two years ago began to shed a little light on the real costs of nuclear power, which for years had been shrouded in claims of national security. Successive governments had attempted to hide or play down decommissioning costs and underestimate development and construction costs as they would have undermined the myth of "cheap" nuclear power. But would-be capitalist investors wanted true figures and it has now been admitted that de-commissioning costs could exceed £150 million for each power station, without counting the cost of ongoing security.

The government was forced to withdraw the nuclear plants from the energy privatisation. Instead they arranged a levy of £1.1 billion a year on consumer bills to build a fund for decommissioning costs. At the same time Nuclear Electric (covering England and Wales) has been given a guarantee that it can sell all the power that it can produce.

The Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (Thorp) which Tory ministers now want to commission at Sellafield will make the surrounding area a nuclear dustbin. The purpose of the plant is to import (highly radioactive) spent nuclear fuel rods, with all the attendant transport and security danger, and reprocess them into new

fuel, leaving behind a greater amount of radioactive plutonium. It has been calculated that, working at full capacity, Thorp would produce 59 tons of plutonium over a decade. This may not seem much until it is remembered that a golf-ball size lump could wipe out a city. Even the commercial arguments, which can never outweigh the environmental dangers posed for future generations, do not add up.

Thorp was conceived in the 1970s, when the

capitalist world was embarking on a headlong dash for development of nuclear power. Now that has changed and several of the largest intended "suppliers" of spent fuel for reprocessing are now curtailing their previous nuclear programmes and stockpiles of unwanted plutonium exist around the world.

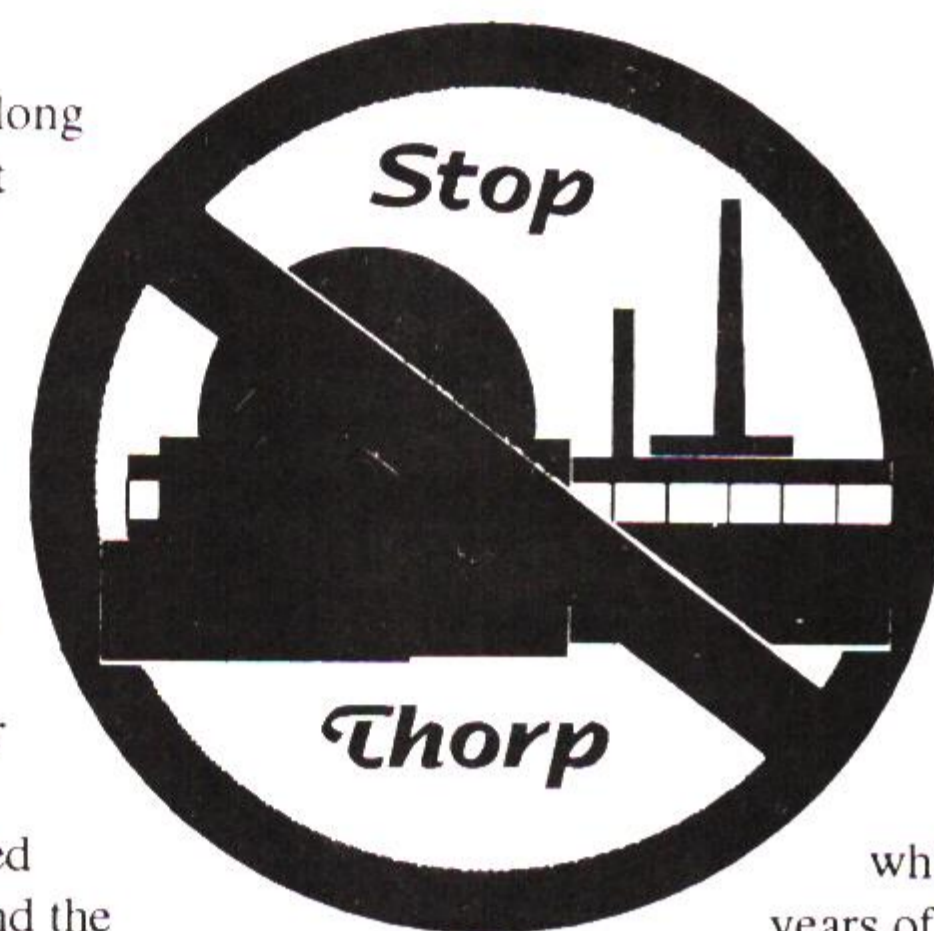
Even the US administration is calling on the Tory government not to proceed with commissioning Thorp. The plant should be closed down immediately.

Hidden Energy

In the period after the Russian Revolution, Trotsky spoke of the "mighty hidden energy" of the atom: "The greatest task of physics consists of pumping out this energy. Then the possibility will be opened up of replacing coal and oil by atomic energy..." (*Radio, Science, Technique and Society*, 1927).

Trotsky was clearly speaking of the possibilities for nuclear power that would open up under socialism, with planned production under democratic workers' control and management. It is in this context that Marxists view the possible future development of nuclear power. The dangers in the development of nuclear technology are such that they cannot be trusted to capitalism or Stalinism, but under a socialist plan it would be possible to devote resources to all-sided balanced research and development which, along with the development of renewable energy sources and improving efficiency of use, would also be able to undertake the huge tasks involved in the development of nuclear fusion.

In contrast with existing fission technology (which splits atoms to release energy), nuclear fusion releases heat by combining atoms together, with very little radiation. The raw material for fusion exists in almost limitless quantities in sea water. The fundamental problem



which years of

existing research is nowhere near tackling, is how to create the huge temperatures needed to start a fusion reaction and then control it without the reactor components literally being vaporised.

The possibility of nuclear fusion being harnessed will only be conceivable with the scale of research and scientific collaboration that will only be realisable under an internationally planned economy

The scale of research needed to make this technology viable is beyond the limited programmes provided under capitalism, even in boom years. The possibility of nuclear fusion being harnessed will only be conceivable with the scale of research and scientific collaboration that will only be possible under an internationally planned economy and even then not for many years to come. Marxists have always opposed

the development of the nuclear fission power programme because it ignored the unsolved questions of handling highly radioactive waste. However the alternative now being encouraged by the Tory government only serves to demonstrate the anarchy of capitalism. While coal mines with exploitable reserves lasting for hundreds of years are being closed down and miners are being thrown on the dole at a huge economic and social cost, the recently privatised energy companies are now embarking on a "dash for gas", building low-cost gas-fired power stations. Fifteen new power stations are due to come on stream by the end of 1994, increasing an already substantial excess of capacity. Apart from Sizewell B, the other fourteen will be burning up non-renewable gas reserves that are estimated to have a life of only 20-30 years. Nor will the "dash for gas" and the weakening of British Gas' supply monopoly benefit "the people". The Economist brutally spelt out the real effect of deregulation: *"The price for consumers of less than 100 therms a year - old-age pensioners and the like - will double as the current subsidy from higher charges on bigger commercial users is competed away. For the smallest users in remote areas, it could go up even more. This makes economic sense. But it comes on top of the government's unpopular decision in March to put VAT on fuel. Many voters will not be amused."*

The whole energy generation and supply industry must be renationalised. It is only on this basis that energy production can be planned in a harmonious way for the benefit of all not the benefit of small groups of shareholders

The building of power stations using limited gas reserves should be stopped. The whole energy generation and supply industry must be renationalised as only on this basis can energy production be planned in a harmonious

way rather than for the benefit of small groups of shareholders.

The nuclear power stations should be closed at the earliest opportunity. The government appointed nuclear industry executives (NRPB and NIREX, the nuclear waste executive) should immediately be disbanded and replaced by boards based on the organisations of the working class including the trade unions and local communities to ensure that the problems left behind by the nuclear power industry are tackled in the best way for the majority of society. The jobs of workers in the nuclear industry must be safeguarded.

Decommissioning

Their skills will be needed to tackle the problems posed by decommissioning nuclear plants and can be used to develop research into new areas of energy production and use efficiency. Between 1950 and 1992 the UK spent more than £17 billion on nuclear power research and little more than £200 million on research into renewable energy technologies. Instead of the "dash for gas", investment should be put into the more efficient use of coal (eg by fluidisation), the development of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and wave power and to investigate the long term potential of nuclear fusion.

A socialist energy policy is not just a question of production. It would also look at consumption, and the more efficient use of energy. This would include the development of combined heat and power plants, the raising of insulation standards and improved construction techniques in new buildings. **In a socialist plan of production, an integrated energy plan would be linked to a transport plan. Above all it would include steps being taken to end the huge waste of resources and pollution caused by the sabotage of public transport and the Tories obsession with road building.**

Under capitalism, energy production has been distorted to produce plutonium for warheads and to undermine the strength of the miners. Energy distribution is being twisted by the privatisation programme. Private profit has no role to play in providing the basic needs of a modern society. The basic necessities of life such as fuel for domestic consumption should be provided free.

The whole industry, from research and manufacture through to distribution must be nationalised and brought under the democratic control of the organisations of the working class.

Whose Profit?

The age old proverb of capitalism remains "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost". Despite the threat from continued pollution a company which spent extra to prevent damage to the environment would soon be pushed to the back of the queue, with "mother" nature is left to pick up the tab.

For young people, of course, the environment is a vital issue; after all the possible repercussions from continued pollution are part of our future.

Saving the planet through merely "turning off the lights, recycling and using roll on deodorants", although commendable in their intentions, are actions which pale into insignificance compared with the damage done by big business in its short-sighted pursuit of the fast buck.

The normal everyday emissions of chemical and biological waste into the sea and air by factories are still increasing and the threat of accidents like the Exxon Valdez oil tanker disaster mean that we have to act soon. But how can the environment be saved? Some governments have brought in legislation against pollution. When this happens the multinationals generally pack up their bags to go polluting in the third world, or they flout the law with the help of an official blind-eye. The continuing mismanagement of the environment only serves to prove that you cannot exercise any real control over something which you do not own. The "green" lobby answer of cutting production, zero growth, closing down "dirty industries" is no solution either. This would succeed in creating increased unemployment and poverty, and would do nothing to help the starving millions of the third world, nor would it prevent pollution internationally or assist the reversal of damage done. In reality, this is a return to the Stalinist idea that our problems can be solved within national boundaries, and that we can all be happy and poor provided we are equally poor.

Socialism is not the equality of poverty but the equality of wealth, we do not stand for the destruction of industry, but for the harmonious pooling of the Earth's resources, planning their use in the interest of efficiency, health and safety of the workers, local communities, and the environment generally. This could only be achieved by nationalising the key industries, and not only in Britain but internationally, under the democratic control of the workers, utilising all the advances of modern technology to cut the length of the working week, without cutting wages, allowing everyone the necessary time to run all aspects of industry and society in general. Only a democratically run socialist society can halt and reverse the damage being done by capitalism. The implementation of a co-ordinated energy policy fully utilising renewable fuels (wind, waves, biofuel, geothermal and tidal), and increasing research into cleaning up current industrial processes (the fluidised bed combustion of coal for example and research into nuclear fusion), a public transport system drastically reducing the inefficiency of car congested cities, in short a programme that does things for the common good and not for the greed of a handful of individuals.

by Alex Grant

The election victory of the fascist BNP in Millwall and the growth of far-right organisations across Europe demands a clear, determined response from the labour movement. Below, Roger Simpson looks at what conclusions the movement should draw from the Millwall by-election and on page 15 Anthony James asks, how can we fight racism and fascism?

The Lessons of Millwall

The election victory of the fascist BNP is a severe warning to the labour movement which will be complacent at its peril. The growth of the far right racist organisations such as the BNP is a very real and immediate threat to the Black and Asian population and to the labour movement.

In the 1970s, having begun with street violence, the fascists then attempted to move against labour movement meetings and attacked trade union activists. Whilst it would be a mistake to over exaggerate the situation, predicting as some have, that the BNP victory in one ward means that a new fascist dawn is around the corner, nevertheless the labour movement must act now to answer the racist lies and drive the fascists off the streets.

Housing Conditions

A number of specific factors contributed in the Millwall ward to make possible an election victory that would have been unlikely elsewhere. Material conditions, social deprivation, unemployment and bad housing conditions are invariably at the root of support for racist sentiments.

With unemployment on the Isle of Dogs standing at over 20 per cent, there is always room for the idea that "someone else" has an unfair advantage. The run down of the docks and all the associated industries such as food processing has led to a certain siege mentality developing. The government was warned seven years ago by a Commons select committee that unless Tower Hamlets gets more money for housing then racial antagonisms could erupt. "It is hard to imagine", states the committee's report, "anything more damaging to racial harmony in Tower Hamlets than competition between different communities for increasingly scarce housing."

There was no significant real increase under the Housing Investment programme since that report. Last year the borough asked for £90 million and got just £24 million.

The feeling of neglect has been exacerbated on the Isle of Dogs by the docklands development of the last decade. Billions of pounds have been poured into building office blocks and

yuppie apartment blocks, which now stand side by side with old tenements and damp 1960s blocks. The local tenants have suffered years of building noise, dirt and disruption and received nothing in return except for TV pictures distorted by Canary Wharf. In these conditions it is no great surprise that the long established tenants of the area, who are overwhelmingly white, can mistakenly feel that someone else is getting a fairer deal, or getting to the front of the housing queue.

Docklands Economy

Another factor in the BNP's victory was the way in which the local dockland economy was bound up for generations with the interests of the empire. **With the vast majority of dockers moving out and the docks closed, the fighting class traditions of the area were weakened. This could have been cut across if the Labour Party had fought on a clear class programme.** Unfortunately, the years of right-wing reformism served to reinforce backward social prejudices. A combination of acute social deprivation and the legacy of the past came together in the Millwall to create the specific conditions that made a BNP victory

possible. But these factors were not the only ones. **Racism in the area has been fuelled over a number of years by the local Liberal Democrats.** Tower Hamlets has been a real-life exploration of the "Liberal Focus" pavement politics which began to grow in some traditional Labour areas in the 1970s. It is an approach that some local Labour parties, lacking a clear socialist alternative to bad housing and unemployment, have attempted to mimic.

The idea behind the Liberal's pavement politics is that they will look after individuals and can "solve people's problems". In reality, in the absence of any wider policies to tackle unemployment and cuts, every Liberal success merely reallocates scarce resources, creating a victim somewhere else. The victims are those less able to speak out, less confident of "working the system". Not surprisingly many are Black and Asian.

In Tower Hamlets, the Liberals took this approach to its logical conclusion. Identifying their support among older white working class people, they evolved the "Sons and Daughters" housing policy, giving priority for scarce housing to children of existing "local" (ie white) tenants. This immediately excluded the vast majority of Bengalis who mainly were a younger generation. This policy led to the



Neo-fascists give Nazi salute during demonstration earlier this year

Liberal leaders in Tower Hamlets being involved in putting out a racist forged Labour Party leaflet in the 1990 council elections. If one 'positive' political development comes out of the BNP's victory, it is that the real, nasty face of inner city Liberal opportunism has been exposed before a national audience. Ashdown may wring his hands. But the national leadership until now has tolerated the racist methods of the Tower Hamlets Liberals.

Indeed they were feted as the leaders of the only inner city council controlled by Liberals. As recently as February of this year the local Labour leadership in Tower Hamlets wrote to Ashdown urging him to stop Lib-Dem councillors promoting "racist feeling in the borough". Ashdown sent an acknowledgement slip but no reply.

Local Lib-Dem councillors responsible for the racist 1990 leaflet produced a document earlier this year stating that they could not have continued without Ashdown's support. In 1991 the Labour MP Mildred Gordon wrote to Ashdown complaining of a Liberal "Focus" leaflet. The content of her letter later turned up in another "Focus" leaflet, showing clearly that Ashdown's office knew and cooperated with the activities of the local Liberals.

Unorganised

It is not an accident that the fascists groups and the Liberal Democrats tend to do well in the same areas. They approach the same people and problems from different angles, but with a similar underlying approach. In Tower Hamlets it went so far that Liberals toured the Millwall ward with Union Jacks flying from cars.

They both appeal primarily to the unorganised, self employed and unemployed working class in run down mainly white inner city areas. Their appeal is that "we'll look after you". It is the negation of people organising themselves or moving through existing organisations such as the Labour Party and trade unions in a struggle to change the fundamental problems involved. No doubt many well meaning Liberal party members will be shocked at the revelations about their Tower Hamlets members. But the point is that the policies operated in Tower Hamlets (and elsewhere) are a logical conclusion of the method of Liberal "Focus" pavement politics, which is based on the idea of looking after people as individuals and attempting to solve the problems of one section of society without tackling the underlying problems.

The Liberals won a majority on Tower Hamlets Council in 1986, in a backlash against years of right wing Labour control. Under the right wing, estates had been allowed to crum-

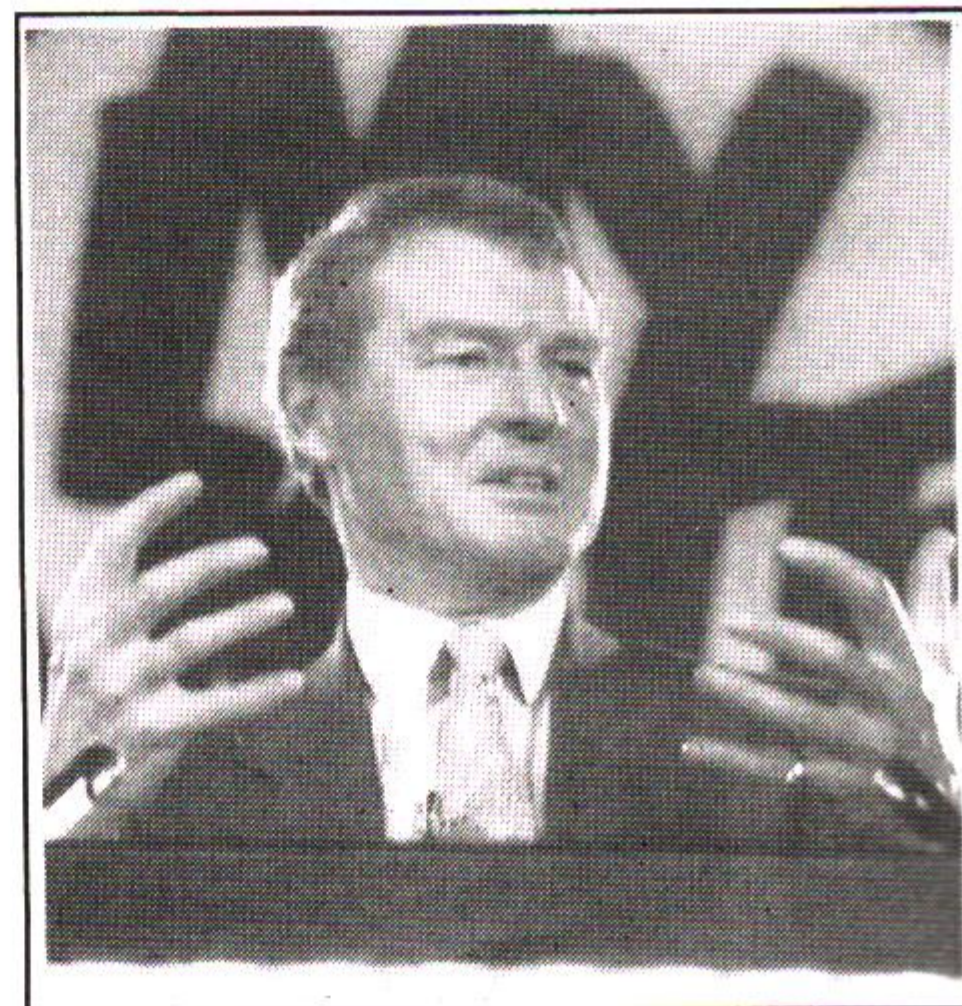
ble and decay, enabling the Liberals to pose as "people who cared".

