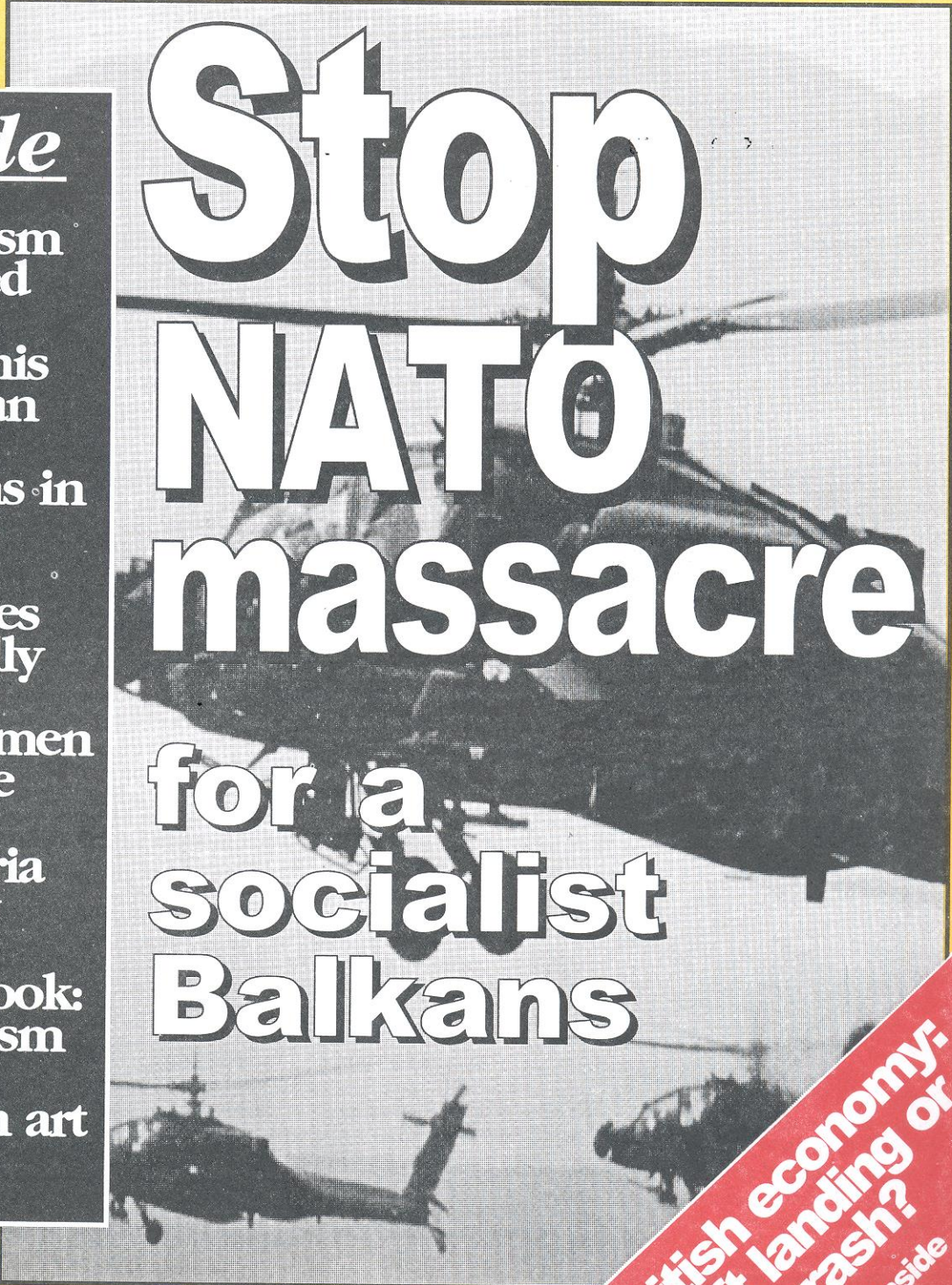


socialist *appeal*

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Stop NATO massacre for a socialist Balkans

**British economy:
soft landing or
crash?**
see inside

price: £1

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

no.69
June
1999

Blairism rejected

Faced with a massive parliamentary revolt over benefit cuts, and last month's poor election results, the Blair government is facing growing opposition on all sides.

Two years ago Labour was elected with a massive majority of 179. It represented an historic defeat for the Tory Party and everything it stood for. However, the Blair government, rather than implement a socialist programme, continued with discredited Tory policies. Now, as we predicted, the government has been met with back-bench revolts, widespread disillusionment and the loss of key seats in its industrial heartlands.

This constitutes a serious warning to the Labour movement.

The election results in Wales were especially catastrophic. Labour's campaign managers were expecting an absolute majority in the new Welsh Assembly. The loss of bastions like the Rhondda, Islwyn and Llanelli to the nationalists was a shattering blow. Plaid Cymru recorded swings of up to 25% from Labour. Given PR, this gave them 18 seats to Labour's 28 – an unprecedented advance – which even astounded the leaders of Plaid.

The Labour leadership were totally stunned. Peter Hain, the campaign manager, looked in a state of shock. "We cannot any longer take our supporters for granted", he said. Even Glens Kinnock had to recognise that Labour voters in Wales had been "alienated" by the policies and actions of the Blair government. Without doubt, this result also reflected widespread resentment at the imposition of Blairite, Alun Michael, on the Wales Labour Party.

Rhondda

At a time when the Labour Party nationally is about to celebrate the centenary of its birth, the loss of rock-solid Labour seats like the Rhondda, is a shattering blow. The working people of the Rhondda have returned Labour to power consistently for generations. No seat in Britain has a more deeply ingrained tradition of Labour voting than Rhondda: it is unbroken since 1885. Labour have had control of the council since time immemorial. At the last general election Labour got three-quarters of the total vote. In this

light, May's vote is even more catastrophic. It represents a complete rejection of Blairism.

The loss of Rhondda, Islwyn and Llanelli is no "mid-term blues", but a vote of no confidence by Labour's traditional supporters in the performance of the Blair government. The writing was on the wall, for those who wanted to see. In an article entitled "*Labour strains loyalties in valleys*" The Guardian states there is "*routine disappointment at the fact that Labour has been in power for two years now, and the towns of the Rhondda valley still bear no obvious resemblance to the New Jerusalem.*" (28/5/99)

social issues

The swing to Plaid, however, is not a vote for Welsh nationalism. In fact, Plaid was forced to abandon the idea of independence for Wales and concentrate on the social issues. Its support was directly a result of disillusionment with Labour's Tory policies. It was a protest vote. A rejection of Blairism. Alun Michael, himself, only succeeded in being elected by the skin of his teeth on the list vote, and paradoxically, the poor showing of the party.

This blow to Labour has caused shock throughout the ranks of the party, which clearly opposed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Coalition in Wales and Scotland was obviously part of the Blair Project. That was the reason for introducing PR in the first place. If Blair and Michael could have got away with it, a coalition would have been formed in Wales. However, the reaction in the rank and file was clearly against, which, under the circumstances, the leadership was forced to accept.

In Scotland, the turnout of 57% for the election to the Scottish Parliament was again considerably down on the general election, and even down on the referendum turnout. After all the hype about the first Scottish Parliament for 300 years, the low turnout was a direct reflection of Labour abstentions. With the election seen as a referendum on the Blair government, the Labour vote collapsed. In some seats the Labour vote dropped more than 10,000. The votes in some Labour strongholds of Glasgow and elsewhere witnessed a 20% swing to the SNP.

The reason for the poor showing, in the view of the right wing, was that voters were so satisfied with the government that

they stayed away!

The nationalists secured 28 seats to Labour's 56, making Labour the biggest party and the SNP the official opposition. In contrast, the Tories failed to win any first-past-the-post seats, and were only able to gain representation through the second preference vote. The fact that in 1955, the Tories got over 50% of the vote in Scotland, is a measure of how far support for the Tories has collapsed.

Dewar immediately entered negotiations with the Liberal Democrats to cobble together a coalition government. This was the favoured option of the Blairites, who see coalition in Scotland (the "new politics") as an example for Westminster at a later date. At first, the Liberal's "non negotiable" opposition to tuition fees appeared to be a potential stumbling block. But true to form, the Liberals were prepared to ditch their principles for two cabinet seats in a Lib-Lab coalition.

This compromise will not be the end of the matter. The Scottish Parliament will have to debate education shortly, where all the resentment will inevitably surface. Dewar hopes to enforce "collective responsibility" on the Liberals, but pressures in the future could blow the coalition apart.

economic crisis

As the economic crisis intensifies, pressures from below will open up splits and divisions across the parties. It will certainly not be a "stable government" based on consensus as envisaged by Blair. The continuation of right wing policies under the Lib-Lab coalition will inevitably lead to further disillusionment and play into the hands of the nationalists at a later date.

The whole experience in Wales and Scotland has also created a reaction nationally. The Blair Project with the Liberals has not been enhanced by the deal in Scotland. Prescott has already come out against PR and coalition politics. "I can assure you", he said, "*it's not the idea of the Labour party to cozy with the Liberals.*"

Any attempt by Blair to drag the Labour Party in this direction will clearly meet with massive opposition. Blair's "control-freak" tendencies have already led to a backlash in and outside the party. It is largely to blame for the disaster in Wales and the outstanding victory of Dennis Canavan in Falkirk West. Canavan, who

was the local MP since 1983, was scandalously blocked by the Blairites for "not being good enough" to stand as Labour's candidate. He won against the Blair-imposed candidate with a massive 12,000 majority.