Since 1986 the left has grown in support in Tower Hamlets Labour Party and Labour won some seats back from the Liberals. Labour needed to undermine the BNP's racist lies with clear class-based arguments explaining the real roots of unemployment and bad housing in the capitalist system. This would have shown how the Liberals and BNP were merely covering up for the Tory government. **However, lacking a clear socialist programme, they have been unable to undermine the bedrock support that the Liberals have established in some of the areas which have a mainly older white population.**

Instead some of the Labour leaflets in the election attempted to undercut the Liberals by adopting a similar parish-pump approach. The election campaign of the local Labour Party made some unfortunate mistakes. A few days before polling day the Labour Party announced that the BNP were threatening to win the seat. In fact they had panicked and counted "doubtful" voters in with identified BNP supporters. This may well have encouraged a number of Liberal voters to switch to the BNP and certainly served to become a self fulfilling prophecy. The media are now wringing their hands in horror, but in the days leading up to the election, sections of them, including TV news, gave at times almost uncritical coverage to the BNP, highlighting their "rights for whites" stickers without seriously exposing their racist lies. By doing this they gave credibility to the BNP.

Without exaggerating the threat, it is vital that the Labour movement responds firmly and quickly to prevent the BNP strengthening its position. In a marvellous action the day after Beackon's election, local council workers walked out in protest at the prospect of having to work with him. This example should be followed up by all trade unions in the area.

Unions should discuss and agree on a course of action and provided this is done should use their industrial muscle to isolate Beackon. Beackon's leaflets use a PO Box number. UCW members should refuse to handle his post. NUT members can take action to defend



Paddy Ashdown - knew about Lib-Dem racism in the borough

pupils and staff facing racist threats and to prevent meetings taking place in schools. On the night of Beackon's victory one local pub refused to host a BNP celebration. Brewery workers should refuse to deliver to any premises known to be used as fascist meeting places. At the same time, the fascist scum must be driven off the streets. While various groups have confronted the BNP on the streets, the resultant running scuffles show that what is needed is for the massive latent power of the labour movement to be mobilised to deal the BNP a crushing and demoralising blow.

National Demonstration

From some quarters the call has been raised for people to join their "community organisations" to fight against the BNP. This is a way of avoiding the main issue, of mobilising the organised might of the labour movement to drive the fascists from the streets.

Asian youth in the East End are organising to defend their communities, but if they are left isolated, they could become alienated from the labour movement. In particular, the call of the TGWU for the TUC to organise a demonstration through the area must be supported, although it is unfortunate that they have called for a "multi-party" approach instead of relying on the power of the labour and trade union movement. If the TUC don't take up the call urgently, the TGWU should take the initiative itself and appeal to other unions for support. TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris has commented that: "As a union with its roots deep in the docklands area, the T&G knows well that the great majority of East Enders hate fascism and pride themselves on their traditions of tolerance and democracy."

Material from the TGWU answering the racist arguments of the BNP could reach into many households in the area. The tradition of the union in fighting for workers rights in the area would help it to gain a hearing.

The existence of tiny groups of fascists is only one side of the political tradition of the East End. The area was the birthplace of the modern general unions in the late 1800s. It saw the



BNP members displaying their "patriotism".

election of the Communist Phil Piratin as the MP for Stepney, the battle of the Poplar councillors and the defeat of Mosley's Blackshirts in the battle of Cable Street in 1936. It is time that these traditions were reclaimed. A massive labour movement demonstration would make it clear to the fascists thugs that while they may have gathered a few votes, they are still a tiny minority. It would also show Asian youth that they are not being left to fight alone. In the face of the growth of support for the BNP, some anti-racists are calling for the BNP and their marches to be banned by law. But the labour movement must be clear. Legal bans and proscriptions introduced officially to curb fascists have invariably been used against the left. Indeed, for years the police have allowed and even protected BNP paper sellers in Brick Lane, while sellers of socialist papers up and down the country frequently face harassment for "obstruction". **The only reliable ban on the fascist groups is one operated by the power of the labour movement.**

The call has also been raised for the election result to be declared void on the grounds that substantial numbers of Asians were prevented from voting as a result of racist intimidation on polling day. While Marxists are not opposed to this course of action, it would be a big mistake if it is seen in isolation as a solution to the problem. Any legal action must be secondary to a campaign of mass demonstrations of the labour movement in the area. If this is not done there is a grave danger that any legal action will only serve to drive a section of white voters into the hands of the BNP.

The rotting decay of capitalism, which leaves room for arguments that one group in society are to blame for shortages, is the source of the increased support for the far right in Britain and Europe. It will not be defeated by moralising appeals to better nature.

To effectively cut across the racists, Labour must put forward an alternative to the problems of cuts, unemployment and bad housing. In the 1920s and 30s, even the Tory government built upwards of half a million council properties a year. But capitalism today is incapable of such measures.

What is needed is a crash house building programme of a similar size which could alleviate the housing crisis in Tower Hamlets and other inner city areas at the same time as providing work for hundreds of thousands of unemployed building workers. However, this will require a socialist housing plan as part of a socialist plan of production.

Most importantly, Labour must be able to convince doubtful workers that it is actually going to change things for the better, which means acting to sweep aside the capitalist system and replace it with a socialist plan capable of ending want and poverty.

In the wake of the BNP by-election victory workers are asking how can the racists be defeated. Anthony Walsh outlines the only programme which can tackle racism.

The Fight to Defeat Racism

The rise of racist and fascist groups in Europe, together with the increasing activity of similar groupings in Britain has given rise to growing concern amongst workers and youth. The recent victory of the BNP in a Tower Hamlets' by-election has turned concern into alarm.

The election of the avowed fascist Derek Beackon has created a backlash in the labour movement, not seen for twenty years, when 350 council staff at the Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Centre walked out in protest. Town hall unions have said they would boycott proceedings where Beackon was involved, effectively bringing the borough to a standstill.

Significantly, the TGWU nationally has called on the TUC to organise a mass demonstration - all be it all-party - against racialism in East London. Under conditions of social crisis and deprivation, where unemployment is endemic, housing shortages have reached chronic proportions, and there is no future for the youth, this mix will provide the breeding ground for racist and fascist groups - as long as the workers' organisations do not offer a way out. The BNP win is symptomatic and serves as a serious warning to the labour movement.

Despair

It is out of total despair that sections may turn to the racist groups, who are constantly stirring up racial antagonism and division. The victory of the BNP in Millwall on a policy of 'rights for whites' by seven votes, reflected disillusionment with the established parties. It comes after the BNP picked up 20% of the vote at a previous by-election in October 1992 and represents a protest vote against the plight of many on the Isle of Dogs and Tower Hamlets generally. This inner city area is home to the poorest immigrants, with Asians comprising about 26% of the population. Since the war, they replaced the predominantly Jewish population that centred in the rag trade, and was the brunt of attack from Mosley's Blackshirts.

Now, with the squeeze on jobs and housing, it is the blacks and Asians that are portrayed as the scapegoats for the crisis of the system. Racial attacks on blacks and Asians have reached new heights. It has been estimated that a racial attack takes place every four minutes. Ten percent of officially reported attacks take place in East London. Several racial murders have taken place over the recent period in South East London, close to where the BNP headquar-

The racist lies must be exposed but an alternative must also be put forward to explain how jobs can be created, homes built, services extended. This can only be done through a socialist plan of production.

ters is situated. The BNP election win came only a week after the savage beating of Quaddas Ali, a seventeen year-old student and violent demonstrations in Whitechapel. Racism is not a moral question, but is rooted in the class nature of society. Periodically, the British ruling class deliberately fosters racism as a means of deflecting attention away from the real causes of shortage and crisis.



Throughout its history, the British ruling class has used various means, including racism, as a means of divide and rule. It was firstly tried successfully in the colonies, in Palestine, Cyprus, India, Ireland, etc, to maintain the power and influence of British imperialism. Racism is carefully cultivated by the ruling class, to be used when necessary. However, they use this weapon with extreme caution, exploiting it with every retreat and disappointment in the class struggle, when the bonds of class unity are at their weakest. In periods of heightened struggle, it is kept in reserve for better times. They are also careful not to whip up racism to such an extent that it threatens its lucrative trade with the ex-colonial countries.

National Front

The growth of the National Front in the latter part of the 1970s was a product of the disillusionment with the counter-reforms of the Callaghan Government. At its height it managed to win council seats in Blackburn and in the 1977 municipal elections, the NF won 120,000 votes in the Greater London area alone. This created a backlash, particularly amongst the youth. This anger was reflected in the growth of the Anti Nazi League. But the ANL offered no real programme, concentrating on moralising appeals and images of the holocaust. Such arguments made those already opposed to the Nazis feel good, but they go no way to answering the fears and concerns of working class people that temporarily have been lured into supporting one or another fascist group out of demoralisation. **The racist lies must be exposed but an alternative must also be put forward to explain how homes can be built, jobs created and services improved. This can only be done by a socialist plan of production.**

The most significant turning point in the 1970s came in Southall, where, after long provocation, Asian youth organised themselves and hammered NF members travelling to a racist rock concert. The pub venue was burnt to the ground. From that moment being an NF supporter was no longer "a laugh", it had become a more risky business. Within three years, with the radicalisation of the trade unions and under the impact of the battles against the new Thatcher government, the fascist rabble had disintegrated.

The shift to the right of the Tory Party attracted these racist elements, who successfully infiltrated the party. A recent convert to the Tories was Mark Cotterill, who joined the Torbay Association after resigning as the South West organiser for the National Front. Cotterill had been responsible for taking NF groups to Belgium to meet fascist groups there. Last October he started Patriotic Forum, the newsletter of British Patriot, which stated: "We think

patriotic Britons can do far more good inside the Conservative Party by meeting and talking to other members once inside than by joining the tiny and mainly crank right-wing parties on the fringe.

"We suggest this not because we are in full agreement with the party...however, there is much patriotic support in that party, mainly at local level."

The Tory Association chairman, Squadron Leader Johnnie Johnson, told the local paper that Cotterill had been admitted in the full knowledge of his former political associations, adding that the association was satisfied he held Conservative views.

Despite the objections of Major ('I want to make it clear that there is no place for these sort of policies'), the outbursts of the respectable Winston Churchill MP about restricting 'illegal' immigration and preserving the 'British way of life' are no accident. They serve to keep the pot boiling. Again it is no accident that racism is inherent at every level of the Tory Party. Over the recent period, a Tory minister at the time, Alan Clarke, remarked that black people came from 'bongo-bongoland'.

Tory Racism

The crop of resolutions for the Tory Party Conference is a reflection of the real attitude of the Tories. "This conference wishes to remind the Government," states a resolution from Rochdale Conservative Association, "that in many areas of our towns the indigenous community is now an ethnic minority and therefore calls for the Government to aim for 'zero

immigration'... This will not cause disruption to family reunion as all are free to return to their country of origin for such purposes."

The Davyhulme Tories (represented by Churchill) state they are "concerned at the increase in racial violence that has resulted from more than trebling of the ethnic minority population of the UK over the past 25 years..."

It is not only the Tory Party that has engaged in racism. The Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlet have played the racist card repeatedly since they won control of the borough in 1986. They turned out all the Bangladeshis from bed and breakfast accommodation for deliberately making themselves homeless by leaving Bangladesh! They have played on the fears of white families in relation to

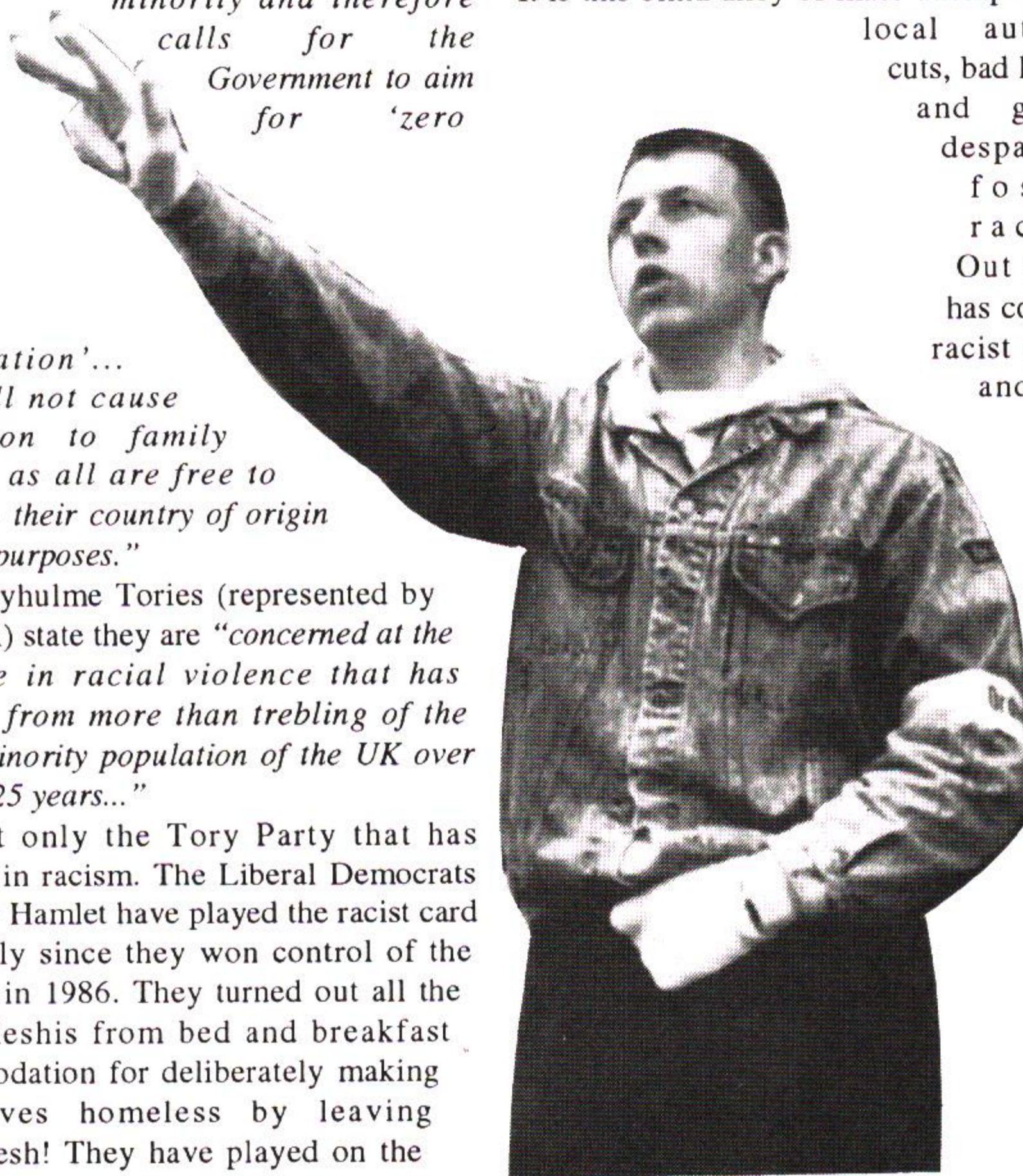
housing allocation. In their election material it states: "Do you believe that new homes should go to islanders not homeless families?" It goes on, "Do you believe that your island councillors should listen to islanders and not the Commission for Racial Equality?"

Under pressure, Ashdown has launched an internal enquiry into the local party after ignoring their racist stance for years. But as the Liberal Democratic campaign organiser, Mathews, stated defiantly: "We won't change the way we are campaigning just because there are some unpalatable truths that must be aired." (Independent, 18.9.93).

In the May 1990 local elections in Rochdale, the Liberal Democrats translated and distributed to white households a Labour leaflet for Asians written in Urdu under the title 'Food for Thought'. John Connell, the Liberal Democratic candidate said "Chowdry's literature (the Labour candidate) was printed in a foreign language - a secret language if you like - for his own narrow, selfish political ends. I thought it proper to print it in English."

The departure of Thatcher and the disillusionment with traditional Toryism, has witnessed the growth of racist groups such as the BNP. In their hard core, they have attracted the scum of capitalist society, intent on stirring up racial hatred and blaming black immigrants for the ills of society. But they attempt to appeal to a wider layer that is disillusioned with Toryism as well as the failure of the Labour leaders to offer any real alternative.

It is this blind alley of mass unemployment, local authority cuts, bad housing and general despair that fosters racism. Out of this has come the racist attacks and even



murders. However, the fascist groups are minuscule at the present time. The BNP numbers about 1,000. Nevertheless, their poison promotes bigotry and serves to divide workers. Their viciousness provokes fear and intimidation, especially in immigrant areas. This poses a grave threat to the labour movement in the long run. It is vital the might of organised labour be mobilised to root out this cancer at an early stage before it is allowed to spread.

The British working class has a proud history in the struggle against fascism. The attempt by Oswald Mosley and his Black Shirts to organise in the East End of London in the 1930's was met by pitched battles that culminated in the battle of Cable Street in 1936, from which the fascists never recovered.

The labour movement should uphold those traditions. The call of the TGWU for a mass demonstration is a step in the right direction. Marxism has always explained that there is only one force strong enough in society to defend immigrants, and workers generally, which is not the self-appointed anti-fascist groups (which haven't the forces or the programme) but the eight million strong Labour and trade union movement.

Labour Movement

However, racism and fascism can only be defeated, not by moral argument, but by a socialist programme that can solve the problems of unemployment, bad housing and low pay, which are the breeding ground of racism. Clearly the Tories and Liberals have no answers. In fact they have promoted racism and even fascism in the past. They are interested in maintaining a system that breeds racism. The call for an all-party demonstration will simply build up unwarranted illusions in these capitalist parties.

Only the labour movement has a vested interest in eradicating racism and fascism. It should stick to an independent class position and mobilise the strength of organised labour against racism and fascism, together with the system that breeds them. That is the only way forward.

At this stage, the ruling class has no interest in building up the fascist gangs. That was clearly indicated by the refusal to grant bail to BNP members, including their national organiser, arrested in Whitechapel for violent disorder. Big business does not want to repeat the mistakes of the past. Its promotion and financing of Hitler's fascist movement in the late 1920s and 1930s ended in world war and the lost of capitalism in Eastern Europe and half of Germany. It is true that Hitler succeeded in destroying the powerful German labour movement, due to the criminal policies of the Stalinist and reformist leaders who refused to forge a united front to defeat fascism. But unfortunately for big business,

the mass forces of crazed petit bourgeois that Hitler mobilised allowed him enormous independence from his rich backers, to their cost. The ruling class will not want to repeat this mistake. That is why the turn towards classical fascism is ruled out.

Today, big business, if it takes the road of reaction like in Chile 1973, prefers to rule through more traditional methods and allies in the military. In other words, it will take the form of a bonapartist military dictatorship.

Another factor is that the social basis for reaction has been weakened in the post war period, where large sections of the middle class and peasantry have been proletarianised. Many white collar and professional layers have become unionised and look to the organised labour movement.

Military Dictatorship

In the modern epoch, the fascist groups act as an auxiliary to the emergence of a military dictatorship, as with the Chilean Patria y Libertad or in Italy where the fascist MSI have been linked to a bombing campaign to destabilise Italian society and prepare the ground for a coup. The MSI also have links with the secret services and the P2 conspiracy, which planned to overthrow parliamentary democracy.

Similar parallels took place in Britain where plots were hatched in the 1960's and 1970's involving leading military personnel, elements of the secret service and sections of big business, aiming to overthrow parliamentary democracy and establish 'strong government'. These conspiracies have been revealed in numerous memoirs and books such as 'Spycatcher'. This threat, however, was cut across largely in the 1980's with coming to power of the Thatcher government and the economic boom that was taking place.

With a crisis in the Tories and a new economic downturn, conditions will inevitably arise - if capitalism is not overthrown - where sections of the ruling class will look towards an authoritarian solution to its problems as in the 1930s.

However, the threat of future mass reaction will not come from the upstarts of the BNP and the other Nazi splinter groups, which are too identified with foreign varieties of fascism. British reaction, when it develops, will be a home-grown 'respectable' variety, emerging from a right-wing split off from the Tory Party itself, possibly around the Monday Club. It will be around racist elements like Churchill and Alan Clarke that this reaction will coalesce. It will take the character of a royalist-bonapartist movement, seeking support from the millions of disillusioned and ruined middle class, desperate to recapture their

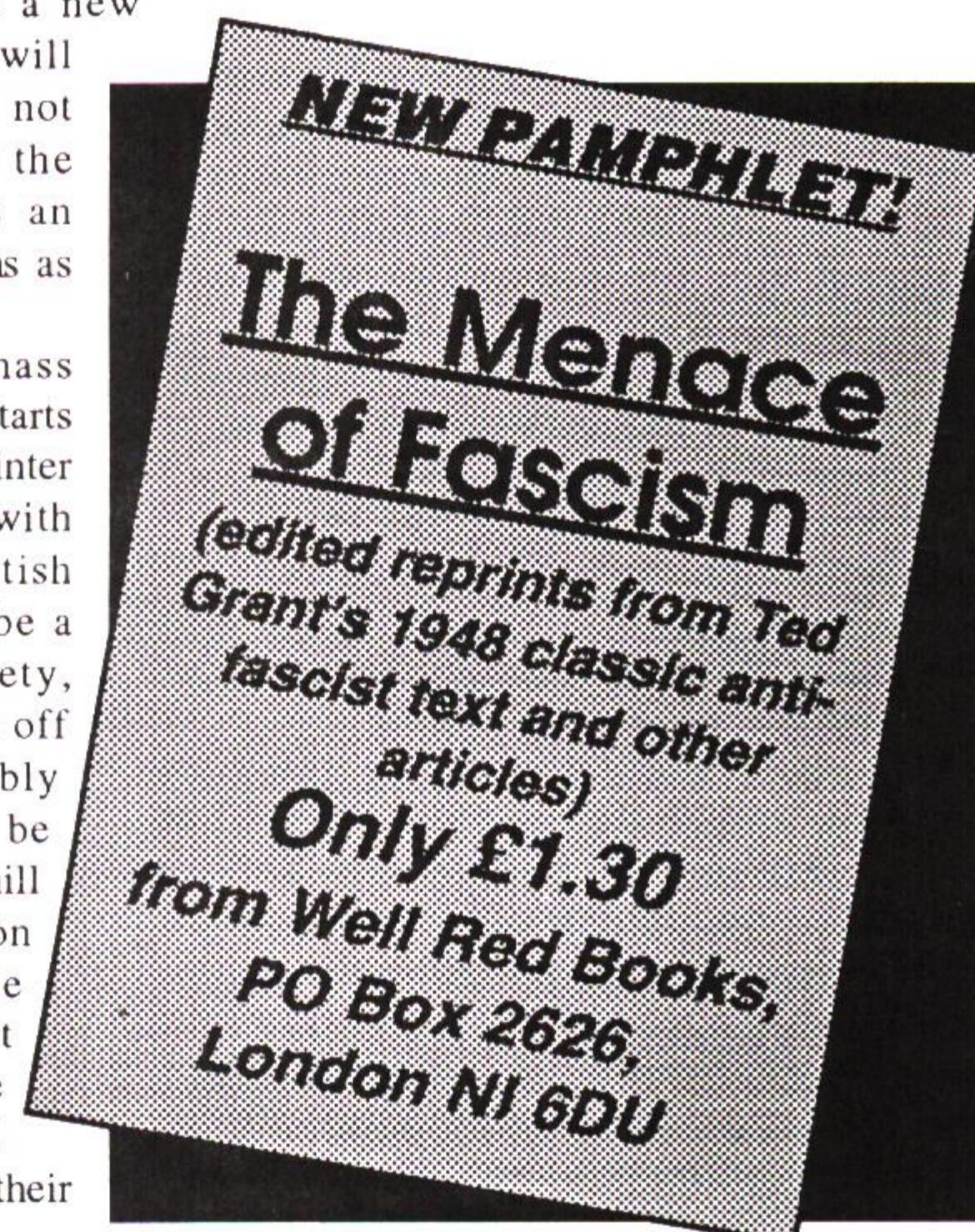
past position. But that is the music of the future.

The decay of capitalism with its pauperisation and degradation, will always serve to provide the raw material for reaction. The key job of the labour movement is to keep the fascist rabble off the streets, and to campaign to expose the lies of the racists. Just as the German neo-fascists, the NPD, were dealt a shattering blow in the late 1960's when 20,000 trade unionists set on their conference and broke it up, so the British labour and trade union movement should take action to sweep away their British counter-parts.

Socialist Plan

But as the revival of the fascist groups in Germany demonstrate, the only lasting solution to this menace is the removal of the social conditions that breed racism and fascism.

The only real way of defeating these threats is on the basis of a socialist programme that can unite and mobilise millions of workers - irrespective of their colour or creed - against the system itself. The only solution to poverty, unemployment and homelessness is to take over the commanding heights of the economy, the major monopolies, banks and insurance companies, under workers' control and management, and to draw up a socialist plan of production, using the enormous resources and technique that is available. Only such a programme can answer the needs of working people and provide the super-abundance that will accrue from a socialist planned economy. A new form of society, based upon human need and not profit, will eradicate for all time the scourge of racial discrimination, bigotry, and hatred, and open up a new history of harmonious development.



Russia on the Brink

Boris Yeltsin has gambled everything on establishing a presidential dictatorship. He has issued decrees abolishing the Russian Parliament and Congress of Deputies, and has concentrated power in his hands. This act represents a coup d'état by Yeltsin's forces and threatens to plunge Russia into a deep crisis.

It is ironic that this has happened at a time when the Commonwealth of Independent states, which was established after the collapse of the USSR, seemed to be becoming more effective with Georgia and Azerbaijan reapplying for membership. Now this is threatened. There are currently two presidents in Russia. The Parliament has dismissed Yeltsin and he them.

Yeltsin is under intense pressure from the Western imperialist powers to push ahead with his 'reforms', but at the same time has faced continual sabotage by the Russian Parliament, which represents the interests of the managers of industry and the bureaucracy. He faced a growing problem of resistance and disenchantment with his rapid drive towards the market economy. So long as the opposition of Parliament exists, Yeltsin would not be capable of carrying through his unbridled restoration of capitalism. Parliament had become the effective focal point of opposition to his 'reform' measures.

Nascent Capitalists

The conflict revolves around the interests of the nascent capitalist gangster elements, represented by Yeltsin, who want a rapid introduction of laissez-faire or uncontrolled capitalism, and Parliament on the other hand, which represents the old bureaucracy of state managers and the military-industrial complex that previously ruled Russia through the Stalinist Communist Party, which prefers a gradual movement in the direction of capitalism where they are the ruling class. There is also a section now (which may even be a majority), who want to return to the old system of so-called 'socialism' and centralised economy. Both these interests are appealing demagogically to the masses for support. Both are appealing to the military caste to move in their favour. Yeltsin gambled on the army's support, but even his own Minister of Defence, Grachev, in the beginning opposed his actions. But faced with dismissal by the Parliament, he then came out in favour of Yeltsin. On the other hand, the Parliamentary Speaker, Khasbulatov, has appealed to all military and security chiefs to disobey all the 'criminal' decrees and orders of Yeltsin. The Central Bank was also instructed to stop financing government and presidential structures.

However, the tops of the military are paralysed for fear of splitting the armed forces. A great part of the officers, who are members of the 'Officers Union' are openly hostile to Yeltsin's regime and have come out in favour of Russia returning to so-called Soviet rule.

There is widespread dissatisfaction in the armed forces. A senior officer complained recently that a large proportion of soldiers had not been paid for the last two months. According to the 'Finan-

cial Times', only 14% of conscripts had responded to call up papers. There are plans to reduce the army by half, with some 80,000 officers being discharged in the last year without homes or jobs to go to. There have been reports from the Pacific region of soldiers actually starving. Hoping to buy support for his coup, Yeltsin increased the wages of the officer caste in the last two months.

Whereas Yeltsin boasted about the support for him, which was repeated internationally by the capitalist press, the newly appointed President Rutskoi asserted that "more than 20 regions have already condemned the coup d'état and expressed support for the constitutional system."

On 18th September, Yeltsin met members of the Federal Council and asked them to supplant the Parliament until new elections, but 148 of the 176 regional leaders refused to support the proposal. Even the St Petersburg city council, the second largest, condemned Yeltsin's decree after rejecting an appeal by the city's mayor, Sobchak, a Yeltsin supporter. In fact Yeltsin was forced to act when he failed to gain the support of the regions for a new constitution with a two-tier chamber, where the regions would form the upper house. They insisted, instead, on the present constitution. Yeltsin's proposals were seen as a trap which would effectively clip their powers and concentrate greater power in the hands of the presidency. In practise, the regions are ignoring both Yeltsin and Parliament in order to increase their own regional powers; in future, they will act according to the relationship of forces.

Yeltsin, like all dictatorial rulers promises future elections under a constitution drawn up by himself. He forms the judge, jury and executioner. Imagine the international outcry there would have been had the so-called hardliners acted in this fashion.



Yeltsin

The actions of Yeltsin are clearly a violation of the present constitution, despite his assurance of new elections in December. Nevertheless, the imperialist powers have fallen over themselves to support him in his actions. In the final analysis, they are not concerned with 'democracy' but only with their material and strategic interests. They are not concerned with the illegal dismissal of Parliament. What a contrast to their howls of protest when 'democracy' was flouted in the attempted coup in August 1991. But then it was a question of the interests of the nascent capitalists being threatened or crushed. It is always their class interests that dictate their home and foreign policy. The hypocrisy is nauseating.

Constitution

Of course, Yeltsin, like all dictatorial rulers, promises future elections under a constitution drawn up by himself. He forms the judge, jury, and executioner. Imagine the international outrage that would have broken out if the so-called 'hard-liners' had behaved in this fashion.

The new constitution decreed by Yeltsin does not even exist at present. He wants a free hand to prepare the way for an untrammelled movement towards the market and capitalism. The measures that have been blocked by Parliament would mean a massive privatisation of industry and result in the destruction of 40% of industry with mass unemployment of 25 million or more.

The West is unconcerned with this social catastrophe in the making and are demanding measures, in return for loans and financial assistance, to speed up the transition to capitalism. They are resting on the nascent Russian capitalists, which is composed of criminals, racketeers and gangsters. They are black-marketeers of the worst type, who in turn are preyed upon by local mafia engaged in protection rackets on a much higher scale than the Italian Mafia and even Al Capone. (See insert). These 'businessmen' are all corrupt. The whole nascent market system is corrupt from top to bottom. For instance, two-thirds of the hard

currency earned from exports is stashed away in foreign bank accounts, mainly in Switzerland, by these 'entrepreneurs'. This is the type of society that is emerging under Yeltsin. He personifies this new repulsive class of capitalists developing in Russia.

The corruption has reached unheard of levels and if they succeed in establishing capitalism it will be much worse. In the meantime, 90% of the Russian population are living below the poverty line, while these gangster-capitalists are living a life of unheard of luxury. Inflation is running at 30% per month. The shops are full of goods but are out of the reach of the overwhelming majority of the population. This is a product of the new 'reforms'.

The Parliament has called for strikes against Yeltsin, but there have been none as yet reported. It appears incapable of calling for action to defend workers' rights, liberties and interests. Both parties are remote from the working class.

The bureaucrats are the descendants of those who betrayed the revolution. They are busy defending their own caste interests. Their abstract call to defend the constitution has failed to ignite an active movement against Yeltsin. Nevertheless things are still in the balance. Yeltsin has burnt his bridges with Parliament, although he has backed down and

compromised in the past. Yet the present situation cannot last indefinitely. Parliament, which has already made Rutskoi president, has called an emergency session of the Congress of Peoples Deputies to impeach Yeltsin. The Constitutional Court has also declared his actions illegal. Despite the decrees of both sides, state power is still divided between both parties, who are locked in mortal combat.

If Yeltsin succeeds, he will become more and more authoritarian in order to push through the capitalist counter-revolution to a conclusion. Through these actions he hopes to gain further economic concessions from the West - also increasing his dependency on them.

Open Splits

On the other hand, the situation is fluid. A split can easily open up in the armed forces, anxious to put an end to the disintegration of Russia. The masses are in a desperate state given the experience over the last four years. A recent opinion poll gave the startling figure of 40% wanting to return to "communism", 84% supported the Constitutional Court. There was a 52-48% split over support for presidential decrees. This is not unique. Despite the disillusionment with the Stalinist regime and the perversion of 'socialism', the ex-Stalinists are making a come-back in

Lithuania and Poland - for lack of a genuine socialist alternative.

A military coup, on the basis of the economic catastrophe, could easily revert to repression against the black-marketeers and a centralised economic plan. However, it would offer no real lasting way forward. It would end in an impasse as formerly. But Yeltsin's programme represents a catastrophe for the working people of Russia. As against Yeltsin, and the quasi-Marxists in Britain who in effect supported him in the past, the Marxists pointed out that he represented the capitalist counter revolution supported by world imperialism.

We stand for an independent mobilisation of the working class and soldiers, under their own banner, against the moves of counter-revolution. By independent means we must support all measures to maintain 'democracy' and the interests of the working class. Under the threat of civil war, workers and soldiers should establish defence committees in the factories and armed forces against the forces of counter-revolution. We warn about the aims of the bureaucracy, but will support all measures to mobilise the workers and soldiers against the Yeltsin coup.

However, what is necessary is a genuine workers' democracy, carrying out the conditions laid down by Lenin and Trotsky for the beginning of a workers' state: the election of workers' councils with the right of recall, no official to receive wages higher than a skilled worker, no standing army but an armed people, and no permanent bureaucracy. In the words of Lenin, "every cook should be able to become prime minister".

There should be a workers' democracy with full rights for all to put forward any point of view. These conditions can be obtained when the working class control industry and the state. That is entirely possible in any industrial economy. The reason for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution was the backwardness of the economy, lack of education, mass illiteracy, and the isolation of the revolution.

Internationalism

The working class can take power in one country, but Socialism cannot be built in one country alone. The world is so integrated that a victory of the proletariat in any important country will prepare the international victory of Socialism. Under the conditions of an advanced economy, the advantages of state ownership and the democratic plan would be so overwhelming apparent that the working class internationally would rally to their support. With modern techniques of computers and information technology, it would be possible to dramatically lower the working week to a six hour day and a four day week, giving the working class time to run industry and the state. Under these conditions degeneration would be ruled out, and society develop in a harmonious fashion. This would mark the beginning of a healthy workers' state, rather than the caricature which existed in Russia and Eastern Europe in the past. Such a society would mean a massive increase in living standards and put an end to the miseries suffered by working people under capitalism.

Ted Grant

Where murder is just a form of currency

"Murder is becoming a form of currency, with companies ruthlessly buying the lives of their business rivals", states Will Stewart (Daily Express, 21 September).

The latest victim was a 26 year old tycoon, Ilya Mitkov. "He featured in the first-ever list of Russia's top 100 millionaires." He was gunned down by a Red Army rifle as he left work. "By the time he died he had a private jet, an office in Mayfair, and a penthouse and Ferrari in Paris... He built a business empire with two banks and a host of other commercial interests... Yet in Moscow's business jungle, no-one seems safe. Newspapers say he was killed in a feud over forged payments involving one of his banks."