While not abandoning his principles, Canavan has appealed for readmission into the party. There is without doubt great sympathy for him within Labour's ranks. The Blairites have welcomed with open arms the SDP traitors who stabbed Labour in the back and kept Thatcher in power. A campaign must be launched for Dennis Canavan's immediate reinstatement and for the restoration of party democracy.

In Scotland, the PR system not only allowed the Tories into the Scottish Parliament, but also one representative from the fringe Green Party and the tiny Scottish Socialist Party. Tommy Sheridan of the SSP came third in Pollok, but was elected on the list vote. His victory was due to his personal following after his work against the Poll Tax. Elsewhere the SSP made little headway. The same is true of Scargill's party, which also picked up only a handful of votes.

political action

While the votes for these groups indicate a discontent with Tory Blair, it also shows that growing disillusionment with the Labour leadership will not express itself in the growth of new parties. When the mass of workers move into political action, they will move through the traditional mass organisations which they created over generations. There are certainly no short cuts. Big events will propel the mass of workers into activity, which in turn will serve to transform and retransform their traditional organisations, the trade unions and the Labour Party.

Throughout England, the local election turnout at 29% was also historically low. Again, the Labour vote suffered a big decline, resulting in the shameful loss of Sheffield to the Liberal Democrats. Rather than gain, the Tories' performance was lamentable. The 1,300 or so seats they managed to pick up was very poor given that the last time these elections were held it was Labour's high-point. The Tory Party's share of the vote was only 2% above their disastrous 31% general election performance of two years ago.

The Tory Party under Hague has in effect been reduced to a party confined to the shires of South East England. Their divisions will be further intensified in the European elections. Their problems were already highlighted by the reaction to the Hague/Lilley attempt to reposition the Tory Party away from Thatcherism, and the storm of protest that this provoked. They are in the dol-

drums. A recent poll indicated that the fortunes for the party would not be fundamentally different whoever led the Tories, except Ann Widdecombe, the Tory sorceress. Under her the party's fortunes would plummet further.

At this stage, big business sees their interests served more readily by the Blairites than the present Tory party. However, the continuing crisis within the Tories will serve to further exacerbate the divisions within their ranks. The Euro elections will bring these to the fore yet again. At a certain stage, the Tories could suffer serious splits, with the Clarke wing possibly splitting off in a likely realignment with the Blairites.

underlying crisis

For Marxists, elections are a snap shot of the political situation. Nevertheless, they can indicate certain underlying processes within the classes, and can reflect important symptomatic changes in the situation. The May elections, as well as the Euro elections, reflect growing disillusionment with Blairism amongst the broad mass. The growing economic crisis will exacerbate the underlying crisis of British capitalism, and open up a period of sharp and sudden changes. It will provoke a political crisis and a differentiation within the Labour Party and the unions, pushing them to the left. The recent revolt over invalidity benefit, which was the biggest since the general election, and where Labour's majority of 178 was cut to 40, is an early anticipation of the revolts and opposition that is developing. And this is just the beginning. The growing disillusionment with right wing policies, arising from the ills of the market economy, will inevitably lay the basis for big opposition in the trade unions and Labour Party and result in a massive swing towards socialist policies.

Socialist Appeal aims to provide a focal point for this the opposition within the party and the unions. The Marxist tendency can offer a clear analysis of the unfolding situation and provide a bold socialist programme as an alternative to the market economy. Resolutions should be moved in Labour Party branches, trade union branches, GMCs, and trades councils opposing Blair's pro-capitalist policies and offering real socialist policies.

All the ills of the inter-war period are beginning to reemerge with a vengeance. Mass unemployment, speed-ups, temporary contracts, and all the other measures of the capitalist counterrevolution in the workplace, are part and parcel of daily life. No amount of tinkering with capitalism can change its character. There has never been a better time to argue and campaign for socialist policies. ■

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Reinstate Canavan - and party democracy!

On the 6th of May New Labour suffered a double blow in Falkirk by losing the Scottish Parliamentary seat and losing overall control of the local council. Dennis Canavan, the sitting MP for Falkirk West and well known Labour left winger, smashed the Blairite candidate and walked home as an independent with 18,511 votes (55%). In his emotional acceptance speech, Canavan spoke of his sorrow at having had to have fought outside the Party and hoped that at some stage a reconciliation would be possible.

Gray Allan, vice-chair, Falkirk West CLP (personal capacity)

The Labour Group on Falkirk Council was reduced to 15 members, two short of the number needed for overall control. Even when boundary changes, which cut the number of wards from 36 to 32, are taken into account, the result represents a massive swing against Labour in the Falkirk area.

The Scottish Parliamentary constituency of Falkirk West is identical to the Westminster constituency of the same name. Falkirk West has been built up into a Labour stronghold in the 25 years since Dennis Canavan was elected. How was it then that the campaign masterminded in Millbank Tower and in Delta House,

Scottish New Labour's HQ, managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in such a spectacular manner?

The road to ruin began in the winter of 1997-8, following the Referendum Campaign, which saw an overwhelming vote for the establishment of a devolved government in Scotland. The Blairites had succeeded in ensuring that the Scottish Parliament would be elected by a form of proportional representation, which at best would give Labour a slender majority, but would more likely result in some form of power sharing deal. The minds of the Party hierarchy then turned to thoughts of the selection procedure for Scottish Parliamentary candidates. Specifically, on how to ensure that all candidates were reliable voting fodder and were "On Message".

"new politics"

Proposals for the selection of candidates were drawn up by officials and the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party. Despite talk of a "new politics" and the need for "new" representatives, most Party members thought, perhaps naively, that the selection process would be inclusive and not used in a political purge. The procedure was voted through in March 1998 at the Scottish Party Conference in Perth where the attention of the left was on the Private Finance Initiative and on the Lone Parents Benefits issue. These new rules did not give sitting Westminster MPs who wished to stand for the Scottish Parliament an automatic place on the panel. The scene was set for a massive confrontation with some unsuspecting Constituency.

Falkirk West CLP Women's Section had moved against the government's Lone Parent Benefit proposals at Perth with Kate Arnot's memorable speech slamming the policy as "economically inept, morally repugnant and spiritually bereft". It was no surprise when no applicant from Falkirk West succeeded in getting onto the panel of candidates. Party members had hoped against hope that their MP Dennis Canavan, a long standing advocate of Scottish Home Rule within the Labour Party, would get on the list. It was not to be. The leaks had been correct - Canavan would not be going to Holyrood. Dennis Canavan appealed but was not even given a hearing! The left in Scotland reacted with fury and CLPs began a campaign to per-

suaude the leadership to change its mind.

The first step was a ballot of all members of Falkirk West CLP. Party members were asked if they thought Dennis Canavan should be on the panel. The result was an overwhelming 98% in favour. The Executive of the CLP met the General Secretary of the Scottish Labour Party, Alex Rowley, who has since resigned. It was pointed out to him that by de-selecting Canavan, the Party risked losing the seat, possibly the local Council which would be up for election on the same day, and certainly disillusioned many of the best activists within the Constituency. Rowley was shown by CLP Officers how the rules allowed the Scottish Executive Council to set aside any or all parts of the Selection Procedure if the political situation warranted it. There are none so deaf as those who will not listen! The General Secretary and the SEC stubbornly refused to listen to local activists.

frustration

Goaded beyond endurance Dennis Canavan declared that he would "let the people decide" and stand against the Party. *Socialist Appeal* supporters had argued against Dennis taking this step but recognised his enormous frustration with the Party machine that led him to this decision.

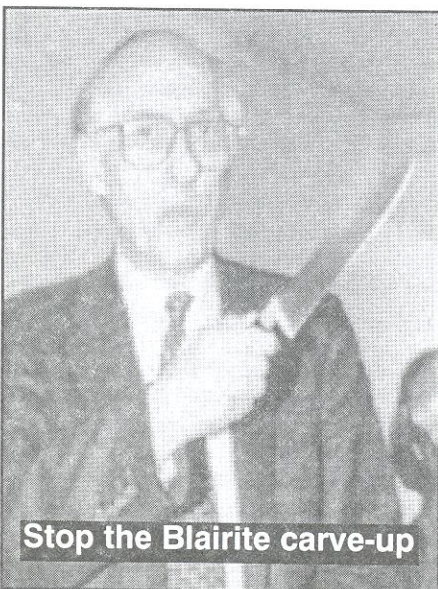
As the Election campaign began, the Constituency Party fractured. Many of the leading activists worked openly for Canavan, while many others just went on "strike". With a handful of loyal activists and a couple of full time officials, the New Labour machine looked decidedly forlorn! The result was a foregone conclusion with the unknown Labour candidate scraping in just 323 votes ahead of the SNP.

The battle is not over. It has really just begun. The Labour leadership must be forced to admit the gross error they made in the Canavan case:

- Dennis Canavan must be readmitted to the Party along with the activists who worked for him.