"For them, Ilya's death is little more than another statistic in a crime wave that now sees 70 murders a day across Russia - 100 times the rate in Britain... Criminal rings 'are trying to intimidate even the representatives of the biggest Russian banks,' the bosses warned Yeltsin.

"But the banks are not exactly blameless. They are among leading companies which have set up their own squads of hit-men to 'exterminate' business competitors, according to sources inside the KGB, now the Security Ministry. "And the number of suspected contract killings in Moscow runs into hundreds in the past year. Typical prices are said to be between 1,000 and 5,000 per hit. Foreign businessmen now use bodyguards, sometimes former KGB agents.

"Yeltsin has called in the FBI, CIA, Italy's top anti-Mafia police and the former Red Army to counter the lawlessness which has left Russian police and secret services swamped. 'The situation in Moscow is like it was in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s,' said Jim Moody, the FBI's leading mob-buster.... Yeltsin's frequent bold statements about cracking down on the crime gangs are undermined by the sheer scale of corruption. Godfathers are allowed to operate above the law thanks to deals with officials and, it is said, police and security services."

Israel - Palestine: Prospects for a Real Peace *by Ted Grant*

The agreement between the Israeli government and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) marks a new stage in the conflict between Zionism and imperialism and the Arab masses - especially the Palestinians, in the Middle East.

Imperialism has played the game of divide and rule since the British conquered Palestine from the Turks during the First World War and encouraged Jewish immigration in order to play off Jews against Arabs. A pre-Second World War uprising of the Arabs was defeated by the occupying British Army. Jewish opposition too, strengthened by increasing immigration, began to increase against British occupation after 1945. The pressure of the other imperialist powers, particularly the United States, plus the resistance of the Jews, forced the British to retreat from Palestine in a response to a United Nations resolution calling on withdrawal.

The UN settlement was a patchwork arrangement dividing the country between the Arab and Jewish population. The arrangement was not satisfactory to either side. The Palestinians rose up in arms supported by five Arab armies in 1948. British Imperialism believed the feudal Arab armies would be victorious, but they were defeated by the Jewish Defence Organisation, the Haganah. Palestinian refugees streamed

out of the area, partly in fear as right-wing Israeli forces committed atrocities in the Arab areas, forcing them to flee. This set the basis for the Palestinian "problem". At least a million Arabs were forced to flee to neighbouring countries in the Middle East. In reality the whole of the Middle East was divided by imperialism despite being one nation with one language - Arabic.

Arab Federation

The problem of the Middle East is how to obtain a federation of the Arab peoples. This is impossible under capitalism. The refugees were not absorbed by the countries to which they fled, despite all being Arabs speaking the same language. They were kept in separate camps under miserable conditions. Even when they went to the Gulf states to work they were kept separate from the local populations. There were two reasons for this. The Arab rulers were afraid of the effect they would have on the local population and they wished to divert the Arab masses from the struggle against the ruling class by pointing to a

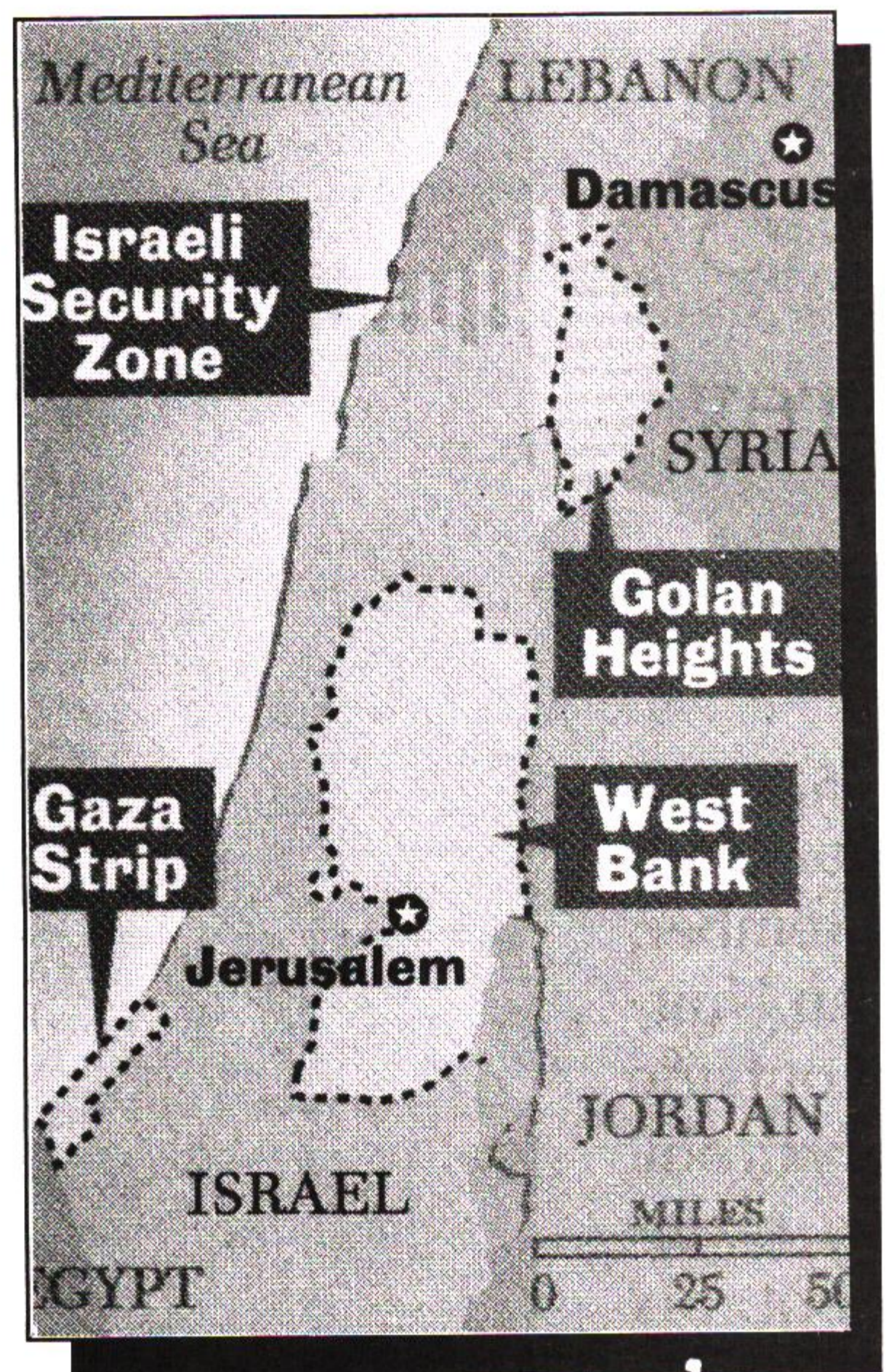
foreign enemy, Zionism, as the main enemy and cause of their misery. The Arabs are one people but the task of uniting them can only be achieved by a democratic socialist federation of the Arabs with autonomy for the minorities in the region such as the Druze, the Kurds and the Israelis.

At the centre of the problems of the Middle East are the Palestinians and Israel. As always the "socialist" "sects" internationally had a reactionary and simplistic answer: "*drive the Israelis into the sea and the destruction of the state of Israel.*" That, of course, would involve the fate of four million people. That was also the programme of the PLO. The PLO was formed at the insistence of the Arab states in 1964. Since the foundation of Israel there have been five wars between Israel and surrounding Arab countries, all of which the Israelis won. The Jews were promised a "*land of milk and honey*" and freedom from persecution. Instead they have had a whole series of wars and preparations for war. After the 1967 war the Israelis conquered

the West Bank of the Jordan River from the Jordanians and Gaza from the Egyptians. The Palestinian population was over a million on the West Bank and 800,000 in the slums of Gaza, a slice of land only twenty eight miles by twenty five miles. Population growth in Gaza is over 4.5% per year and half the population is under 15 years old. In addition, East Jerusalem was occupied and annexed to the state of Israel though the population was overwhelmingly Arab.

Israeli Colonies

Within Israel itself there remains a population of over 600,000 Arabs. The Israelis treat the West Bank and Gaza like colonies. 120,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza worked in Israel. 500,000 people were dependent on them. Yet when there were stabbings of individual Israelis, the Rabin government lightmindedly sealed off Israel from the Gaza Strip and the West Banks resulting in hunger and malnutrition in the Occupied Territories. This "punishment" was inflicted on the Palestinians even though



this meant a serious blow to the Israeli economy, especially in the agriculture and building industries. This was a devastating blow against the fragile economy of the West Bank and Gaza. Recently Rabin announced *"Israeli employers will no longer rely on cheap Palestinian labour. Palestinians will work in and for their own community."* 20,000 Arab labourers were intended to be replaced with Israeli unemployed. A subsidy of 40 shekels (£10) a day will be paid for Israeli workers who take the place of Arab farm labourers. The Israeli government indicated a long term goal of physically separating Israelis and Palestinians.

Fertile Lands

GNP per capita in the Occupied Territories is \$1,800 per annum compared to \$10,878 in Israel. In Jordan it is only \$968.

Average income per head in the territories is \$1,300 a year (in Gaza only \$789), whilst in Israel it is \$10,920. The Israelis have seized one third of the land in the Occupied Territories, with the lion's share of the most fertile land and water rights for the Jewish settlements subsidised by the Israeli state, building houses and settling 115,000 settlers. The intention was clearly to prepare the way for annexation to Israel, especially in the event of a new war in which they would have driven out a great part of the Palestinian population as "fifth columnists." In the meantime the occupied areas were a source of cheap labour for agriculture on the citrus farms and for the building industry.

Throughout this period the tactic of the PLO, supported vociferously by the "socialist" "sects", as with the IRA, was individual terrorism, assassination, bombings and guerrilla raids. This was the alleged "war of liberation." In reality it was futile and counter-productive. We Marxists argued this with the PLO and the "sects". It merely played into the hands of the Zionist ruling class of Israel. We argued that only a mass uprising of the Arab workers of the West Bank and Gaza would shake the Israeli

state and could produce the liberation of the Arabs. The leaders of the PLO and the "sects" argued against this strategy. They argued, contrary to Marxist theory, that the military grip of the Israelis in the Occupied Territories was too strong and the population too cowed and suppressed to have any chance of success. The population of the West Bank and of Gaza were too inert and apathetic to hope for an uprising of the Palestinian people. Similar arguments were used about the strength of the Shah's secret police before the collapse of the Iranian regime in 1979. The leadership of the PLO were taken by surprise by the beginning of the Intifada in December 1987. This was the decisive factor which led to a retreat of the Israeli ruling class from the idea of "greater Israel." Like imperialists everywhere they found the cost

of military occupation greater than the gains.

Apart from the demoralisation of Israeli troops faced with an uprising of people, particularly children, armed only with stones, there was the increased costs of the occupation - more troops needed to hold the

situation in check. They had the odium internationally of firing on unarmed children and the pressure mounted from the imperialist states for some sort of compromise. Three out of four ex-generals and 68% of serving generals and senior security personnel advocated an agreement to withdraw. A similar majority of serving members of the General Staff. These among other factors forced an Israeli compromise. One thing sadly lacking in the marvellous, enduring and courageous Intifada was a fraternal internationalist appeal

to the Israeli troops to join with the insurgents against the ruling class. This could only have been done by a Marxist organisation with Marxist perspectives and a programme of a Socialist Federation. Despite brutal repression by the Israeli authorities the Intifada could not be defeated.

US Imperialism

In 1987 Rabin advocated the crushing of the Intifada using *"might, power and beatings"* to tumultuous applause. He told Israelis, *"We will suppress this violence. Any means at the army's disposal in compliance with army orders is fit if it serves the purpose."* It was these factors plus the inexorable pressure of imperialism, especially the United States, which reluctantly forced the Israeli ruling class to retreat, at least in

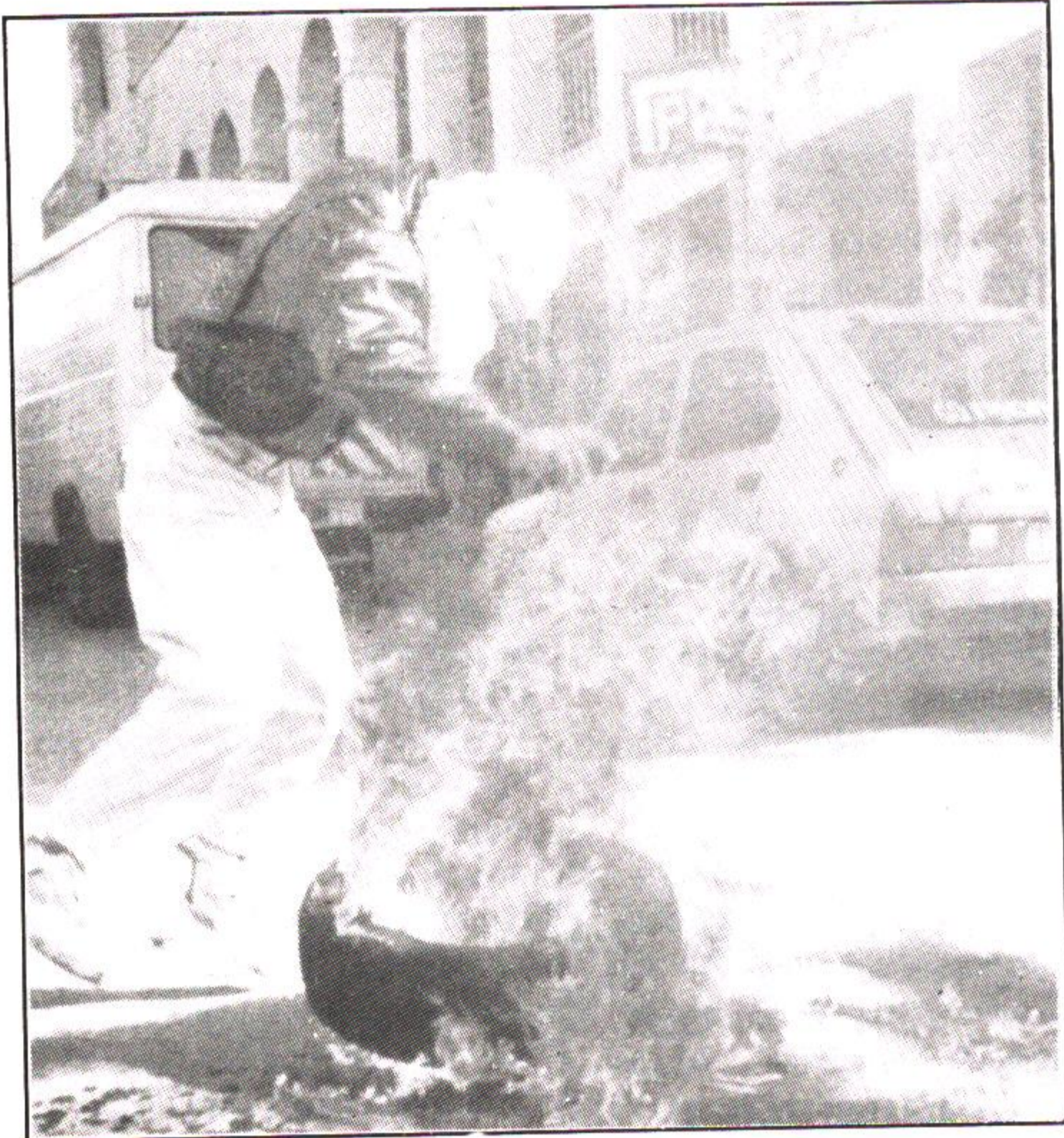
Israel. They have given \$2 billion a year to the Egyptian state. Israel is no longer as indispensable as in the past. So US imperialism exerted pressure on the Israelis to make peace. Even the former right wing Likud government was forced to go through the motions of peace negotiations with the Arab states and the Palestinians. Negotiations began more than 22 months ago. Likud was forced to negotiate in order to try to get the American government to offer the \$10 billion loan guarantees they were seeking to find the money to absorb half a million Russian immigrants who went to Israel. There is 12.5% unemployment in Israel at the present time. The Israeli government wants to spend \$20 billion on housing and state infrastructure to absorb the Russians over a period of 10



Palestinian activists celebrate the deal

words, for the present. So long as the Cold War lasted, the existence of Israel as a reliable ally on which US imperialism could count was a vital necessity. The total amount of "aid" to Israel by the US was \$4 billion a year, \$77 billion since 1948. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the situation has changed. The US still needs Israel as a secure base for the future but not so urgently. After the Gulf War they had allies amongst the Arab states in addition to Egypt. Since the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel they have subsidised Egypt as well as

years. They have to borrow the \$20 billion on international markets and require the US loan guarantees to get it. The guarantees were held up by the US until the recent agreement between the PLO and the Israeli Labour government of Rabin. The Likud was looking towards the absorption into Israel of the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Rabin and the Labour leaders had the same perspective. But the failure to "pacify" the West Bank and Gaza compelled a rethinking of the problem. The Labour victory in the general election with a vague peace



The Intifada was a major factor in hastening a deal

programme altered the situation. The endless "war against the Intifada" was shaking Israel. It had a much greater effect than all the wars Israel had waged. Such is the effect of mass action against repression. 18,000 Israelis have been killed in Middle East wars. In proportion to population this would be the same as about a quarter of a million in Britain. There was a weariness amongst many Israeli workers against neverending repression and the prospect of new wars.

PLO Bankrupt

In the first Israeli opinion poll after the agreement there was only a 54% majority in favour. Since then this has increased to over 60% Arafat and the PLO were literally bankrupt. After their support of Iraq in the Gulf War, under massive pressure from the Palestinian masses, the Gulf oil states cut off their subsidies to the PLO. The organisation was in the throes of crisis. According to the Guardian (16.8.93) there has been a \$450 million cut in the money sent home to Palestinian families from Gulf workers since the end of the 1991 war and a drop of \$150 million in direct aid from the Gulf states to PLO institutions in the Occupied Territories. This has meant less

funding for universities, hospitals, newspapers and welfare payments for around 50,000 families. Palestinian diplomatic missions had to lay off staff. PLO backed newspapers have been closed, salaries of officials remained unpaid. The mood became divisive and acrimonious. The PLO was threatened with the possibility of breaking up. This is why Arafat looked for a way out in an agreement with Israel.