- A campaign to get back the Labour Party from the Blairite clique must be launched as a priority, with rank and file democracy as the leading demand.

- The fight for socialist policies in the Labour Party must begin now!



Stop the Blairite carve-up

Usdaw: 'growing concerns'

A number of the decisions taken at the annual conference of the shopworkers union, Usdaw, reflected a growing concern at all levels at the failure of the Labour government to deliver meaningful improvements in the living standards of its members and working class people in general.

by Stuart McGee

Concern from the union's membership was reflected in propositions that were passed demanding a greater distribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. There was concern from the union leadership that Labour's failure was putting them under pressure from their own members.

A resolution from the Darlington branch called for increased taxation on dividends and on those earning over £50,000 a year.

Despite being fiercely opposed by the Executive, with the General Secretary speaking against, it was passed on a card vote.

A number of other resolutions calling for improvements in welfare provisions were also passed. They included the demand for a campaign to restore free eye and dental services for the low paid and pensioners. Conference also demanded that the government reduce prescription charges and abolish them for people on less than £12,000 a year. Resolutions were passed calling for a significant increase in statutory sick pay, opposition to scrapping industrial injury benefit and several other similar proposals.

The conference also passed a proposition expressing concern at the level of influence big business exerts inside of the Labour Party. Noting the fact that this had an extremely detrimental effect on policies like fairness at work, the conference resolved to run a campaign to increase Labour Party membership within the union and to increase the number of branches affiliating to their CLP's.

In the words of one delegate, "Our branch wants to ensure that the party remains a working person's party and that it remains receptive to the voices of its traditional supporters." He went on to

add "working people should flood the Labour Party."

There were a number of other progressive developments at conference like the decision to launch a major recruitment campaign and to campaign to end the discrimination against young people inherent in the national minimum wage.

However, one of the most illuminating debates was in relation to coalition politics and proportional representation.

The practical issue of whether to reject the PR proposals in the Jenkins report, and, the coalition politics that would inevitably flow from that, ended in defeat for the left. A decision was taken for further consultation with the union membership and to call on the government to hold a referendum on the issue.

This was a telling debate in that it reflected the position of the right wing, Blairite leadership of the union.

working class

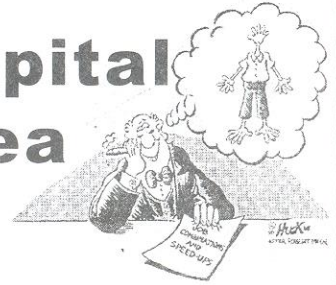
A resolution from the Solent branch pointing out that, "with a majority of 179 in Parliament, Labour could introduce policies in the interests of working class people", was viciously attacked by the union's leaders and their supporters. The resolution had pointed out that a prerequisite to this was that the Labour government needed to change its pro-capitalist policies.

The day before the debate, pressure had been applied to try and get the branch to withdraw the proposition. The delegation refused. When the debate finally took place, the vitriolic attacks from the right wing descended into personal abuse and foul language. The 'political' arguments against the resolution ranged from give Labour a chance to the government has already achieved a great deal, and finally, do we want the Tories back?

While personal abuse and foul language have no place in a democratic trade union, it was clear that this approach revealed there was no serious political argument put against the Solent resolution.

As time goes on it will become more and more apparent that on the basis of capitalism there is no way forward, and in the coming period, USDAW, like many other unions, will move further to the left. ■

Capital Idea



No big deal?

"Time and motion" studies and productivity deals were used to squeeze more unpaid labour out of the workers. Now things have gone much further. Several international companies are consulting scientists on ways of developing microchip implants for their workforce to monitor their activities! "For a business the potential is obvious", says Professor Kevin Warwick, a leading cybernetics expert. "You can tell when people clock into work and when they leave. You know at all times exactly where they were and who they were with.... It is pushing at the limits of what society will accept", he said. "But it is not such a big deal."

To Russia with love

"No one ever realised it would be so tough. The theory was clear enough: get rid of useless Soviet central planning, privatise land and businesses, and let the market work its magic. Milk and honey would quickly flow", states The Independent.

"What happened? Since the end of the Soviet empire, Russia's economy has been in steep decline. Fifty-five million people - a third of the population - live below the poverty line. Social conditions are far worse, blighted by disease and alcohol; state services have all but collapsed; direct foreign investment is miserably low, undermined by endemic corruption, inadequate laws and bureaucracy." (10/5/99) Consequently, the World Bank's chief economic wizard, Joseph Stiglitz, has wondered if the transition to capitalism has now failed.

"I think the lesson we've learned is that market economies are far more complicated than the text book models often describe them", he said. Tell that to the impoverished millions.

Dole queue despair

Heroin addiction has swept through former mining areas blighted by unemployment and despair. In the Yorkshire pit village of Moorends, in the shadow of the defunct Thorne pit, there are 150 registered drug addicts out of a population of 4,500. The youth are offered low-paid training schemes, not real jobs. Such a dead-end situation leads to disillusionment, boredom, and the search for an easy escape. In the words of one addict, Brian, "I was bored and it seemed exciting. Just about everyone I knew was using it. And it was cheap, at least in the beginning." This is the terrible price we pay for the destruction of our communities. Who can deny that capitalism destroys jobs, hopes and lives?

To cap it all, it has just been announced that English Nature has scheduled 15 former coal mines with ancient monument status. For working people, it should be the bosses' system that should be given "ancient monument status".

Blair rocked over benefits row

"...the biggest revolt against the Government since it came to power... a serious personal blow to Tony Blair, who has staked much of his authority on the sort of welfare reforms that have eluded previous governments."

This was how *The Times* of Friday 21 May described the massive revolt of 80 Labour MPs in parliament against the proposals to cut disability benefits. With others being absent (intentionally or otherwise) this rebellion cut the Government's normally massive majority to just 40, an act which again, according to *The Times*, "left ministers reeling". With the likelihood that the measures will return from the Lords heavily amended, the fight is clearly not over.

by Steve Jones

The Government statements that these measures are just about redistribution, helping those in "greatest need", as they put it, and ensuring that 'scroungers' are dealt with are nothing short of a disgrace. No one has been fooled by this, least of all those who actually work on the frontline with the disabled and severely ill. Why else did twelve national charities feel obliged to withdraw from the government forum established to advise on disablement benefit issues? They know the realities of what is being proposed and could not be seen to be supporting them by remaining on such a body. Such a protest shows the depth of feeling against these so-called 'reforms'.

We should be clear what is being pushed through. Incapacity benefit to be dramatically cut, with those on low pay or with insufficient NI payments over a two year period (caused for example by unemployment) being denied money. Means testing to be introduced with compulsory interviews for those wishing to claim benefit—what a way to treat people who are already facing often very severe problems! Even the most Thatcherite of the Tories would not have been confident enough to introduce such an attack on basic rights. In addition anyone on an occupational or personal pension of £9,5000 a year or more will now be denied Incapacity Benefit. To describe people living on such a pittance as being wealthy is nothing short of amazing. Incidentally we should remember that when it comes to the real

scroungers, the millionaires and big companies with their tax dodges and off-shore fiddles, the government doesn't want to know. Like the Tories before them it is a case of chase the poor and leave the fat cats in the City alone. In the end all this is really about is trying to find another way to cut state expenditure (they want to 'save' £750 million) to benefit big business, this time with the sick and disabled, like lone parents and others before them, having to foot the bill. The government seems to have no problem whatsoever about stumping up the cash to bomb Yugoslavia in order to defend imperialism but when it comes to the very people they are supposed to be defending then it is quite another matter.

divisions

This revolt was not accidental but reflects the growing pressure not only inside the ranks of the Parliamentary Labour Party but also within the movement as a whole. It will not be the last time we will see such divisions. Under conditions of crisis, Labour will be increasingly forced to choose between acting in the interests of the working class and acting to support Capital. When you study the deeds of people such as Blair and Brown it does not take much skill to correctly guess which way they are inclined. We

demand that Labour should break with big business and act in the interests of the working class by implementing a socialist programme. We are told that "we" can no longer afford the welfare state and yet we can see how much cash is around just by looking at the massive profits being raked in by big business year on year. Under a socialist plan of production, eliminating the chaos and wastage of capitalism, tremendous resources could be released to provide people who need it with a proper level of support so that they could live full and productive lives rather than being marginalised by a society that just treats them as an expensive burden.

resolutions

The Labour movement needs to be ready to support the actions of those Labour MPs who are prepared to stand up to the Millbank gang and defend, at the very least, the manifesto commitments to maintain the welfare state. People did not go to the polls in their millions two years ago to see a Labour government acting like this one has been. Resolutions of support for the actions of the rebels and against these cuts should be flooding in from Labour Party and trade union branches. The fight is not over, it has just begun.

Socialist Appeal Industrial Conference, London, Saturday 6th November

further details contact Stuart McGee, conference organiser on 0171 251 1094

Unison conference: patience running out

For nearly two decades public sector workers were told by their union leaders that they had to wait for a Labour government.

by Stuart McGee

While hospital workers, council workers, workers in higher education, gas, electricity and other public services, were suffering job losses and reductions in conditions of service from cuts and privatisation, the only strategy from the top was to get the best deal possible and hang on for a Labour government.

The anti union laws were often quoted as being the reason for not being able to mobilise effective national action in defence of jobs and services. It was hoped that when Labour arrived those laws would be repealed and basic rights, like the right to strike and the right to take solidarity action, would be restored.

When Labour was elected in May 1997 many thought that the nightmare of the Tory years were over.

The immediate privatisation of the Bank of England and the declared intention of sticking to Tory public spending limits set alarm bells ringing amongst many Unison activists.

Pilot project

The continuation of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the introduction of a pilot project in some local authorities, known as Best Value, was cause for further concern.

PFI was opposed by Labour when they were in opposition, now, however, Labour are happy with PFI, as it is seen as an opportunity to gain instant popularity by financing capital projects such as new schools and hospitals. Big business would be kept happy by allowing them to maximise their profits if they invested in such projects. Guaranteed profit margins and a chance to increase profit levels by handing over services, like cleaning and catering, to the private companies were methods used to entice companies into such deals.

Best Value was supposed to replace Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). It didn't. The argument being that it would be tried out as a pilot project first, and if successful, it would be brought in to replace CCT.

It has become increasingly clear that Best Value is, in reality, even worse than CCT with all council services coming under the threat of privatisation unless cuts in jobs



wages and conditions of service are accepted by the workforce.

Apparently, the only people who are not happy with PFI and Best Value are those who use the services and those who work in them!

But at least the Labour government has introduced the minimum wage. However, the poor level of £3.60 per hour and a reduced rate of £3.00 for those under the age of 22, was the last straw. Unison members correctly said enough was enough. *Against* the advice of the union's leadership, there was a majority decision to organise a national demonstration to protest against this slap in the face.

It was decided by the the National Executive Committee that the demonstration would not take place before the Labour Party conference - as the Unison conference had decided. In fact the NEC decided that the demonstration would take place in Newcastle the following April. It was later decided by the NEC that there would be no political rally or speakers at the end of the march.

Despite this, 20,000 trade unionists still turned up, unfortunately only to be marched around the backstreets of Gateshead and Newcastle.

The turnout gives a glimpse of what could be achieved if the commitment had existed at the top of the union to organise an effective event.

The resolution to this year's Unison conference from the London Region, calling for another demonstration in the spring of 2000 should be fully supported.

Time and time again, the anti union laws have been used by the employers to prevent public sector workers from fighting back against attacks on jobs and services.

The very least that the trade union movement had a right to expect was for a Labour government to repeal such draconian laws. Although the government is in the

process of implementing an Employment Act, this will not abolish the existing Tory anti-union legislation. Scandalously, workers who attempt to fight for jobs and services are being blocked from doing so by employers who dash to the courts to get injunctions to prevent action from taking place.

Resolutions to this year's conference calling for affiliation to the Reclaim Our Rights Campaign, and resolutions calling for support for an annual May day demonstration against the anti-union laws, should also be supported.

Labour government

For far too long Unison members have had to listen to arguments like 'heads down for a Labour government', and 'they've only been in a short time, we've got to give them a chance.'

No doubt the next catch phrase from the right wing will be 'do you want the Tories back?'

The answer to that is a hundred times no. However, if Labour keeps on attacking the very people who put them in office, that might eventually happen.

On the industrial front, Unison members need to make it clear that the somewhat lacklustre approach that has been adopted in recent years by the union leadership is no longer acceptable. If things don't change for the better, then the rank and file will have no alternative but to vote in a new leadership.

On the political front, its time to start promoting fundamental Unison policies, such as a minimum wage for all set at £5.00 per hour and the abolition of PFI. However, such a campaign must be waged consistently inside the Labour Party, combined also with a campaign to recruit Unison members into the party. It's our party. We need to win it back for working people. ■

Heading for soft landing or slump?

Spring is here and all the winter gloom that surrounded big business in Britain seems to have been shaken off. Before the economic experts were sadly predicting a sharp recession in the UK economy and ridiculing the forecasts of Gordon Brown that there would still be 1% growth in 1999. Now they are all just as convinced that Britain will avoid a fall in national output and 'New' Labour's chancellor was right after all.

by our economic correspondent
Michael Roberts

Given their fickle forecasts, it will be difficult to believe the experts just as much this time as before in the new year. But for what it's worth the majority of economists now expect the UK to grow by 0.7% this year. Hardly anything to shout from the boardrooms about but enough to argue that Britain is heading for a 'soft landing'. Now over 80% of 'professional' investors expect the UK to avoid a recession.

What do they base this newfound optimism on? First, while Britain's manufacturing sector appears to be deep in the doldrums, the so-called services sector (which actually includes communications and transport as well as tourism, leisure, media and financial services) is still rolling along nicely. The restaurants and bars in the centre of London are still chock a block. House prices, especially in London and the south-east, continue to sprout upwards. Average earnings in the private sector are

still rising at over 5% a year, while retail sales are up by about 2% - hardly exciting but better than nothing. It seems that the rapid number of interest rate cuts carried out by the Bank of England over the last few months, plus a relatively benign budget from the Chancellor, have done the trick and kept the economy going.

The problem is manufacturing. That's still falling by 1.5%, while unemployment in this key export sector continues to mount. But so what, say the optimists, the manufacturing sector only makes up 25% of the economy now. It doesn't matter if it is in recession as long as the rest of the economy is booming. And even in manufacturing there are some signs of recovery. The April survey of purchasing managers in manufacturing posted the first rise for a year. Now it is argued that the strong pound, which has made it so difficult for British manufacturing exports, is no longer a problem. By cutting jobs and lowering wages, British firms have been able to compete. In other words, 'competitiveness' has been achieved at the expense of those who produce the goods.

The truth is that this rosy picture hides many skeletons. First, even if British capitalism succeeds in growing by 1% this year, that will be the lowest rate of growth since the slump of 1990-2. And that average growth hides huge variations across the country. In the manufacturing dominated north-east, there will still be an outright fall in production, with manufacturing down by 2.4% this year and unemployment set to rise by nearly 12,000 to reach 100,000.

In the north-west, there will be little or no overall growth, while manufacturing falls by 2.8% and unemployment up another 10,000. The south-west will grow by 1.4%, but that hides a fall in manufacturing output of over 3% and unemployment will rise. The south-east will do best with growth of 2% but manufacturing output will be down and unemployment up. The midlands will have a very tough year. Manufacturing output will drop by 2.7% and overall there will be a slight rise in output. The Scottish economy will shrink by 0.7% overall.

There is another reason why the UK seems to have avoided a deep recession this year. It is not interest rate cuts or tax cuts or a successful services sector. It's the continued growth of the US economy. When the Asian and Latin American economies dropped into a deepening slump last summer, it threatened to bring the whole world down into an economic winter. That was avoided because the US economy continued to race along.

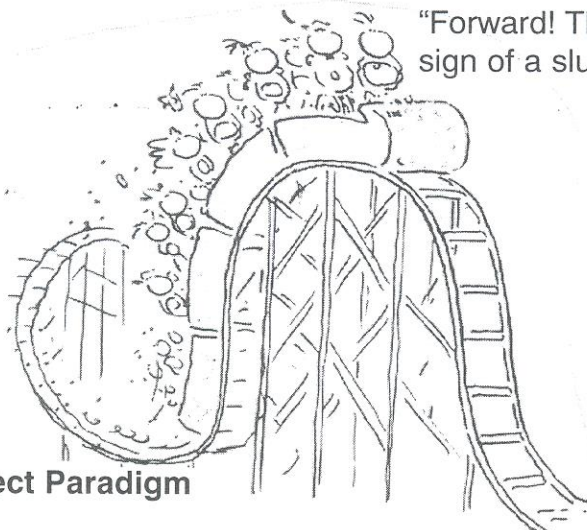
Federal Reserve

The US Federal Reserve Bank cut interest rates sharply to revive a stock market in crisis. And America's boom is increasingly a huge great speculation on the stock market. Sure, the great inventions of the internet/information revolution are helping to boost productivity and output. But it's the unfading belief in the miracles of this revolution that is driving more and more to invest in the stocks of the likes of Microsoft, Yahoo!, Amazon etc. The Fed made it cheap to borrow money. People borrowed to invest in the stock market and companies borrowed to buy their own shares. Stock prices went up in the first quarter of this year at an amazing pace. The value of investor portfolios rose accordingly. Everybody felt rich enough to go on spending in the shops. Consumption of goods in the US is rising at 7% a year. National output shot up by 6% in the same period.

All this has helped to turn the rest of the world round too. Brazil has been able to cut interest rates and finance its debts after its crisis in January. Asia has got its interest rates down too and has been able to sell its exports to the US by the bucket load. Even Europe and the UK have been able to live off America's speculations.

But here is the danger to global capitalism. If the US economy should dive, all

"Forward! There's no sign of a slump..."



The Perfect Paradigm

the others would sink with it. And the US boom has not much further to go. A stock market crash is long overdue. As I write, the Fed has just announced that it is now worried about inflation and overheating. It is considering raising interest rates. And it will in the very near future, say June or August. When it does the stock market will take a big hit. Given that 25% of American household assets are tied up in stocks and bonds, any loss of value there will mean Americans will tighten their belts and stop spending. That will signal a sharp fall in profits and the end of the boom.