The terms of the agreement turn Arafat into a virtual Israeli puppet. Gaza and the town and area around Jericho will come under the partial control of the PLO. They will control housing, education, social services, culture and taxation. The Israelis will still control foreign policy, security and the Israeli settlements. They will withdraw their troops from the populated areas. The rest of the West Bank, for the time being, will remain under Israeli control. Jerusalem will remain one city, "united" within Israel. Prime Minister Rabin declared, "Jerusalem remains under Israeli sovereignty and its capital." A Palestine Police force will be recruited under Palestinian control to secure order. According to some reports half the Palestinian Police will be recruited by the Israelis. The

Israeli army will not be withdrawn for 2 years. Depending on the "behaviour" of the PLO in the next two years in Gaza and Jericho there could be a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the rest of the West Bank within five years. There will be only partial autonomy, not a Palestinian state. Later Palestine could possibly be linked in a confederation with Jordan. Probably the area of the West Bank and Gaza will be demilitarised. Thus the Israeli ruling class will still dominate the area.

Status of Jerusalem

According to Prime Minister Rabin, the whole of Jerusalem will remain as part of the state of Israel. Arafat is disputing this in his speeches to the Arab rulers. In a speech to Arab League ministers in Cairo (19.9.93), Arafat declared that the peace deal was the first step to regaining all the land occupied by Israel. *"The agreement we arrived at is only the basis for an interim solution and the forerunner to a final settlement, which must be based on complete withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian land, especially Holy Jerusalem,"* he said. But real power rests on force of arms and this will be in the hands of the Israelis. Arafat has moved from one extreme to the other. From a refusal to "recognise" the existence of Israel to capitulation to the Israelis. The imperialist patrons of Israel concurred with this position. Warren Christopher, Secretary of State for the US State Department, said, *"The accord did not include provision for Palestinian statehood within the next five years. It does not take the step,"* he said and *"the United States has never supported a Palestinian state."*

The immediate result of the compromise was a split among the Palestinians. On the eighth of July supporters of Arafat's Fatah fought with the fundamentalists in Gaza. Fists and gunfire were exchanged, iron bars, knives and axes were used in the clashes. In Rafah 1,500 fought, 1 was killed and thirty injured. However over 70% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support Fatah

and since the agreement was reached this figure has increased. Hamas has announced that they will boycott future elections organised by the PLO. This can only be because this will show them to be a dwindling minority in the Occupied territories. The fundamentalists, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the group of Abu Nidal - 10 Palestinian factions in all opposing the settlement - organised a strike of protest in the refugee camps of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. These refugees have nothing to gain short of independence. Hamas declared a general strike on the West Bank and in Gaza as a protest. But in reality the big majority of Palestinians support the agreement. The situation in the Occupied Territories is such that the people have nothing to lose. The PLO was threatened with the loss of control of the streets to the fundamentalists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Hence the desperation of the PLO to obtain "autonomy."

Military Power

Arafat has belatedly recognised that the Arab rulers used the PLO as a tool in their own interests. He cannot rely on the Arab armies for "liberation." Israel, despite its small population, remains the strongest military power in the Middle East. Israel possesses nuclear weapons. Its army is a "levee en masse" as against the Arabs "professional" armies conscripted by hunger rather than ideology. Without an internationalist approach and with terrorist attacks the Israeli masses remained hostile to the PLO. The decisive advantages in the agreement are in the hands of the Israelis. The international ruling classes will not tolerate "ethnic cleansing" in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. So the Israelis are compelled to make the best of this. Agreement with the PLO opens the way to agreement with neighbouring Arab states. Jordan has already made an agreement. The Israelis are negotiating with Syria and Lebanon. The Palestinians scattered around the world, the Diaspora, have been sacrificed. The half million who fled from

the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 will be able to return, but those who fled in 1948 from what now constitutes Israel, who with their descendants amount to around 1.5 million people, will have no right of return or compensation. Money will be "showered" on the West Bank and Gaza to try and "normalise" the situation. At present the infrastructure is dilapidated. Roads are unsurfaced. Only 30% of houses are connected to a sewage system. Tons of raw effluent pours into the streets.

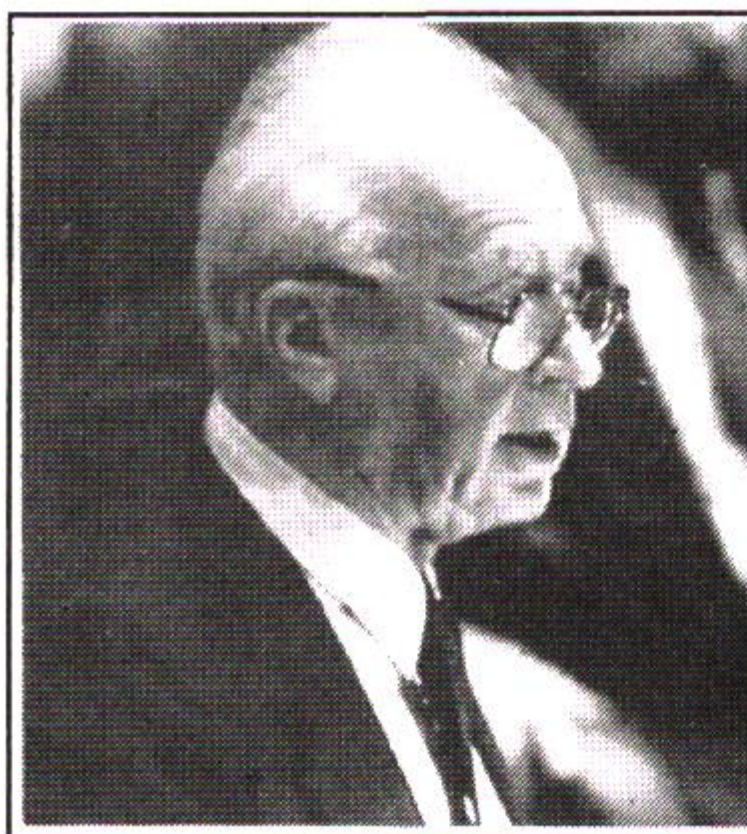
Financial Backing

For the first year Arafat will receive from the EC countries alone £383 million. Similar sums will come from the USA. The Gulf States will be pressurised to chip in similar amounts. The World Bank estimates \$4 billion will be necessary over ten years. This is needed for imperialism to try and develop stability in the region. Oil is vital for the economies of the West - that is why they will underwrite the Israeli-PLO agreement. However they will fail in their aim of stabilising the situation in the Middle East. It will continue to be an area of upheavals and revolutions because of all the class contradictions. As a reward for the agreement, the EC has restored Israel's "most favoured nation" trade terms which had been cancelled because of Israeli "intransigence." More aid will now be given to

Israel by the EC than to the whole of the Maghreb (Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria), with a population of over 40 million. The United Nations, World Bank, the G7 Powers, along with some smaller states such as the Scandinavians, have promised aid which would amount to a similar amount per head as the Marshall Plan for post-war Europe.

The officials of the PLO, Israel and its neighbours are going to meet to discuss a central fund to direct international assistance to the Occupied Territories. The UN will assist to "create a viable economy with proper roads, water and telecommunications." All the imperialist powers will be involved, including Japan, the US, the EC and oil-rich states. Israel will benefit through the development of trade with the Arab states which recognise Israel.

King Hussein of Jordan, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and President Assad of Syria have been quick to support Arafat. Syria, which since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been trying to secure American aid, supported the Gulf War against Iraq and is now "accepting" the agreement. The Syrian rulers said that they supported whatever the PLO did. Iran, Iraq and the Muslim fundamentalists have rejected the agreement, refusing to take part in future elections. The Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation



Rabin

of Palestine and the Population Front for the Liberation of Palestine, along with other "left" factions, have taken a similar position and threatened Arafat with assassination.

The most likely result of the agreement in relation to Jerusalem would be access to all the Holy places of the Muslims for all the Arab states. The Israelis will not budge from their actual annexation of Jerusalem without a war.

Demilitarisation

Palestine after five years will remain an Israeli puppet. Israel will insist on the demilitarisation of the area. This means domination by the Israeli state and ruling class. The Zionist rulers have reluctantly abandoned their dream of a greater Israel, despite massive spending on the settlements in the occupied areas. Though the settlements remain under the control of the Israeli state for the interim period, they will be withdrawn as the settlers were forced to withdraw from Sinai after the peace agreement with Egypt. Ironically, that agreement was reached under the right wing Likud government. The Israeli state will sacrifice the settlers for their broader aims.

A public works programme will probably in the first phase be implemented in Gaza and the West Bank in order to mop up sections of the 50% of the population who are unemployed. There is a dread of the consequences of failure by the imperialist powers. Within limits they will put in big sums to try and stabilise the situation. There will be enormous economic benefits to the Israeli state. The Intifada has constituted a

running sore which undermines the morale of the Israeli army. Even after five years the resistance of the Palestinians continued despite repression. In January it was reported that 25 Palestinians, including 10 children under the age of 16, had been killed since the beginning of December. More in two months than in any full year since the Intifada began. It was this bitter and implacable resistance which caused the Israelis to retreat.

If Israel can find a way to agreement with Syria by handing back the Golan Heights or the major part of it, with the Heights demilitarised, then there could be a big extension of trade with the Arab countries. Of course the Israeli army would always be on standby for a rapid reoccupation of the Golan Heights if there was any threat from Syria. There are sufficient social and economic contradictions in the Middle East to prepare explosions. But the US and other imperialists have the illusion that by getting this agreement they can guarantee their oil supplies. They think they can eliminate the festering ulcer of the Palestinian problem. In reality this agreement is far from a solution. In the short term it will be a "success" from the point of view of imperialism's interests.

Class Conflicts

From a long term point of view, however, it is not a solution. To the despairing Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza the prospect of work, water, health measures and the perspective of Israeli withdrawal constitute some hope for the immediate future. The promises of the imperialist powers will have some effect. The Israeli state has all the key positions in its hands. They could retake the West Bank and Gaza in any emergency. They have been forced to retreat by the pressures of the Intifada and those of the imperialist powers but they still have immense compensatory advantages for the immediate future. In the coming epoch, however, it will be the class issues which will come to the forefront of events in all the Arab states and in Israel itself. ●

There is a dread of the consequences of failure by the imperialist powers. Within limits they will put in big sums of money to try and stabilise the situation. There will be enormous economic benefits to the Israeli state.

However, from a long term point of view, the peace plan is no solution.

Lift the Suspensions, Save the Health Service

Despite a new court order the Catalan authorities continue to victimise health workers following a lengthy dispute.

It's over three years now since the extraordinary struggle of the hospital workers of Vall d'Hebron took place. Their strike against an unfair temporary employment scheme lasted 43 days, action that eventually forced the Generalitat (Catalonian Regional Government) to take on over 8,000 casual workers on a permanent basis and permanent contracts. This victory followed a broken previous agreement from March 1990, when promises had been made to take the workers on on a permanent basis. Once the strike was over, the ICS (Catalan Health Institute), the regional health ministry under the Generalitat, proposed that 21 members of the strike committee be suspended without pay for a year. According to documents that were signed at the end of the strike, these suspensions were only to be implemented should the members fail to exonerate themselves in legal cases.

Disciplinary Action

There are now three demands, including the one received in September, from judicial bodies demanding the ICS do not carry out any disciplinary action against the 21 members of the strike committee until they have concluded their proceedings and reached a final decision. On July 9, fourteen of the 21 suspended workers, on the orders of the court, returned to the workplace accompanied by a notary in the hope of recommencing their respective duties. But, yet again, the ICS ignored the court's decision. If the Generalitat keeps dodging the law - that in a capitalist democracy is only a front - action should be taken against the Catalan administration. If this does not

happen our "workers" solicitors should file for criminal damage to compensate for all that has been inflicted upon us. These are hard times for the working class, and there's worse to come. It's no longer possible to conduct a strike like that led by the healthworkers. Neither the administration nor Vall d'Hebron's management can abide the existence of democratic workplace unions because of the obstacle they represent on the road towards privatisation of Spain's health service which, regrettably, the leadership of both major trade unions - CCOO and UGT - are supporting.

Privatisation

The leaders of the main health service unions have already signed agreements which facilitate the "modernisation" of the public sector, thus paving the way for a gradual and subtle attack on the rights of both patients and workers in the Spanish health service. The cut in the number of subsidised medicines is a clear indication that such is the case.

Geographic mobility, staff reductions, a worsening of working conditions all form integral parts of such a policy. To carry out such measures they will need trade union consensus, and that is precisely why the suspensions have not been lifted, despite court intervention. We are the cog in the works stopping their plans from working smoothly. Nevertheless, whether it be with the help of the legal apparatus or by trade union action, we will continue our struggle for our jobs and, as is our duty, defend all health workers' rights and the service itself - the only health choice available to the working class.

**Manuel Camacho
General Secretary CGT,
Vall d'Hebron**

Send messages of solidarity to:

Seccion Sindical de CGT Ciudad Vall d'Hebron, Paseo Vall d'Hebron s/n, 08035 Barcelona, Cataluna, Spain

Send letters of protest to:

Director General del ICS, Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, 587, 08007 Barcelona, Cataluna, Spain

Send donations to:

Rosa Maria Montensinos (Comite de Sancionados de Vall d'Hebron)
Account No: 34-0.100.320.350 Bank: La Caixa
Office number: 0764

Solidarity with Health Workers' Fight

Fourteen workers from the Vall d'Hebron Residential Health Centre, Barcelona, face a year without pay and employment. They are being victimised for fighting against short term work contracts. This sanction means that these 14 trade unionists and their families will not receive a single peseta of their wages for 12 months. Whilst the principal campaign is directed at lifting the sanctions, it is vital that these workers also receive the financial backing from the international labour movement.

Three years ago the workers at Vall d'Hebron waged a 43 day strike against short-term contracts which forced a change in the policy of the Generalitat (the government of Catalonia) to the extent that 6,000 workers who had been living with the insecurity of short term work contracts achieved permanent contracts.

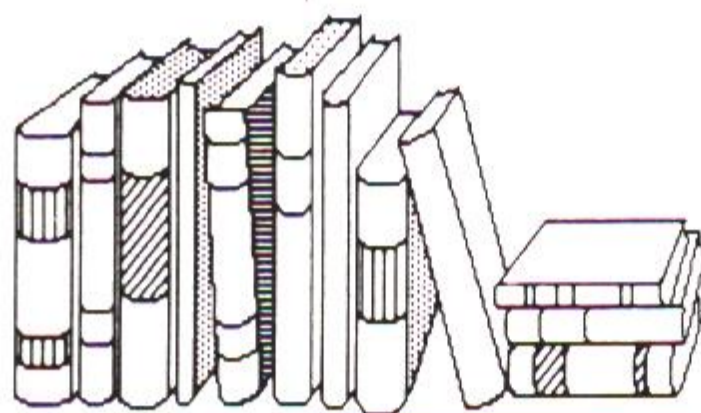
The struggle began at Vall d'Hebron where the administration had failed to fill any of the permanent vacancies since 1983. To such an extent that by 1990 around 25% of the workforce are without permanent contracts.

The strike had clear implications for the entire health sector in Catalonia as well as the rest of Spain, and the main force behind its success was the solidarity of workers from other important regional hospitals. From the beginning of the dispute meetings were organised at other hospitals to explain the issues and this resulted in many solidarity actions.

Conscious of the implications of the strike (34% of the total workforce in Spain are on short term contracts) the Generalitat waged a vicious campaign against the strike and in particular the strike committee. The police repression of the pickets was particularly severe. One of the factors which led to even greater solidarity was the hospitalisation of two workers resulting from a police charge.

The sanctions now imposed on the workers are not just an attack against members of the strike committee, but an attack against any trade unionists who are determined to fight for the interests of the workers.

- No to short term contracts
- No to privatisation of health care
- Immediate withdrawal of the sanctions



Bookshelf

This book published in 1988 and now available from Well Red Books tackles one of the most difficult questions posed by 20th Century history - how did Fascism triumph in a country which had one of the strongest organised working classes?

This book maps the developments within Germany from the end of World War 1 in 1918 through to Hitler's victory in 1933. However this is not intended as a dry history account but a book which will draw out the important lessons for workers today - for Marxists this is the point of studying the past.

At each stage the author seeks to outline the main political questions posed by the events as they occur. In 1918 Germany facing defeat in the war was on the brink of revolution. The Russian revolution of 1917 was having an "electrifying effect" on the workers in the factories and in uniform. Tens of thousands of workers moved into action as the book describes, "as with the February Revolution in Russia, the German masses poured onto the stage of history. They took destiny into their own hands. A red flag flew over every barracks and over every ship in the German Imperial Navy. Alongside a feeble government, the workers' and soldiers councils ruled all the main cities of Germany. The old state apparatus had collapsed and the streets were now controlled by armed workers"

Now Back in Stock!

Germany: From Revolution to Counter-Revolution

by Rob Sewell

Published by Fortress. Price £2.95

Yet despite this the opportunity to seize power was not taken and very "rapidly the workers' councils handed power over to the Social Democratic leaders, who in turn began to rescue German capitalism" In analysing the political reasons for this the book seeks to draw out a number of important points. In particular it notes that the failure of the revolution would lay the seeds of counter-revolution and also the origins of the nazis who grew out of the Freikorps set up by the Social democrat leaders in 1919 to crush the revolution.

Rosa Luxemburg

The author also takes up an important point in relation to the tactics of Rosa Luxemburg in saying that her "failure to build a mass revolutionary party was not due to the fact that she had not broken earlier with social democracy to form an independent sect, but to her failure to create a well-organised and homogenous tendency within the SPD at a much earlier time" The book then goes on to deal with the important developments of the twenties - the Kapp putsch of 1920, the uprisings of 1923 - which will be the subject of a future article in this journal - and finally the rise to power of Hitler on the back of the failure of the workers parties to act. The madness of Stalin's "Social Fascism" policy - in which the main enemy was seen as the Social Democrats not the Fascists - is dealt with in detail and conterposed to Trotsky's position of a united front of the workers'

parties against the Nazis.

As Hitler himself is quoted as saying "only one thing could have broken our movement - if the adversary had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed with the most extreme brutality, the nucleus of our movement".

Hitler's Rise

The Nazis came to power without any resistance and proceeded to destroy the workers organisations completely. The lessons of this disaster should be made clear to all as the book continues to state; "Hitler could have been broken if the labour movement had acted swiftly. but its leadership was rotten. It acted as a brake at each stage of struggle. The KPD (German CP) ... deliberately split the workers' organisations, paralysing them on the eve of its most decisive battle against Facsism"

This short book - which is well illustrated and comes with a usefull chronology and glossary - should be read by all workers with a view to learning to understanding the importance of the role of the working class in transforming society and the terrible conseqences of failure.

Steve Jones

Order your copy from Well Red Books, PO Box 2626, London N1 6DU. Price £2.95. Please add 50p post and packing.

GATT Collapse Step Nearer

The EEC's Council of Ministers must make a vital decision this month. They must decide whether to accept the agreement reached earlier this year with the US to cut subsidies on agricultural exports and so make farmers in the EC compete on more equal terms with their American, Canadian and Australasian competitors. The conservative French government has pledged to protect their farmers' interests and up to now has tried to renegotiate the deal, called the Blair House accord, by getting a five-year delay in implementing the subsidy cuts. But it is likely that by the time you read this article, the US trade negotiator, Mickey Kantor, will have told the EC negotiator, Leon Brittan, that there will be no compromise. If that is the case, the EC must

decide whether to accept the terms of the Blair House accord or by rejecting it threaten all the moves towards the holy grail of 'free trade' in global markets. If the French opt to veto the deal unilaterally, they will open up divisions and splits within the EC's own Single Market economy (where tariffs have been removed and there has been free movement of trade without regulation since the beginning of this year).

Even more important, if the Blair House accord collapses, then the major trade liberalisation negotiations of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), started way back in 1987, the so-called Uruguay Round could unravel, plunging capitalism into a protectionist economic war leading to a major slump. Watch this space!

Next Month:

GATT, Free Trade, Protectionism

Good, Bad or Ugly?

by Economics correspondent
Michael Roberts

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With the date looming for agreement on a new constitution and with elections next year, our correspondents in South Africa look at the perspectives for a transition to majority rule.

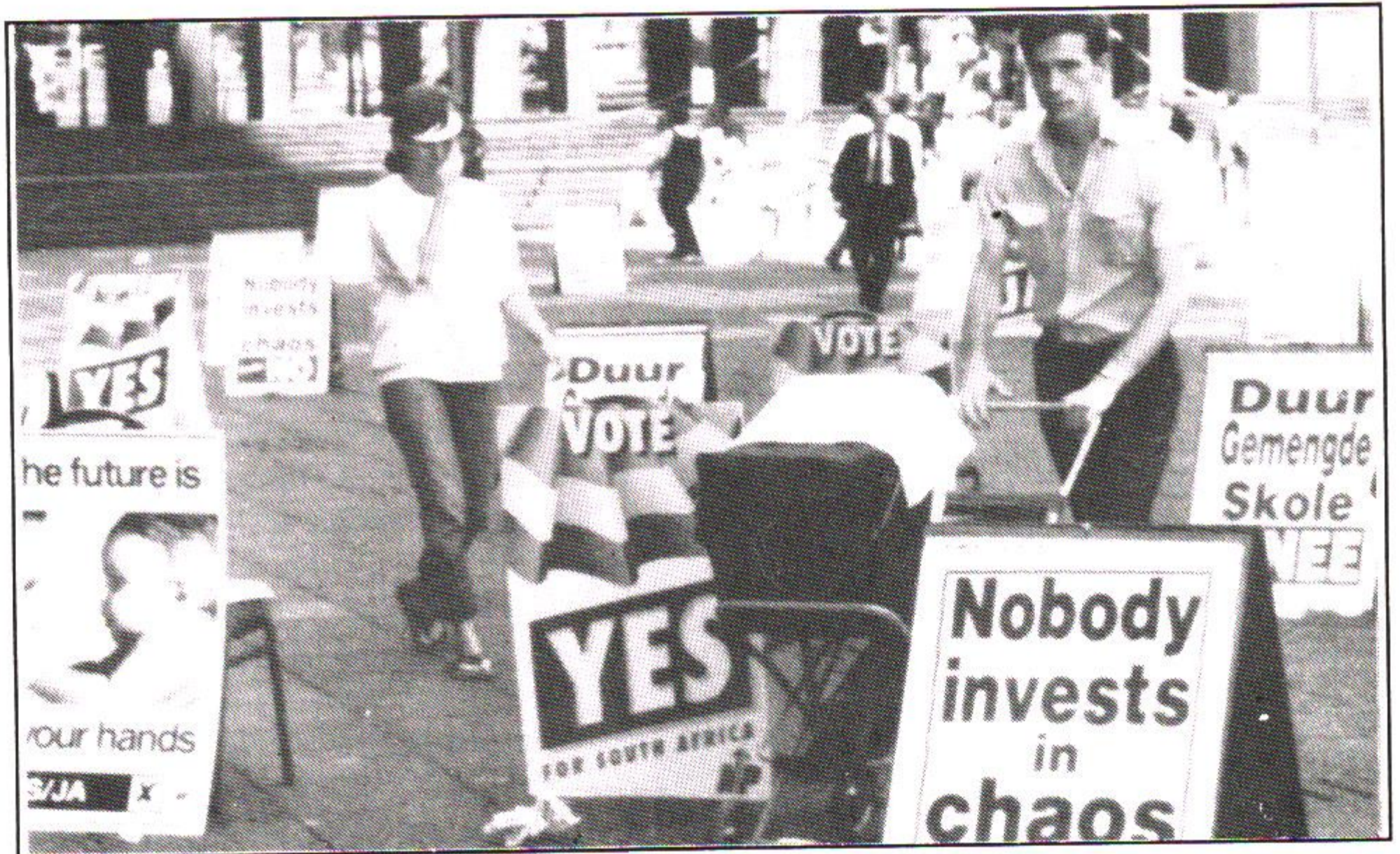
Winning Power or Just Winning Office

Only one thing is certain in South Africa, and that is that nothing is certain. This morning's newspapers were filled with parliament's approval of a Transitional Executive Council (TEC) to "help run the country" up to the planned elections on April 27 next year. It is said to "pave the way for the end of centuries of white rule," But there is a strange, now-you-see-it-now-you-don't feel about the "historic" changes taking place.

Yesterday, the debate in parliament scarcely got a mention in the news. By this afternoon the headlines were all about floods in the Eastern Cape. In a radio straw poll in central Johannesburg, the vast majority of those interviewed didn't know what TEC meant. In the meantime, taxis were blockading city streets in protest against a government-enforced petrol price increase while the oil price was falling sharply. The ultra right was threatening a "ten plagues" campaign of violent resistance if the government goes ahead with its political reforms. The editor of the pro-government *Beeld* newspaper asks: "Are we going to have an orderly parliamentary process or are decisions going to be taken at street level?" The answer would seem to be - both.

Conflict

Given De Klerk's big majority in parliament (as long as the National Party doesn't split) and pre-arranged deals with the ANC and the Democratic Party (DP - the liberal party of big business) the parliamentary process will no doubt be orderly. But huge tides of conflict are building up "at street level" which could sweep it aside. Millions of South Africans are wondering what the future holds. The spectre of "violence" hangs over the country like a shroud. Who is causing the violence and why? The answers to these questions will depend on who you ask. Activists see the sinister and of a "third force" - elements of the security forces operating outside official policy, or hit



Elements in South Africa hope that by creating chaos they can cause economic collapse and scupper the power-sharing talks

squads backed by these elements - provoking the waves of killings and revenge killings in some East Rand townships and areas of Natal. The vast majority of whites see violence as a "black phenomenon" - a diabolical plot by the ANC and its "communist" mentors, or (depending on how right wing they are) a mindless eruption of barbarism threatening to wipe out Western civilisation as represented by white rule. There's no doubt of security force involvement in orchestrating bloody violence against strongholds of the ANC. Reactionary Bantustan leaders, particularly Buthelezi of Kwazulu and his semi-militarised Inkatha movement, have been willing accomplices in this campaign of destabilisation. Making the country "ungovernable", previously the slogan of the black youth, has become the objective of these reactionary groupings. What do they hope to gain? The National Party (NP), the traditional party of white supremacy, is today dominated by a leadership which seems committed to carrying out the power sharing policies demanded by big business in an effort to create a more stable basis of rule.

The white middle class and workers no longer hope to safeguard their privileges through parliamentary means and mistrust those in control of the state. Yet they still make up the backbone of the security forces and the state bureaucracy. White reactionaries and black Bantustan leaders alike have their power base in the existing apparatus. They are not about to give it up. Any form of power sharing is seen as a deadly threat which has to be prevented at all costs.

Sabotage

The more perceptive right wing leaders such as General Viljoen, however, understand that a racist putsch at this stage would not only arouse the fury of black South Africa but could not be touched with a barge pole by the West. Their only hope is to sabotage the constitutional process on which De Klerk and the West depend. Only if negotiations break down completely could the possibility of a "settlement" more to their liking be put on the agenda. What would happen then? Whilst it is not possible to forecast exact events a few indications are visible. One is the over-

whelming preoccupation of the right wing and Bantustan leaders with "federalism", "confederalism" and other formulas spelling the partition of South Africa.

Clearly they see the impossibility of creating a regime of their own to govern the whole of South Africa. Buthelezi aspires to no more than domination of Natal in partnership with local whites (who are rallying to Inkatha in droves). Viljoen's Afrikaner Volksfront (AVF) demands only a regional volkstaat (people's state). There are reports of behind-the-scenes talks between the ANC and AVF leaders to seek a compromise.

In reality, the AVF-Inkatha programme would rule out the prospect of a federal but unified South Africa. If "independence" from the "spectre" of an ANC government is conceded to these regions others may follow suit - for example the Western Cape with its two-thirds coloured and white majority. With most capital and skills likely to gravitate towards "non-ANC" regions, any possibility of a centralised economic policy to address the country's problems would rapidly fade.

Right Wing Power

Do the right-wing leaders and their Bantustan allies, depicted by the media as impotent figures of fun, really have the power to hold the country to ransom? The top layers of the military and state bureaucracy seem loyal to De Klerk and intent on securing their future in a new dispensation. Even at lower levels there is a visible confusion and division. In this sense the extent of right-wing power is an unknown factor, but there is no doubt that it is formidable.

As Mandela observed: *"What a cause of worry to me is the right-wing inside the cabinet and the ultra right-wing represented by the Conservative Party and the AVF. In spite of the fact they lost the last election, they polled 500,000 votes. Then in the referendum last year Mr De Klerk won comfortably, but not until the right had won more than 800,000 votes. Apart from that they have a substantial following in the civil service, and the security forces. Some of them have taken part in building powerful communications systems and so on. That worries me."* (Weekend Argus, 18.9.93)

There are other signs of the right wing mustering forces. The government's controversial decision to award contracts for cellular phones to two consortia of its own choosing has run into a storm of protest from the ANC and Cosatu. One reason is general opposition to privatisation and the move is perceived as a deliberate scheme to undermine a future black government. In the field of telecommunications, the strategic importance of creating a network of sophisticated communication outside government control is obvious.

Is the right wing digging itself into an impregnable defensive system that could not be defeated without tearing the country apart? Already, in response to the TEC vote, a few voices have hinted that Afrikaners should repudiate the present parliament and recognise the executive of the AVF as their "provisional government". But gestures of this kind are premature. Blacks and whites still wait and watch while life in much of the country, on the surface at least, goes on much as normal. The horrors of daily and nightly killings are confined to a few black areas. City centres present a picture of prosperity and a well-oiled economic machine, with only the beggars and street children to drive home the fact that there is a different world down the road.

The questions will only be answered by the events of the next few months. During October a new constitution will have to be agreed if the election timetable is to be met; in just a few weeks, in other words, all the problems of regional boundaries and powers will have to be resolved. In November the TEC is supposed to start monitoring the exercise of state power.

Then will come the election campaign, and it is probably for this that the right-wing are sharpening their teeth. Many, including some despondent voices on the left, have

The ANC and Cosatu leaders have given up the idea of majority rule - all their policies centre on the perspective of forming a government on the basis of the existing state

conceded that there can be no genuine elections if significant parts of the country are effectively out of control. There is every indication that Inkatha and other reactionary forces are intent on ensuring this happens. Already many black areas have been carved up on a party-political basis. Despite sincere protestations by ANC leaders that they are committed to freedom of expression, there are ANC strongholds where other organisations are not permitted to hold meetings; and there are Inkatha areas where it would be

certain death to campaign for the ANC.

There have been violent clashes between ANC and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) supporters, and ANC and black consciousness supporters. There are areas where factions within the ANC and factions within the PAC have bloodily settled their differences.

If a week is a long time in politics, then the six months ahead in South Africa promise to be a near-eternity of tension and ferocious eruptions of conflict.

Gloomily surveying the prospects, liberal leader Zyl Slabbert has suggested that, if elections are impossible by April, perhaps a referendum should be held. This is likely to be the worst of all possible worlds. Millions of black South Africans have their sights set on the elections to bring to power a black government that will transform their lives. Their disappointment and anger if the prize is snatched from their grasp could be earth-shattering.

A denouement like this would open up yet another possibility. Faced with the breakdown of the constitutional process, De Klerk may well have no option but to seek consensus among black leaders and Western governments for some form of executive "interim" rule - perhaps a continuation of the TEC arrangement - as the only way of maintaining order.

Those in the movement who denounce this as a coup and try and mobilise mass struggle would be faced with emergency powers. Though purged of its racist trappings, the apartheid state would effectively be back in business, uniting the whites behind it and, possibly, splitting black leaders down the middle.

Minority

Could De Klerk, with or without an ANC coalition, hope to keep control on this basis? Some, mesmerised by numbers, state that it is impossible. They forget that armed and organised minorities can terrorise unarmed, unorganised majorities. Spontaneous struggles cannot be kept up indefinitely. Without a clear goal, a viable strategy and skilful tactics they will sooner or later run out of steam and the state forces will regain control - until the next explosion from below.

The point, and the greatest weakness of the mass movement, is that the existing state machinery is undefeated and that no alternative machinery of rule is waiting in the wings. The ANC and Cosatu leaders have given up the idea of majority rule - all their policies centre on the perspective of forming a government on the basis of the existing state.

Mandela has made clear the dilemma this involves: *"As one of our colleagues has said, when we win an election, we merely occupy office, we don't actually gain power,*

because to gain power is going to take some time. It means that we must reorganise the security forces to make those services capable of defending democracy."

Mandela concedes that it will be necessary to purge the existing security forces in order to make it feasible for the ANC to govern. In so doing he gives notice to the hardline racists that an ANC government would set out to purge them. The stage is thus set for a right-wing backlash, with potentially disastrous results.

Rule of Capital

The reason for this dilemma is ideological. The popular leaders have no conception of a society run on anything but capitalist lines. Within the capitalist scheme of things, majority rule in South Africa is "unrealistic". It would mean political earthquakes and, very probably, a flight of capital and economic collapse. In order to coexist with capitalism, the ANC leaders therefore have to try to adapt to the existing institutions and hope that De Klerk will be able to deliver his side of the bargain: white support for a "government of national unity".

Even then, will the ANC be able to deliver black support for such a government? It is obvious that no government inheriting the crisis-ridden economy would be able to offer solutions to the masses. The leadership are under no illusions on this score; at best they hope to offer gradual improvements on the basis of political stability and an influx of foreign investment. This, they believe, will gain time and broad acceptance.

These hopes seem very fragile. There is no space here for an analysis of the medium to long-term economic outlook and the scope it offers for a programme of social reform. But quite apart from this, there are big question marks about the prospect of achieving the political stability which is a precondition for any economic growth.

The black townships used to be solid working class strongholds. Now there are huge concentrations of unemployed people, many of them recent migrants from the rural areas, living in abject poverty, eking out a living in the so-called informal sector, rife with crime and internecine violence.

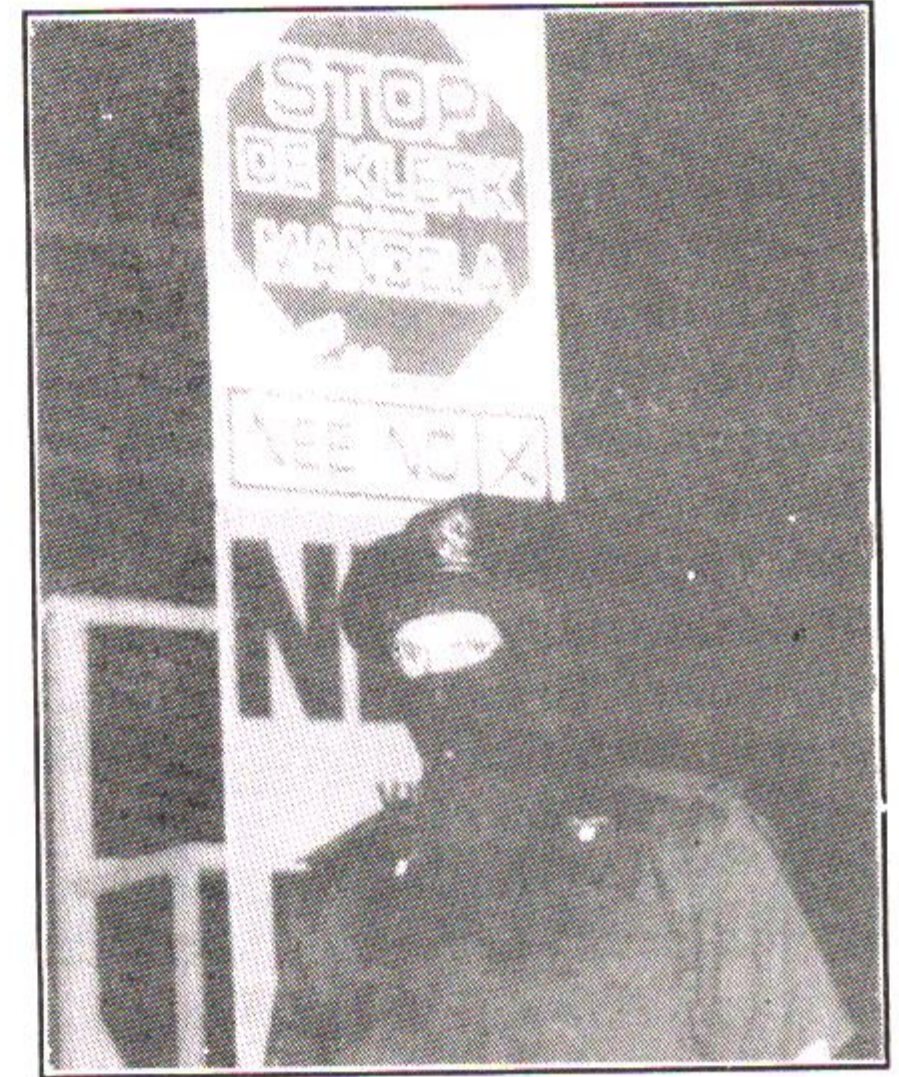
The youth are highly volatile. They have been pushed beyond the limits of endurance. They have nothing to lose, they are filled with steely determination to destroy every symbol of white supremacy and every sign of collaboration within the communities. They are not so much "seeking an alternative" as seeking to return to the road of "mass struggle" and "armed struggle". This has come to mean running battles with police and Inkatha in some townships; elsewhere it has meant random attacks on whites, even on coloured workers entering the townships.