This cannot be more than a year away at most. Once the US slides into recession, the feeble and fragile economic warmth in the UK will be snuffed out by the cold wind of deflation from across the Atlantic.

weaknesses

The shocking weaknesses of the UK economy will once again be exposed. Costs of production in UK industry are 20% higher than they are in the Euro area. Britain cannot compete. Once world growth and trade slip back, that reality will be revealed. UK manufacturing is already running a £20bn deficit with the rest of the world. That deficit is going to double over the next three years, unless either sterling is devalued by 20% or more, or the economy goes into recession, or both. Devaluation will help the trade balance by making exports cheaper and imports too expensive to buy. While a recession will cut living standards so that people will buy less imports (and less British goods for that matter).

The deficit in manufacturing reveals the nature of British capitalism as it staggers

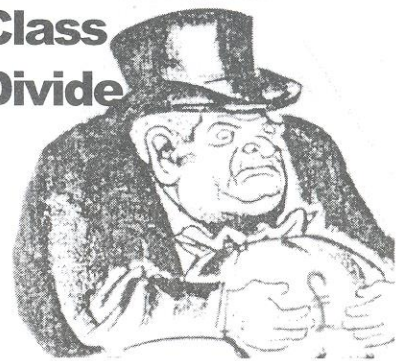
into the next millennium. This is a rentier economy, dependent on fees and interest from other countries that make things. The UK runs a big surplus on insurance and financial services with the rest of the world. But it also exports capital in huge amounts. British capitalists do not invest in British industry, which is increasingly foreign-owned. They send their capital abroad. There was a net outflow of private capital approaching £50bn last year, a figure that will reach a staggering £200bn each year over the next three years.

This huge outflow is financed by attracting 'hot money' from investors abroad who want to hold their money in UK banks for the high interest and the safety. Indeed, so much hot money is invested in the UK that British capitalism owes more to foreigners abroad than they owe to Britain, to the tune of £60bn. If anything should go wrong with the UK economy or the pound, then that money would be called in.

The City of London is now another Switzerland. However, it has the burden of 30m people demanding a livelihood and a manufacturing sector that can't compete because interest rates and the pound are so high, and because big business is so parasitic that it doesn't want to invest in industry or making things.

So the UK may achieve a 'soft landing' this year. That would be good news. Less jobs will be lost and wages will not fall, even if they do not rise. But this 'success' is not down to a clever economic policy or to the brilliance of British industry. It's because the US has lengthened the boom through an increase of fictitious capital in the American stock market. But the higher the speculation, the harder the fall. The first year of the millennium may have more than some Christian significance. ■

The Class Divide



Anything Juicy?

A private Stamford-based tuition agency - Stepping Stones Tuition - created uproar in the classroom when its newsletter urged tutors to inform on failing teachers. "If you have any stories about situations in which tutors have stepped into the breach where schools have failed - particularly anything juicy about teacher incompetence - we really want to hear..." stated the letter. This private outfit is simply attempting to capitalise on the Tory-inspired hysteria over failing schools. It is not interested in education standards, but very interested in promoting its own business interests. Such private parasites should be squeezed out of education.

Jail Bird Blues

US unemployment is at record low. Apart from booting people off welfare, could this be due to the ever-expanding prison population? In 1980, there were approximately 300,000 inmates. Today there are almost two million behind bars - the majority being blacks. By contrast, there are less than 61,000 prisoners in Britain. American businesses are taking advantage of the situation. Increasingly, private industries are leasing out prisoners for cheap labour. TWA "employs" prisoners to handle over-the-phone air ticket sales. Clothing firms and computer manufacturers are also taking advantage of this captive pool of workers at third world wages. Is this another example for the Blairites?

Without comment

In the last 18 months, the Blair government has dropped more bombs than the Tories dropped in 18 years. Eighteen hospitals and clinics and at least 200 nurseries, schools, colleges and student's dormitories have been destroyed or damaged, together with housing estates, hotels, libraries, youth centres, theatres and museums.



Nato split - defeat in the offing?

NATO is in a mess. After seven weeks of bombing, not a single one of its objectives has been achieved. Milosevic remains firmly in place. Kosovo has almost been emptied of Albanians. Despite all the claims made in past weeks, Yugoslav forces remain entrenched in Kosovo. NATO is staring defeat in the face. In place of the confident, smiling front which he put on at the start of the conflict, President Clinton now reveals the sorry spectacle of a man who is out of his depth.

*by Socialist Appeal editor
Alan Woods*

At the Spangdahlem air base, the President of the world's mightiest power appeared before his audience dressed in a leather bomber jacket—a little inappropriate for a man with Bill Clinton's military record, but then, as we have seen, retired pacifists always make the most belligerent warmongers when given half a chance. He said that NATO would continue to hit Serbia "hard, where it hurts", and condemned the Milosevic government as a regime of "concentration camps, murder and rape". He talked of a fight to the finish, and warned that the USA could put troops into Kosovo "in six hours"—if Milosevic capitulates.

However, since the Yugoslav President shows no sign of obliging just yet, Clinton must cover his bare backside by pleading for peace and a negotiated settlement—a

settlement which already bears no relation whatsoever to the Rambouillet agreement. After all the public rhetoric designed to demonise the Serbs in general and Milosevic in particular, it comes as a surprise to see the eagerness of the Americans at this late stage not only to talk with this "regime of concentration camps, murder and rape", but even to offer it every assurance that it can stay in power. When asked whether any deal could be struck that left President Milosevic in office, Clinton replied—somewhat sheepishly—in the affirmative. No wonder the Americans were not amused by Tony Blair's ravings about pursuing the war "until Milosevic stands down"!

Given the extreme obtuseness of the American and British leaders, it is still possible that they could stumble into a ground war. But the probability is now weighted against this. Clinton's tendency to retreat reflects a growing awareness in the US establishment that—as we pointed out from the first day—a war in Kosovo would be a nightmare. NATO is now split wide open over the question of continuing the war. The much-vaunted leadership of the United States has proved disastrous from day one. The Americans blundered into a war for which they were clearly not prepared, believing that Milosevic would immediately capitulate. Now they say that an intervention on the ground can only take place when the Yugoslav army has been sufficiently "degraded" (i.e. pulverised) to render effective resistance impossible.

The military backwoodsmen (British, of course!) are still game for a fight—in words at least. Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Jackson, the British commander in charge of NATO forces in Macedonia, is warning that the onset of winter begins in October, so they should think in terms of "bringing this conflict to a resolution before then." If NATO intends to change policy on the use of ground troops, "we haven't got very long, it seems to me, if such a change of strategy is decided upon."

But the decision does not depend on Sir Michael, but on the 19 NATO governments. The prospect of a bloody conflict on the ground has concentrated their minds wonderfully. Recently the US House of Representatives refused to pass a motion in favour of the war. This is a warning to Clinton that Congress is already having second thoughts.

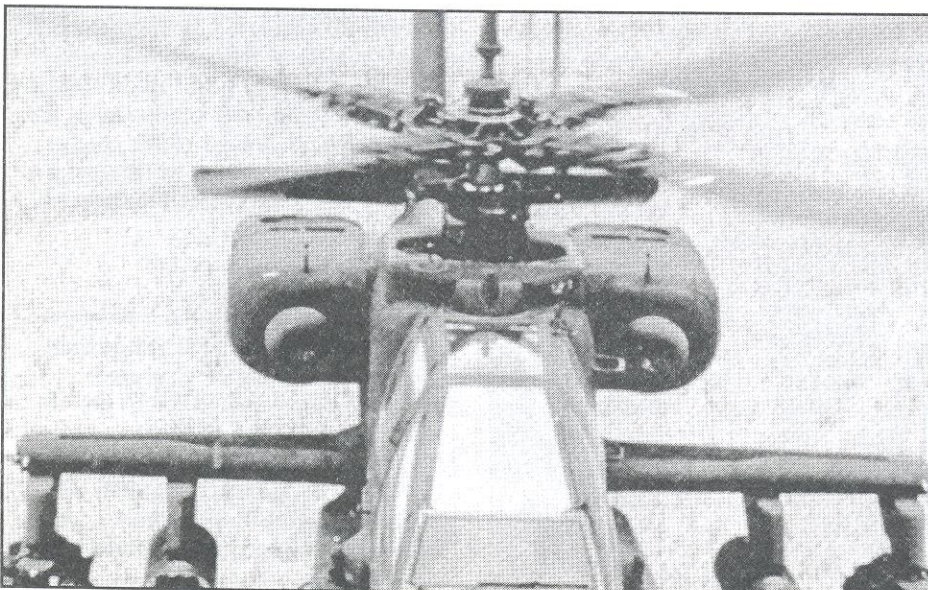
real position

The editorial of *The Economist* of May 8th, significantly entitled "Making the best of a bungled war," stated the real position:

"So far, the West's war against Serbia has been a shambles. The humanitarian catastrophe it was designed to avert has merely been intensified. Nearly a million people, over half of Kosovo's population, have been driven from their homes; thousands are missing, perhaps dead, Serbia's military machine looks defiantly intact; barely a score of its 1,300-odd tanks have been destroyed. Dazzled by technology and obsessed with avoiding casualties, the allies seem to be unable to hurt, let alone destroy, Serbia's army."