Ironically, the youth have not seriously

challenged the economic programme of the ANC leadership. What they are rejecting is the compromises which it entails. Their tactics are incompatible with the politics of seeking a negotiated settlement. "Mass action" on this basis could unleash forces beyond the ANC's control that could make the spectre of race war a reality.

Asked about the ANC's thinking on "ways to tackle the problem of the inadequately educated and unemployed youth in the townships", Mandela gave a revealing reply: "We're all concerned about that. But one of the things we notice is that when we address the youth and point out to them the dangers of violence they tend to listen. When violence erupted on the East Rand I went there and I made an appeal for peace. As I arrived there was a placard: "Mandela, we don't want peace, we want guns." I said we must go to members of the Inkatha Freedom Party and say to them: "Why should we be slaughtering each other when we can sit down and talk?". There were jeers. So I said to them, you have been fighting Inkatha since 1984, you will never defeat them just as they will never defeat us. Continuation of the violence means more innocent people are going to die. If you want me to lead I am going to tell you what I believe to be the correct strategy. If you don't want me to tell you, tell me to resign and I'll walk away now and go and attend to my family. They immediately fell into line and by the time I left it was they who were clapping and cheering."

There is not a word about the expansion of education and massive job creation programmes that would be necessary to tackle the fundamental problems of the youth. Mandela knows that the economy cannot afford it. He offers nothing more than the



The ultra right wing threaten violence if power sharing becomes a reality

authority of the ANC leadership to hold the youth in line. How long can this last? On the other hand, it is clear that the youth alone can offer no solution to society as a whole. Socialists have always explained that the labour movement is the key not only to building a new democratic order but in breaking the power of the capitalists. Only by doing that can we harness the resources effectively and begin to address our social needs. Armed with a programme explaining convincingly how this can be done, organised labour could win enthusiastic support not only among the youth but also among the middle class, both white and black, and among white workers. Developing and campaigning for such a programme has become a crucial task. It is the only basis for uniting the mass movement and isolating right-wing reaction; as such, it is the only hope for South Africa.

Fights Break Out Over Price Increase Action

The 7c per litre petrol price increase has created confusion among commuters after the action by taxi owners and drivers to challenge the government and petrol bosses. (The taxis are mini-buses charging low fares and serving areas that are often without public transport; many workers use them every day - editor) It started last Wednesday when taxi drivers and owners blocked major city streets demanding that the government withdraw the price increase. Fights started when the SA police intervened and arrested some drivers. Commuters were stranded and were forced to take either buses or trains.

When taxi owners saw that the bus companies were not supporting them, they started taking people forcibly out of the buses. Many people had to walk home and could not get to work the next day. In Khayelitsha, outside Cape Town,

some people were injured when taxi owners stoned and even fired at buses.

Whereas the taxi owners' demand was a good one and supported by many working people, the way the campaign was conducted has created anger and frustration. First of all, they were not told about it beforehand and secondly, when they used alternative transport they were stoned and ired at.

Many people feel they should have been involved beforehand. Some say the ANC and Cosatu should have been involved so that they could call a stayaway because as workers they will be the most affected by the price increase. Instead there is now a danger that the taxi owners will exploit the situation to further their own interests and try to drive public transport off the roads.

Socialist Appeal's Sales Campaign '93 has got off to an excellent start as Business Manager Steve Jones reports.

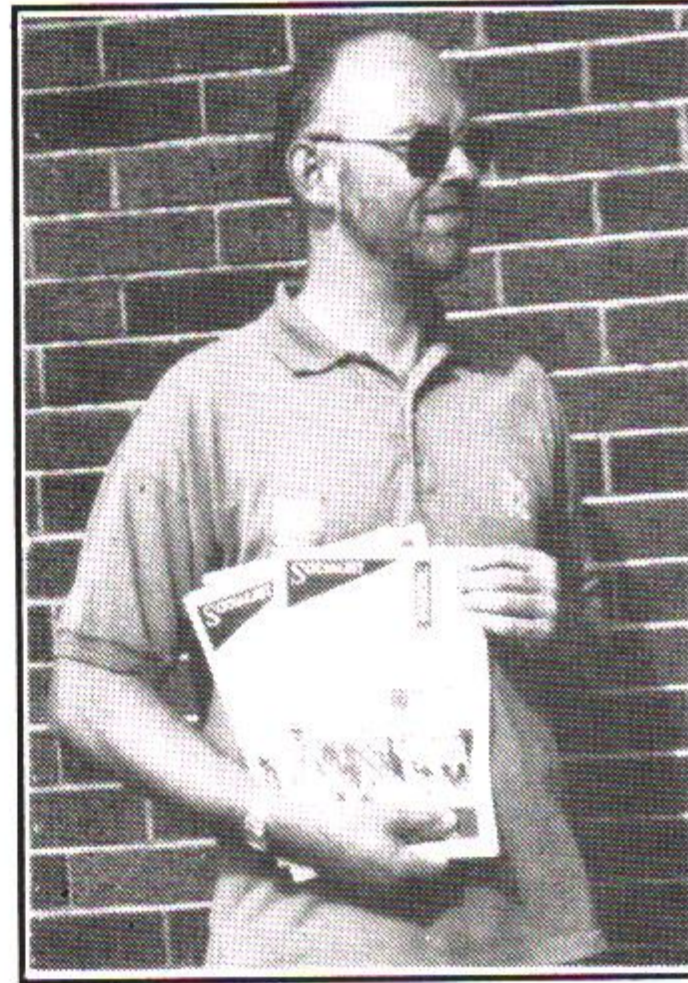
Off to a Flying Start

**£5,000
Appeal
Launch**

One delegate at this year's TUC congratulated Socialist Appeal for the "wealth of material" we produced giving a clear Marxist analysis of events. Undoubtedly, with the economic debates raging in the unions and Labour Party, with events in Russia and the former Yugoslavia, there is a desperate need for a clear Marxist perspective pointing a way forward for the labour movement.

With the constraints of a 32-page monthly publication, Socialist Appeal cannot deal in sufficient depth with all the issues workers are looking for an answer to (*despite our heroic efforts - ed!*). Socialist Appeal's editorial board has consequently launched a special £5,000 appeal to purchase urgently needed pamphlet publishing and finishing equipment. With this equipment, we could immediately begin the vital task of publishing pamphlets on subjects such as racism and fascism, a socialist programme for the unions, on Marxism and science, on key economic questions such as nationalisation, full employment and so on, and on a range on international issues as well as republishing some of the Marxist classics which are now out of print. With this new material at our disposal the voice of Marxism in the labour movement would take a qualitative step forward. We urge every reader to respond to our special appeal and make a donation - every pound is vital. We urge every seller to visit regular readers and ask them for a donation. We appeal to you - help build the ideas of Marxism, help us raise £5,000.

No sooner had we announced the launch of our Sales Campaign '93 than the reports of excellent sales and reports of plans for reaching our new targets were being received at



our office.

On the first day of the Sales Campaign '93 sellers at the TUC Conference notched up an impressive 20 sales and three delegates expressed an interest in becoming regular sellers of Socialist Appeal. Our special leaflets also went down well.

The Arnold Tweedale Memorial Lecture may not sound like the most fruitful ground for selling a Marxist journal but our sellers in Oldham proved us wrong. They sold over 20 copies of Socialist Appeal as Dennis Skinner lambasted the Tories, Lib-Dems and Labour's right wing. (see report, page 4). Not to be outdone delegates and visitors to the Labour Party Conference in Brighton had notched up over 60 sales before

the first debate had even started! At the time of writing conference sales stand at 82. With the start of the new academic year in the colleges and universities Socialist Appeal produced a special tabloid student supplement attacking the Tory education

"reforms" Sellers in Yorkshire made sure they were armed with plenty of copies as they planned their sales around the region's colleges. Every area should make sure they take the special supplements to the colleges as term starts. We have received too many reports of good sales to fit them all in but don't stop sending them in! The campaign has got off to a flying start but we must not sit back thinking all the hard work has been done. Sellers should make sure they are covering every labour movement meeting in their area, that they are organising a street or door-to-door sale to pick up regular new readers and new sellers. In every area of the country we have had inquiries about becoming Socialist Appeal sellers. Every area should follow up those people and make sure our sales continue to go from strength to strength.

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Sales Campaign '93

Next month will mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the First World War. No doubt volumes will be written and documentaries shown celebrating this event. But the true history will be buried. At the end of 1918, revolution broke out in Germany and put an end to the war. The November

Revolution swept away the Hohenzollern dynasty.

Discipline in the allied armies was breaking down. Mutinies had broken out at a number of army camps, where military police had been shot and soldiers' committees formed on the lines of the Russian soviets. On the home front industrial militancy flared up, with the Clydeside in the vanguard of workers' struggle.

The ruling class was increasingly alarmed at a developing pre-revolutionary situation. In January 1919, a successful army mutiny in Calais was quickly followed by one at Folkestone and the refusal of 3,000 war-weary troops to board trains for France.

Instead they decided to march on Whitehall and then on Parliament demanding to be demobbed. They were only stopped when they were surrounded, and forced to surrender by the Household Guards and Grenadiers, bayonets at the ready. Over the following two weeks almost fifty mutinies took place in the British armed forces.

This groundswell in the armed forces placed in jeopardy the use of troops against strikes on the home front.

To determine which troops could be used for blacklegging the War Office sent out a secret circular to Commanding Officers (later leaked to the Daily Herald) demanding weekly reports on key matters including: "Will troops in various areas respond for assistance to preserve the public peace? Will they assist in strike breaking? Will they parade for draft overseas, especially to Russia? Have any Soldiers' Councils been formed?"

Results of the circular were reported to Churchill: "Troops... deprecate being used in strike-breaking and the general feeling is that it would not be fair to ask troops to do what they would themselves consider black legging work... Troops will parade for draft overseas with the exception of Russia."

This showed clearly the mood in the forces.

In the Cause of Labour:



War and Revolution

Events led Willie Gallacher to note: "We were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution."

The real tragedy of this radical movement of the troops was that the leaders of the labour movement gave them no political direction. At the same time as the workers in uniform were forming councils and challenging the whole authority of the officer caste, the

industrial workers were engaged in titanic battles with the employers, yet there was no attempt to link these movements up.

At the end of January 1919 an industrial movement on the Clyde reached general strike proportions. Under the leadership of the Clyde Workers' Committee, engineering workers, shipyard workers and other sections struck for a 40

hour week. This was no ordinary strike however. Under existing conditions, it posed a revolutionary threat. Accordingly, the government dispatched 10,000 troops from other parts of Britain, while the local troops were confined to barracks to prevent fraternisation. Tanks were stationed in George Square after a battle with strikers and police.

Unfortunately the strike was isolated by national trade union officials, who went to the lengths of disciplining local officials for their involvement (the Amalgamated Society of Engineers suspended its district officials on the Clyde), and it came to an end within a fortnight. The militants who led the CWC as well as the national shop stewards body, although deeply influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917, were still affected by the views of syndicalism and a disdain for

'politics'. This led Willie Gallacher, the chairman of the CWC, to note later on about the 40 hours strike that "we were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution." (*Revolt on the Clyde*). Our "failure to realise the need of continuous and consistent leadership embracing all phases of activity represented a fatal weakness that was to lead to our complete eclipse." Their experience of syndicalism, however, increasingly pushed them towards revolutionary politics embodied by the newly established Communist International, to which they sent representatives.

During the Clyde events, the million strong

Miners' Federation had resolved to demand a 30% wage increase, a six hour working day, and the nationalisation of the mines with a measure of workers' control. When the Government rejected these demands, a strike ballot was issued resulting in a big majority for action. With coal stocks at famine levels (London had only three days supply), and the other members of the Triple Alliance pushing their own demands simultaneously, Lloyd George found himself in extreme difficulties, with a general strike implicit in the situation.

The government were forced, having sized up the attitude of the union leadership, to undertake a giant bluff. Firstly they threatened the use of force against any strikers, and secondly offered a Royal Commission to investigate the industry, whose findings the government promised to implement. Fearing violence both Robert Smillie, the Federation's President and Frank Hodges, the Secretary, persuaded the Special miners' conference - despite their colossal advantage - to accept the government's offer. A miners' strike under these conditions could rapidly escalate into a general strike which the trade union leaders - both right and left - were not prepared to contemplate. "We had no right to force conditions on the nation because of our strength.." said Smillie.

Triple Alliance

The Webbs, who acted as go-betweens for Lloyd George and the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) leaders, put the issue starkly: "If the Government, confident of their power to beat the miners, go into battle - theirs is the responsibility... 'Blockading the miners' will be a difficult and dangerous task: the railwaymen and transport workers might be drawn in, the army might refuse to act. And then?" (Beatrice Webb's Diaries)

It was this that terrified the reformist trade union leaders.

The interim report of the Sankey Commission came out on 20th March, recommending a wage rise, a working day of seven hours and that "the present system of ownership and working in the coal industry stands condemned and that some other system must be substituted for it.." The final Reports favoured nationalisation and granted the miners a share in control. However, in August, Lloyd George announced the rejection of nationalisation by the Government. The strategy had worked. The miners had been duped.

On the broader front the government used a similar tactic in establishing the National Industrial Conference, where trade unions and employers' organisation were invited to participate to find a common goal. Although the engineers, together with the Triple Alliance unions boycotted the Conference, it served to side channel the industrial unrest and tie the hands of the trade union leaders.

In the words of G.D.H. Cole, "the entry of Labour into the Industrial Conference and Coal Commission - the latter acclaimed as a great Labour triumph - was the determining factor in tiding over the critical industrial situation of the first half of 1919.."

In June a successful strike by 300,000 Lancashire cotton operatives won a 48 hour week and a 30% rise. The following month the Police Union was provoked into calling a second strike. This time the Government was prepared and the response was poor. The strike was broken and all the strikers were dismissed. The Government then introduced substantial improvements in pay and conditions to separate the police from other workers and to stamp out trade unionism in the force.

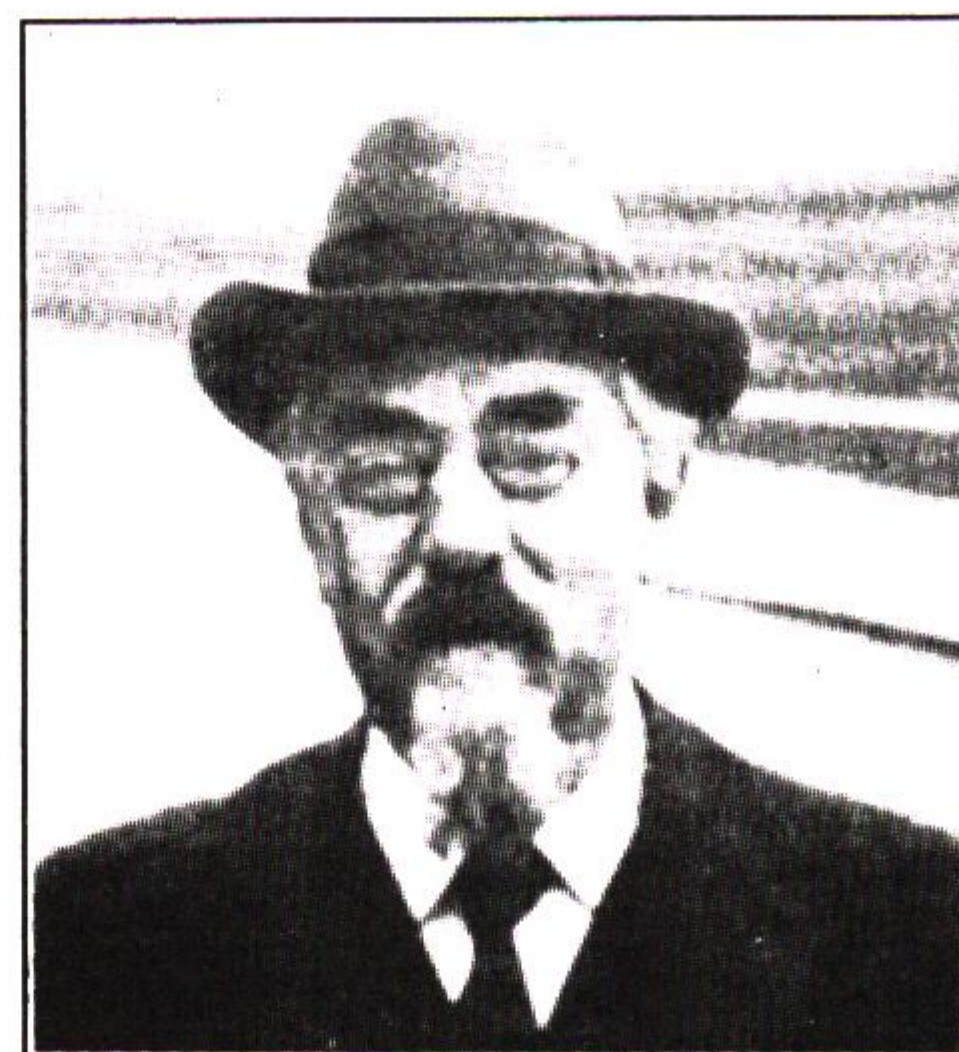
Eight Hour Day

Soon after the war, railworkers were conceded the eight hour day. Negotiations were then carried out to secure the 'standardisation' of wage rates, which in workers' eyes, meant a levelling up of wages. The government deliberately dragged out the negotiations until after the coal crisis had been resolved. Then the government demanded wage cuts. The NUR called an immediate strike which was denounced as an 'anarchist conspiracy' by Lloyd George. 'The Times' thundered that this, "like the war with Germany, must be a fight to a finish." The Government arbitrarily withheld a week's pay due to the strikers, as plans became known to starve the strikers and their families back to work. Troops were called out and instructions were given for local authorities to enrol a 'Citizen Guard'. The scene was set for an almighty show down. However, within a week 400,000 miners and other workers had been made idle; another week and millions would be out of work. Paralysis was sweeping the country. The railworkers remained solid as support came in from other unions and the Co-operative movement. The Government seeing the writing on the wall beat a hasty retreat. Existing rates were maintained and there was no victimisation. The employers' offensive was stopped in its tracks for the time being. Although the railway worker's action was successful, there had been no direct appeal for assistance from their Triple Alliance partners. Similarly in early 1919 when the miners were on the brink of action there was no appeal for joint action. This fear of a general movement of the class was expressed by Clynes at the special TUC in March 1920: "You cannot bring millions of men out to begin a great struggle like this without anticipating a condition of civil war." The right wing rail leader J.H. Thomas stated that he was forced to lead the 1919 rail strike to maintain control over the rank and file and avert the dangers of revolution. The dilemma of the trade union leadership, and of

reformism in general, was summed up in a conversation between Robert Smillie and Aneurin Bevan:

"Lloyd George sent for the Labour leaders, and they went, so Robert told me, 'truculently determined they would not be talked over by the seductive and eloquent Welshman'. At this Bob's eyes twinkled in his grave, strong face. 'He was quite frank with us from the outset,' Bob went on. 'He said to us: "Gentlemen, you have fashioned, in the Triple Alliance of the unions represented by you, a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that in our opinion we are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has occurred already in a number of camps.... In these circumstances, if you carry out your threat and strike, then you will defeat us.