In Greece the massive opposition to the bombing campaign is combined with 55% of the population declaring their opposition to Milosevic, 35% saying they would be prepared to accept Kosovo Albanian refugees in their homes and 65% being prepared to send humanitarian aid to the refugees. These figures show a very healthy attitude on the part of the Greek population and provide the basis for putting forward an internationalist position against the war.

Since the beginning of the bombing campaign at least 10 mass demonstrations have been organised with tens of thousands of people participating. The Greek TUC even organised a 4-hour work stoppage against the war. The Greek Railway Workers Union has declared publicly that if NATO sends ground troops into Yugoslavia



they would prevent any military convoys from using the railway lines in Greece (the leadership of this union is in the hands of PASOK trade unionists who belong to the right-wing of the party, the so-called 'renovators!').

Opposition to NATO's campaign has been specially strong in the harbour city of Salonika which has been used as a base for NATO operations. Several NATO convoys going into Macedonia (or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as it is officially called) have been physically stopped by angry demonstrators. In one incident, anti-war demonstrators changed the military traffic signs and redirected a NATO convoy which was going to Macedonia into a fruit and vegetable market on the outskirts of Salonika where the convoy was attacked with tomatoes and other vegetables by a group of demonstrators.

The position of PASOK in these conditions has been very cautious. They participate in the war effort but publicly make all sorts of noises against it and in favour of a diplomatic solution. This is no accident. The mood is such that if NATO was to send ground troops into Yugoslavia they could face a mass revolt in Greece, especially over the use of the Salonika port. The government, which has managed to present itself as having a 'neutral' position, would be in serious difficulties.

Rome, Paris and Bonn are now all separately looking for some kind of a deal. In fact, the interests of the different NATO countries are far from identical. A continuation of the war would inevitably bring out all the hidden contradictions. In Germany the war has caused an internal crisis in the Greens which threatens the future of the coalition government. But there are other, far deeper, reasons why Germany is unenthusiastic about the war. Because of its position in Europe and its interests in Eastern Europe, Germany is particularly concerned about Russia's reactions. That is why it is busy negotiating with the Russians and Chinese independently of NATO.

The big winner, paradoxically, has been Russia. The most extraordinary outcome of Bill Clinton's Kosovo adventure was that it turned Boris Yeltsin into a statesman, with his representative, Chernomyrdin, taken more seriously in Bonn and Rome than Clinton's Strobe Talbott. As one bemused foreign observer pointed out: when Boris Yeltsin begins to



look like a serious and sober statesman, you know something has gone badly wrong with American policy!

The demands placed upon Yugoslavia by NATO are absolutely astounding in their insolence. The US began by attempting to dictate terms to the Belgrade government, drafting a document now called the Rambouillet Accords. What did they consist of?

sovereign state

The Rambouillet agreement provided for the military occupation, not just of Kosovo, but of the whole of Yugoslavia. Such a demand could not be agreed to by any government of any sovereign state. Moreover, it was couched in terms that would make it as onerous and humiliating as possible for Yugoslavia. Chapter seven, Article ten, for example, gives NATO the right to shoot down any military aircraft, not only over Kosovo, but also 25 kilometres from the boundaries of Kosovo into the rest of Serbia. It also refers (Chapter 7b) to the presence of NATO maritime units, whereas Kosovo is land-locked. So this can only refer to the river Danube, very far from Kosovo.

The agreement gives NATO troops unprecedented access to the country with no legal controls: "3. The Parties recognise the need for expeditious departure and entry for NATO personnel. Such personnel shall be exempt from passport and visa regulations." Moreover, NATO personnel would be placed, effectively, above the law: "6a. NATO shall be immune from

all legal process, whether civil, administrative, or criminal." They were to have the run of the whole country—not just Kosovo:

"8. NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) including associated airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, manoeuvre, billet, and utilisation of any areas or facilities as required for support, trading and operations."

As the peak of insolence, they demanded control of the mass media:

"15. The Parties shall...grant all telecommunications services, including broadcast services, needed for the Operation, as determined by NATO...free of cost."

And, last but by no means least, Article 11 specifies that:

"The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles."

After the collapse of the USSR Washington has abrogated to itself the right to dictate to every country in the world what economic policies it must pursue.

After accepting these outrageous terms, not a single shred of Yugoslav national sovereignty would remain. No government in the world could have accepted such terms, unless it had been already brought to its knees by a devastating defeat in war.

Despite this, the Americans had to lean heavily on the Albanian Kosovars to

accept the Rambouillet agreement because they wanted to settle for nothing less than full independence. But when the Yugoslavs said that they would not sign, the Americans immediately warned that, unless the Serbs agreed to the Accords, precisely as stated with no further negotiation, NATO would begin a bombing campaign against them. This blatant bullying amounts to the policy of: "Do as we say, or we'll bomb you". It is the modern equivalent of gunboat diplomacy—a throwback to the methods of British imperialism in its hey-day.

Unable to inflict a decisive defeat upon Belgrade, out of a spirit of petty and spiteful revenge, the USA is mercilessly pounding Yugoslavia. Gone is any pretence at selective targets. The US airforce is bombing everything—residential areas, refugee columns, Chinese embassy or Greek consulates—who cares? The main thing is to vent the frustration of the world's mightiest power on an enemy that stubbornly refuses to bend the knee. The aim is to flatten Yugoslavia, to ruin it utterly, to reduce it to rubble, before finally signing a peace treaty in which Washington's failure will be writ large for all to see.

There will have to be a cease-fire prior to the implementation of any agreement. Kosovo will remain firmly inside Yugoslavia and Belgrade will continue to control it. While the army may be withdrawn, Serbian police will retain some sort of presence. This will not be welcome news to the KLA, which is making a lot of noise, demanding the continuation of the war. The KLA imag-

ined that they would get a privileged position with Washington by doing the dirty work. Now they will be unceremoniously dispensed with. Of course, in order to cover their backside, the Americans will have to find some face-saving formula to convince the world that this humiliating defeat is after all, a great victory! Having spent the past two months trying to prove that black is white, this will not be a very difficult task for the likes of Jamie Shea.

compromise

A recent report by STRATFOR suggested the form this compromise may take: "A lightly armed international peacekeeping force will be permitted into Kosovo. Some NATO members will send forces, several non-NATO members, including Russia, will also send forces. The command structure of the force will remain deliberately vague. It will be agreed that Albanians will be able to return to their homes in Kosovo in stages. Many will refuse to go, hoping to be resettled elsewhere. Others will return. Yet others will try to return but will find it impossible. An ineffective peacekeeping force will remain in place for a very long time, with an unclear mission." (The world after Kosovo, STRATFOR Global Intelligence Update, 3/5/99)

The terms which Bill Clinton now seems prepared to offer Belgrade could have been offered to the Serbs long ago, and a lot of deaths and damage could thereby have been avoided. Milosevic has already stated that they would be prepared to accept a cease-fire, autonomy for

Kosovo and the return of the refugees. Belgrade would also accept the presence of an international "peace force" but unarmed (or with only side-arms for self-defence) and under UN control. Of course, this is only the opening shot in a lengthy process of horse-trading. In the end, Belgrade will have to accept the presence of some NATO troops, but the British and Americans will have to be a minority, surrounded by Greeks, Italians, Russians, Ukrainians and probably Chinese, under UN control.

Such a deal will provide no serious or long-lasting solution to the problems of Kosovo, any more than the Dayton Agreement solved anything for Bosnia. It will only stoke the fires of future conflicts, wars and ethnic hatred to the detriment of all the peoples.

The root cause of the crisis on the Balkans is fundamentally economic and social. The former Yugoslavia was engulfed by a catastrophic economic crisis towards the end of the eighties. In 1987 unemployment had reached the staggering level of 1,200,000 (out of a working population of 6.5 million!). 53% of the population was living below the minimum poverty level. Its foreign debt had shot up from \$5 billion to \$20 billion in just five years. The uneven development of the country had created a situation where unemployment in Slovenia, in the North, was a mere 1.3%, while in the poorest province, Kosovo, in the South, it had reached the level of 30%.

On the basis of economic development it had been possible to achieve a forty year long period in which all the peoples of Yugoslavia were able to live together peacefully. But once the crisis of the economy set in all the nightmares of the past began once more to loom large.

The leadership of the old Yugoslav League of Communists (the Communist Party) proved incapable of solving the economic crisis and thus each national bureaucracy, Croatian, Serb, Bosnian, Slovene, etc., moved along the road of nationalism. If we bear in mind the fact that nationalism was able to thrive on the basis of millions of Yugoslavs being thrown into extreme poverty then we have to ask ourselves how is the wanton destruction of the economy of Serbia going to solve the problem.

At the moment Yugoslavia is taking the direction of a war economy, with measures of planning and centralisation. This will achieve results in the short term. But after



the war it is likely that the movement in the direction of capitalism will be resumed, not only because of the pressures from the IMF, but because Milosevic and the ruling clique are all in favour of capitalism—as long as the wealth is in their hands and no-one else's. The losers, as always, will be the working people of Yugoslavia.

devastating

Tomislav Banovic, President of the Serbian Confederation of Trade Unions, the official and most representative union organisation in Serbia, recently gave a devastating picture of the effects of the bombings in an interview with the Italian newspaper, 'il Manifesto' (1.5.99). "They are bombing everything, factories, hospitals, schools, bridges, roads, power supplies, the abbeys that are a Unesco heritage, the TV stations. And they also hit highly polluting factories such as the oil refinery of Pancevo, and they contaminate the land with depleted uranium which is used to make these powerful bombs..."