"But if you do so," went on Lloyd George, "have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it



Sidney Webb - acted as a go-between for Lloyd George and MFGB leaders

must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state. Gentlemen," asked the Prime Minister quietly, "have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?" From that moment on,' said Robert Smillie, 'we were beaten and we knew we were.'" (In Place of Fear, p40-41).

In December 1919, a special TUC Congress launched a 'Mines for the Nation' campaign. In March a recalled TUC considered further action to force the Government to honour its pledge. Yet the proposal for a general strike was defeated by 3,870 votes to 1,015.

By September a battle over wages in the pits resulted in the miners' leaders for the first time calling on the Triple Alliance for support. However the Transport and rail union leaders shied away from the appeal, which resulted in the MFGB agreeing to a

temporary agreement, which conceded a wage rise related to output. This was the so-called 'datum line' agreement which was due to expire in March 1921.

It is no accident that the Government used this retreat to broaden its powers in addition to its wartime Defence of the Realm Act, with the introduction of the Emergency Powers Act. It constituted a growing arsenal for use against a radicalised Labour movement. The ruling class were preparing for civil war.

Soviet Support

Throughout 1919 and 1920, the British Labour movement took up the cause of the defence of the Soviet Republic. Since its inception the young workers' state had been subject to attack by the Imperialist Powers, either through support for the Whites or by direct military intervention. The Labour Party conference in June 1919 discussed direct action to prevent British involvement. By 1,893,000 votes to 935,000 it carried a motion demanding an immediate end to the intervention, prescribing Labour and TUC co-operation "with the view to effective action being taken to enforce these demands by the unreserved use of their political and industrial power."

For months agitation had been conducted in the London docks by the 'Hands Off Russia' Committee. In May 1920, it bore fruit when dockers engaged in loading the freighter 'Jolly George' with munitions for Poland decided to strike. This act of international class solidarity electrified the whole movement. A week later, the Dockers' Union decided to stop the loading of any munitions for use against Russia.

However by the end of July the Government threatened war with Russia which had waged a counter offensive against the Poles. Mass demonstrations took place

across the country, called by the Labour Party. The Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, the Labour Party Executive and the Parliamentary Party met in the Commons on the 9th August and issued the following statement: that "*the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war,*" notified the Executives of all affiliated organisations "*to hold themselves ready to proceed immediately to London for a National Conference,*" advised them "*to instruct their members to 'down tools' on instructions from that National Conference,*" and constituted a representative Council of Action with full powers to implement these decisions. 350 Councils of Action sprung up throughout the country. The Government retreated, and there was no war with Russia. "*The whole of the English bourgeois Press*", noted Lenin, "*wrote that the Councils of Action were Soviets. And it was right. They were not called Soviets but in actual fact they were such.*"

National Council of Labour

These revolutionary years, deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution, led to many changes in the British Labour Movement. In 1920 the TUC Parliamentary Committee was transformed into a 'Trades Union General Council' as "*a central coordinating body representative of the whole trade union movement.*" The following year saw the establishment of the National Council of Labour comprised of the General Council and Labour's Executive. There also occurred an increase in union amalgamations, headed by the groups associated with the Transport Workers' Federation to form the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Again the Labour Party agreed to adopt a new constitution, with a new socialist Clause Four. The Party adopted a radical programme, 'Labour and the New Social Order', which attracted millions to the cause of Labour. In 1920 the ILP voted to break with the old Second International and open discussions

with the new Third (Communist) International. The Labour Party conference, however, opposed seceding from the old international by 1,010,000 votes to 519,000 - a sizable opposition.

Following the birth of the new International in March 1919 revolutionary groupings began to strive to form a Communist Party in Britain. Unity negotiations concluded in August 1920 with the establishment of the party. Although small in number, it attracted the most militant sections of the working class, including those in the shop stewards movement. Following the experience of the Bolsheviks, the attempt to win the majority of the working class to the banner of Marxism required work in the mass organisations, especially the trade unions. Lenin was forced to conduct a struggle against the ultra-left and sectarian elements who entered the Communist Parties and who refused to work within the existing reformist organisations. His pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, brilliantly answers the erroneous arguments of the ultra-left.

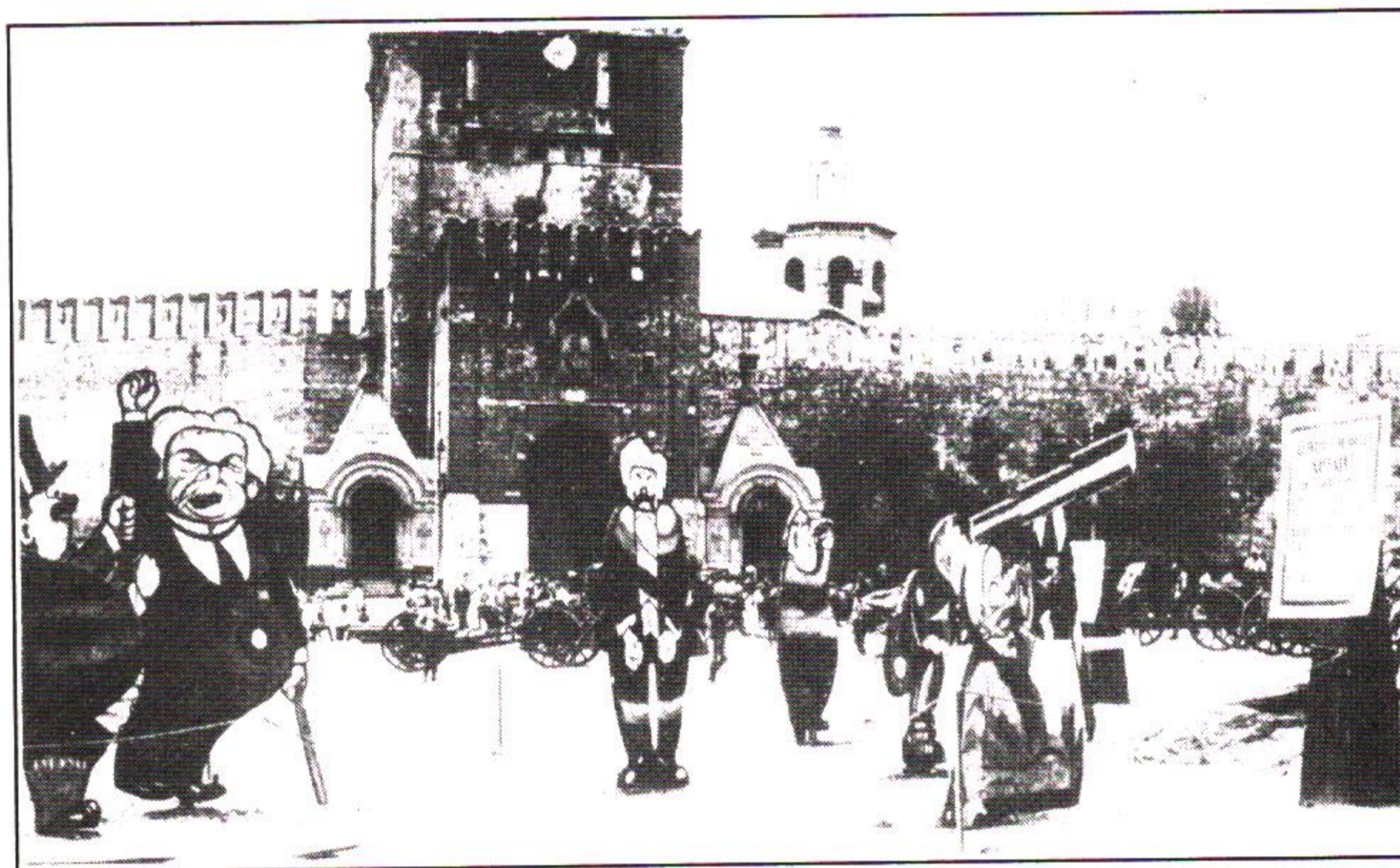
After pressure from the International, and strong internal resistance, the Communist Party agreed to seek affiliation to the Labour Party. It's rejection was greeted, however, with the remark: "*It's their funeral*".

Employers' Offensive

Despite this sectarianism, the party also agreed to conduct organised work in the trade unions. The expulsion of communists from the reformist Amsterdam Trade Union International led to the formation of a new Red International of Labour Unions, which immediately offered a united to the old federation.

The slump of 1921 heralded a new employers' offensive, which centred around the coal industry. The Government, who worked hand and glove with the coal owners, agreed to bring forward by five months the ending of war-time control of the mines. On 31st March, the miners were locked out having rejected demands for wage cuts and the return to old district agreements. The implications of the dispute were far reaching.

As a result, the MFGB called on the Triple Alliance for support to meet, in the words of the DAILY HERALD, "*a frontal attack on the whole working class by the capitalists and their Government.*" A general railway and transport strike was called for 12th April. Support in the rank and file was solid. Unfortunately the same was not true of the Alliance leadership. Firstly the strike was postponed to the 15th. Then, in an impromptu speech to a meeting of MP's, Hodges, the MFGB secretary made a personal offer of a temporary 'settlement', which was disowned and he was reprimanded.



The British labour movement took up the issue of support to the Soviet Republic. Here the Soviet's caricatures of international class enemies includes Lloyd George, on the left.

manded by his Executive. Using this as a pretext ('the miners had rejected a possible settlement') the Triple Alliance leaders withdrew their support. That day went down in Labour history as 'Black Friday' and the alliance dubbed the 'Cripple Alliance'. Black Friday signalled a general onslaught by the employers on wages and conditions. The miners were defeated by June and wage cuts were imposed on six million workers by the end of 1921. The following year saw a lock-out in the engineering industry, increasing the power of the engineering employers and draining the funds of the AEU. The high point of trade union membership of six and half million began to quickly reverse. Between 1921 and 1923 affiliations to the TUC dropped by over two million. Over the next two years there was a recovery in the movement. In August 1924, a new rank and file organisation was created in unions, the National Minority Movement. It followed from the success of the Miners' Minority Movement which had secured the election of A.J. Cook as secretary of the MFGB, when Hodges was forced to resign. A new ferment had developed in the British trade unions. Despite a temporary fillip to the coal industry by the French occupation of the Ruhr, the economic situation was so serious that it was described as "heading for irretrievable disaster." The scene was being set for the biggest showdown in British history: the General Strike of 1926.

by Rob Sewell

NEXT ISSUE: The Minority Movement and the General Strike.

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The Great British Tradition

By Beatrice Windsor



Stuff Ye Olde Poll Tax

All socialists worth their salt know of the Peasants Revolt in 1381. But the fightback against the Poll Tax actually began a year before in 1380.

The absolutist rule of the monarchy was in chaos. Edward III, a senile old fool, finally breathed his last in 1377. Such was the corruption and self-interest of his Court that before he had even gurgled his last death rattle, his mistress was prising the rings off his fingers. The kingdom was in chaos - the monarchy's Justices of the Peace toured the countryside trying to suppress the many localised rebellions against the Statute of Labourers (see last issue). The disastrous Hundred Years War with France had ended in fiasco with the Frenchies throwing the English out of the Dordogne and beginning to raid the south coast, while the military adventure had left the monarchy bankrupt - even the Crown Jewels had been pawned.

The new King, Richard II took the throne at the age of 11, and at such a tender age had not fully grasped the predestined responsibilities placed upon him by God. The real power of the throne lay with the Royal Council; at his head was John of Gaunt, an early day Norman Tebbit/Kenneth Baker type character.

He came up with the bright idea of a Poll Tax to raise the readies. Everyone over the age of 14, rich or poor (the vast majority being very poor) would have to pay a Groat.

The masses grudgingly accepted this, but it was only sporadically collected.

Having got away with it first time around, the ruling elite warmed to the idea. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, suggested that for the new Financial Year 1380/81, the Poll Tax should be set at three Groats per person.

Given that the average weekly wage at the time was three Groats, this was none too well received. Like Mrs Thatcher 600 years later, the Royal Council was to learn that you can get away with screwing some of the people some of the time, but take them on all at once and you're on a one way ticket to the House of Lords. As historian Charles Poulson comments in *The English Rebels*: "This was basically a tax on the labouring classes, and the response was a unity of opposition among the commons that overrode all their many divisions."

Before you can implement a Poll Tax of course, you must first set up a Register of those eligible to pay. And so in 1380, Commissioners set out to the four corners of the kingdom to carry out a registration campaign. They suffered the same frustration as their modern day local authority counterparts. With every settlement they visited, they found that the village was, well, 'out'. The place would be deserted as everyone went and hid in the woods, until the Commissioners lost interest and moved on.

This non-registration and non-payment campaign was extremely effective. Of the £100,000 anticipated being raised by the 1380 Poll Tax, all the Royal Council got was £22,000.

However, absolutist monarchies were never reknowned for their forward thinking of the pursuit of improved customer relations. Therefore their conclusion was to bash on regardless with the exception that this time, there'd be no more Mister Nice Guy.

For the 1381 Poll Tax the Commissioners would be accompanied by armed Justices of the Peace and if people didn't pay up they'd be off to prison, without so much as a Reminder Notice.

But the seeds of rebellion had been germinating beneath their feet. The first sizeable town the Commissioner visited was Brentwood, perched on an Essex hill outside east London. Far from being greeted by hordes of cowering peasants proffering their Groats in abject submission, he was met by hundreds of armed men from the nearby village of Fobbing, who in no uncertain terms told him to Fob off. Throughout the rest of the country the peasants were taking up arms and marching on London to overthrow the despotic rule of John of Gaunt. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Next issue: the Watt Tyler Tendency - the first revolutionary organisation.

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- Marxism and Science

Strike to Defend Fire Service Pay Formula

The FBU special conference has decided to ballot the membership over action to defend the Pay Formula. Joe Barr, a delegate at the conference from Glasgow North FBU spoke to Dave Cartwright.

What's the background to the current dispute?

The background is the proposed scrapping of the pay formula which was won following the nine week strike which took place in 1977. The Pay Formula has kept industrial peace for the last 15 years. There has only ever been that one national strike and with the Pay Formula there should never be the need for another.

When did the government announce it was scrapping the Pay Formula?

In November 1992 the Chancellor Norman Lamont made his autumn statement in which he announced that pay in the public sector would be limited to between 0 and 1.5%. The FBU asked, "did that include us?". For 6 to 8 months we were told that they were not prepared to discuss it until we approached the normal pay review period i.e. November 1993. So we took a decision at our conference in May to defend the Pay Formula next year and if necessary to call a ballot for action. That prompted the government to say what offer they were prepared to make.

They said that pay would be limited this year but they promised the return of the Pay Formula next year. We went to the membership and graphically described previous promises. We asked the members, "do you believe them?". And the vast majority said no.

The vote at the May conference was to accept or reject the government offer - and it was rejected.

What is the stand of the FBU executive?

The executive is fairly unanimous. That is quite different to 1977. Then we had to organise enough votes to out-vote the EC. Terry Parry, the general secretary at that time appeared on TV and virtually disowned us. This time we are better organised and better informed. It is more solid.

What do you expect to happen next?

After hearing what Kenneth Clarke had to say in Glasgow I believe we will get a result in the ballot. Some members were considering the idea of accepting 1.5% this year followed by reinstatement of the pay Formula next year. Now they realise it's a hollow promise. The only way to get an increase is to play other people off. We're not going to get involved in that!

Also, the Audit Commission has started to look at the Fire Service in terms of "value for money". We have already had "output monitoring and performance indicators" - the next stage is performance related pay which the Police have already shown they are against. Then there is financing of our pensions. All the conditions of service are being looked at. If we are seen to be weak and allow them to take the Pay Formula then we could ap-

pear to be completely unable to fight for all the other conditions of service.

If the decision is taken to strike do you think fire fighters will get the same support as in 1977?

Yes, undoubtedly. The Fire Brigade enjoys great public support. Our biggest problem will be the press. They will portray us in an outrageous manner. On a personal note I remember with horror the poverty of the 1977 strike. I was living on £7 per week. I was a whisker away from declaring myself bankrupt. I don't want to get in that position again. We are possibly looking at one-day strikes beginning in November. We are not cheering or relishing the prospect of a strike. If we do strike it is because we have to. Maggie Thatcher had a phrase with the initials TINA - there is no alternative. That is our position now - there is no alternative.



Reject the Tory Pay Ceiling