"I have here the latest list ... of the 35 major engineering factories destroyed by NATO bombing raids: if you include all the surrounding plants that receive and supply parts from these factories then we calculate that this has led to a further 155,000 unemployed, which together with their families means that a total of 605,000 who no longer have a means of maintaining themselves. To these engineering factories we have to add all the other centres of production and those connected to the services and infrastructure, from chemical plants to the railways, which brings us to a total of 600,000 people who have lost their jobs in a 40 day bombing campaign. This has had a knock-on effect in other sectors, which brings the total of people who have lost their jobs to about one million, and this has to be added to the one million who were unemployed before the bombing. This is our humanitarian catastrophe, practically almost half the working population without a job..."

"To destroy the factories means striking a blow at multiethnic interests. The bulk of the workforce at the nickel processing plant near Pristina was ethnic Kosovar Albanian. The refugees will return, they must all return to Kosovo, but where will they work if the factories have been destroyed by the bombing raids?"

The Kosovo crisis has reawakened all the old hostilities on the Balkans, pitting one government and nation against another,

and thereby sowing the seeds of new wars in the future. Not only do we have the revolting role of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic in backing NATO, but the equally treacherous role of the so-called socialist government in Tirana and the right wing administrations in Bulgaria and Romania who lost no time in stabbing Yugoslavia in the back in order to further their own interests. The Albanian government was initially enthusiastic about the war—so enthusiastic that it effectively offered NATO to take over the country! They dreamed of establishing a strong base in the Balkans—on American bayonets. Kosovo would be given independence, then, after a decent interval, vote to unite with the Albanian motherland, leading to the formation of Greater Albania. This would, of course, immediately raise the question of the Albanian minorities in Macedonia and Montenegro. But one need not talk about such things in advance! Such were the illusions that the rulers of Albania entertained in secret, if not in public.

Now all these dreams have gone up like a puff of smoke. Tirana, like the Kosovars, has been betrayed by its NATO "allies". When the Americans said that the Serb attacks on the Kosovars would mean a revision of the Rambouillet agreement, they had always taken this to mean a toughening of the terms of the agreement. Instead, it is clear that what Clinton is looking for is a way out—in other words, a climb-down. The terms for the Kosovars will not be better, but worse, than the deal they so reluctantly signed at Rambouillet. *The Financial Times* lifted the veil on both the war aims of Tirana and the prospect of new upheavals in Albania:

"Artan Hoxha, a former minister of foreign trade and now chairman of the Albanian Institute for Contemporary Studies, warned that if the agreement did not provide sufficient guarantees for the Kosovars, the resulting anger at the present Albanian government could result in violent disorder of the kind seen here several times since the collapse of communism.

"In the Rambouillet agreement it was said Kosovo would be a protectorate within the Yugoslav federation, but everybody believed it was just a front for the independence of Kosovo," he said.

"Now it seems more likely that something on the model of the Republika Srpska [the semi-autonomous Serb state in

Bosnia-Hercegovina] is being prepared for them." (*Financial Times*, 12/5/99.)

As a matter of fact, this scenario is the best the Kosovars can hope for. In all likelihood, they will have to settle for less. The fate of the Kosovo and the plight of Albania is a stern warning to all small nations that put their hope in imperialism. Down this road, there is nothing to be expected, except betrayal, defeat, ruin and humiliation.

The Kosovo crisis represents a turning-point in the history of Europe. The defeat of NATO in Kosovo—for that is what it is—has shown the limits of the power of US imperialism. This has a crucial bearing on the new stage in the colonial revolution that has already begun in Indonesia and will inevitably intensify in the period of crisis that now opens up on a world scale. If the Americans could not intervene with ground troops in Kosovo, how could they contemplate a serious intervention against the Indonesian revolution? They will try to organise thugs, thieves and scum, as they did in Mozambique, Angola and Afghanistan, but could not directly intervene against the revolution.

humiliations

The inability of NATO to defeat little Yugoslavia is the latest in a series of humiliations that reveal the limits of US power in the world. In addition to the intervention in Iraq we have had the interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and now Kosovo. All have ended badly, most in humiliation. After eight years, Saddam Hussein continues in power in Iraq. Somalia was an all-out failure. The Haitian invasion displaced the former government but solved nothing. Bosnia, which was supposed to be a short-term intervention, has become a permanent presence. But the most humiliating setback has been suffered in Yugoslavia. The spokesmen for NATO try to put the best possible face on this defeat. But defeat it is, and no amount of spin-doctoring can alter the fact.

This crisis has also seriously affected the situation in Russia. Boris Yeltsin was faced with an open crisis, and even overthrow, if the war went ahead. That is why he has been anxiously trying to stitch up a deal, using the services of discredited ex-Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. The Americans were likewise anxious to keep Russia out of the conflict and therefore suddenly forgot about their earlier policy of refusing funds to Moscow. In other words,

they resorted to bribery. Russia has so far walked away with \$4.5 billion in its pockets. Not that this will last very long under conditions of such terrible collapse. If the leaders of the so-called Communist Party had a genuine Leninist policy, they could have taken power in the last few weeks. Instead, they have tied themselves firmly to the capitalist road. As a result, yet again, Yeltsin has recovered. How long for is another question.

The sudden dismissal of Primakov was the result of the attempt to impeach Yeltsin. By acting in this way, Yeltsin hoped to pre-empt his enemies in the State Duma. In the context of a profound social ferment and disillusionment with market reform, the open split at the top can be the signal for an explosion from below. "Even if the economy were running smoothly, we'd be in for a very hot political year," said Vladimir Petukhov, an analyst with the conservative Institute of Social and National Problems in Moscow. "But here we are skirting the abyss of social explosion and the political elite are moving into an all-out struggle for power. The odds are that our leaders will find a way out by imposing dictatorship."

Thus the Kosovo crisis showed up all the fault-lines that lie beneath the surface in Russia. The repercussions of these events will exacerbate the contradictions between the different imperialist states too—between Europe and America, and also between the rival capitalist regimes of western Europe, with France, Germany and Britain pulling in opposite directions. France looks more towards the Mediterranean, North and Central Africa and the Middle East. Its agricultural inter-

ests clash with those of Britain and Germany. In addition, the growing power of Germany—its supposed "friendly neighbour"—is causing ever greater suspicion and resentment in the corridors of the Elysee palace.

The Yugoslav debacle will also increase the internal contradictions within NATO. It may even lead to the break-up of the alliance at a later date. Despite all the talk of unity, each of the member states of NATO will be pursuing its own ends.

Capitalism on a world scale has entered into a new and convulsive period—a period characterised by crises, wars, revolution and counter-revolution on a world scale. The Kosovo crisis has served notice on Europe of the frightful cost of maintaining the capitalist system in the period of its decay—a system which sets one nation at the throat of another at the behest of profit, markets and spheres of interest. In the long run, the whole of Europe is threatened with the disease of Balkanisation.

fratricidal wars

And yet this is not inevitable. The workers of all the countries of the Balkans have no interest in fighting fratricidal wars. Before the break up of Yugoslavia the workers did move as a class. The Serb, Croatian, Bosnian, Kosovar workers all took part in a wave of strikes and demonstrations which brought them together against the government of Yugoslavia, the government of bureaucrats. When the first war between Croatia and the Yugoslav government started the reaction of workers across Yugoslavia was that they did not want to kill their brothers. We saw this again in Sarajevo where the masses made

a last desperate attempt to stop the descent into barbarism that was being organised by the nationalists on all sides. But the workers were leaderless and were thus unable to provide an alternative to the crisis the country was facing.

So long as the workers of the Balkans remain leaderless then more disasters will be forthcoming, more barbarism and war will be the fate of the peoples of this part of Europe. But the workers remain the only force in society, organised in their trade unions that can offer a way out. Tomislav Banovic, the leader of the Serb trade unions quoted above, has pointed out that, "Our trade union confederation appeals to the workers of the world to stop the NATO bombings... This trade union confederation is multiethnic, it represents 27 different nationalities... I want to make an appeal to the workers of Europe against all forms of nationalism, which has been mainly responsible for this destruction. We must work towards multi-ethnic coexistence. In spite of the hatred and the war in Kosovo this is still possible."

These words undoubtedly represent the genuine aspirations of the workers of Yugoslavia. This is where we must begin to build up the genuine forces for a socialist transformation of society. The workers across the Balkans need to take control of their own destiny by taking over control of the economy and running it in their own interests. That is why only the socialist transformation of society can offer a way out on the basis of a Socialist Federation of the Balkans as the first step to the creation of the Socialist United States of Europe. ■



John Pilger on the Balkans

"This week, the unthinkable will again be normalised when Nato triples the bombing raids to 700 a day. This includes blanket bombing by B-52s. Blair and Clinton and the opaque-eyed General Clarke, apologist for the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, are killing and maiming hundreds, perhaps thousands, of innocent people in the Balkans. No contortion of intellect and morality, nor silence, will diminish the truth that these are acts of murder." (*The Guardian*, 18/5/99)

James Connolly on national oppression

From *Irish Worker*,
September 12, 1914

The "war on behalf of small nationalities" is still going merrily on in the newspapers. That great champion of oppressed races, Russia, is pouring her armies into East Prussia land offering freedom and deliverance to all and sundry if they will only take up arms on her behalf - without undue delay.

She is to be the judge after the war as to whether they did or did not delay unduly. The Russian Socialists have issued a strong manifesto denouncing the war, and pouring contempt upon the professions of the tsar in favour of oppressed races, pointing out his suppression of the liberties of Finland, his continued martyrdom of Poland, his atrocious tortures and massacres in the Baltic provinces, and his withdrawal of the recently granted parliamentary liberties of Russia. And to that again add the fact that the Polish Nationalists have warned the Poles against putting any faith in a man who has proven himself incapable of keeping his solemnly pledged faith with his own people, and you will begin to get a saner view of the great game that is being played than you can ever acquire from the lying press of Ireland and England.

outrages

Of course, that should not blind you to the splendid stand which the British government, we are assured, is making against German outrages and brutality and in favour of small nationalities. The Russian government is admitted by every publicist in England to be a foul blot upon civilisation. It was but the other day that when the Russian Duma was suppressed by force and many of its elected representatives imprisoned and exiled, an English Cabinet Minister defiantly declared in public, in spite of international courtesies:

"The Duma is dead! Long live the Duma!"

But all that is forgotten now, and the Russian government and the British Government stand solidly together in favour of small nationalities everywhere except in countries now under Russian and British rule.

Yes, I seem to remember a small country called Egypt, a country that through

ages of servitude evolved to a conception of national freedom, and under leaders of its own choosing essayed to make that conception a reality. And I think I remember how this British friend of small nationalities bombarded its chief seaport, invaded and laid waste its territory, slaughtered its armies, imprisoned its citizens, led its chosen leaders away in chains, and reduced the new-born Egyptian nation into a conquered, servile British province.

And I think I remember how, having murdered this new-born soul of nationality amongst the Egyptian people, it signalled its victory by the ruthless hanging at Denshawai of a few helpless peasants who had dared to think their pigeons were not made for the sport of British officers.

Also, if my memory is not playing me strange tricks, I remember reading of a large number of small nationalities in India, whose evolution towards a more perfect civilisation in harmony with the genius of their race, was ruthlessly crushed in blood, whose lands were stolen, whose education was blighted, whose women were left to the brutal lusts of the degenerate soldiery of the British Raj.

insolent aggression

Over my vision comes also grim remembrances of two infants and I look on the map in vain for them today. I remember that the friend of small nationalities waged war upon them - a war of insolent aggression at the instance of financial bloodsuckers. Britain sent her troops to subjugate them, to wipe them off the map; and although they resisted until the veldt ran red with British and Boer blood, the end of the war saw two small nationalities less in the world.

When I read the attempts of the prize Irish press to work up feeling against the Germans by talk of German outrages at the front, I wonder if those who swallow such yarns ever remember the facts about the exploits of the British generals in South Africa. When we are told of the horrors of Louvain, when the only damage that was done was the result of civilians firing upon German troops from buildings which those troops had in consequence to attack, I remember that in South Africa Lord Roberts issued an order that whenever there was an attack upon the railways in his line of communication every Boer house and farmstead within a radius of ten square miles had to be destroyed.

When I hear of the unavoidable killing of civilians in a line of battle 100 miles long in a densely populated country, being of, as it were, part of the German plan of campaign, I remember how the British swept up the whole non-combatant Boer population into concentration camps, and kept it there until the little children died in thousands of fever and cholera; so that the final argument in causing the Boers to make peace was the fear that at the rate of infant mortality in those concentration camps there would be no new generation left to inherit the republic for which their elders were fighting.

Persia

This vicious and rebellious memory of mine will also recur to the recent attempt of Persia to form a constitutional government, and it recalls how, when that ancient nation shook off the fetters of its ancient despotism, and set to work to elaborate the laws and forms in the spirit of a modern civilised representative state, Russia, which in solemn treaty with England had guaranteed its independence, at once invaded it, and slaughtering all its patriots, pillaging its towns and villages, annexed part of its territories, and made the rest a mere Russian dependency. I remember how Sir Edward Grey, who now gushes over the sanctity of treaties, when appealed to to stand by and make Russia stand by the treaty guaranteeing the independence of Persia, coolly refused to interfere.

Oh, yes, they are great fighters for small nationalities, great upholders of the sanctity of treaties!

And the Irish Home Rule press knows this, knows all these things that a poor workman like myself remembers, knows them all, and is cowardly and guiltily silent, and viciously and fiendishly evil.

Let us hope that all Ireland will not some day have to pay an awful price for the lying attacks of the Home Rule press upon the noble German nation.

Let our readers encourage and actively spread every paper, circular, leaflet or manifesto which in these dark days dares to tell the truth. Thus our honour may be saved; thus the world may learn that the Home Rule press is but a sewer-pipe for the pouring of English filth upon the shores of Ireland. ■

10 years on... Tiananmen Square massacre

The Tiananmen events of ten years ago are the subject of serious consideration inside China today.

by Heiko Khoo

The argument is put forward that China would have experienced a similar collapse to the USSR and much of Eastern Europe if the Chinese leadership had not clamped down. Stability and economic growth, which returned to China shortly after 1989, have enabled the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to maintain their rule and raise the living standards of the majority.

It is true that had China taken the path of Eastern Europe or the USSR, towards the restoration of capitalism under the cloak of a multi-party system and "parliamentary democracy", things would be worse than today. Chinese society would have been thrown backwards by decades.

There are three central questions that Chinese students and workers looking back to the Tiananmen events need to ask:

What was the character of the movement of April - June 1989?

What were the programmes and policies of the main tendencies?

Could the disaster of the capitalist path have been averted in any other way than

the way chosen by Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and the leadership at that time?

The protests in Tiananmen, when the students occupied the square, were primarily focused on demands against corruption, greed, nepotism and arbitrary bureaucratic rule. This created a focal point for the urban workers to vent discontent on these issues, which were their primary concern.

Inflation was rising fast and undermining rises in living standards. Increasing inequality since 1979 was in obvious contradiction to the official adherence to the "communist worldview", and in sharp contrast to the super egalitarianism of the late years under Mao Zedong. All these issues sparked the anger of the street protests and the occupation of the Square. At no stage did the protests generalise anti-communist slogans or demands. This is not to say that pro-capitalist forces were not present.

'great chaos'

Official historiography in 1990, presented an image of capitalist corporations like Stone, working in co-operation with right wing members of the Party such as Zhao Ziyang, to guide student leaders into foolish acts which risked destabilising China and bringing 'great chaos', such as we

later saw in the USSR.

However this is only one side of the story. Leon Trotsky said that revolution is the forcible entry of the masses into governing their own destiny, in this sense Tiananmen was undoubtedly a revolutionary rising, but a half completed, incoherent, disorganised and compromising leadership can shipwreck the greatest of revolutionary opportunities.

The students in China are a tiny elite section of the urban population, huddled 4-8 to a room in campuses, they have traditionally reflected social crises before any other section of the population.

Being educated in China, many of the student leaders in Tiananmen were more pro-capitalist, wrongly believing that capitalism and democracy are inextricably connected. Most of the famous leaders became openly pro-American after they fled China. They sought compromise and co-operation with the CCP leadership and had illusions in the ability of the "reform" section of the leadership headed by disgraced leader Zhao Ziyang to bring "democratisation".

Zhao Ziyang was removed from office after warning the students of the impending armed suppression of the occupation. However by no means were all the students in favour of "capitalist democracy".

In Tiananmen Square in the days before the army cleared it using tanks and rifle fire, many students wanted the leadership removed. They condemned the student leaders for driving the workers away from the square, for rejecting calls by the workers for a general strike and offers of arms which came from workers' delegations from the munitions factories.

fraternisation

On May 20th 1989, when the army was sent into Beijing to clear the square, the student leaders exposed their utter bankruptcy. But the newly formed Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation organised barricades of buses, trucks, and cars to block the army's paths of entry into the city centre. The working masses of Beijing surrounded the army trucks and discussed for hours with the soldiers and officers. Through this fraternisation the soldiers joined the revolt, and the entire apparatus of the CCP leadership was suspended in mid air without a force able to crush the



protests. The lower layers of the bureaucracy, office workers, Communist Party members sickened by corruption, police officers, and now the soldiers had joined the revolt. But a revolutionary situation requires clear direction and focus if the initiative is not to be lost and swing back to the ruling bureaucracy.

To their great credit the workers leadership that did emerge in the form of the Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation (BAWF) had a revolutionary proletarian instinct as to the direction that had to be taken. It is barely reported in the Chinese or western press even today, that it was this force that was the primary reason for the military to intervene so heavy-handedly on June 4th 1989.

movement

The BAWF saw the working class as 'the most advanced class having a 'special role' to 'correctly' lead the democratic patriotic movement. The Federation's structure had "no leadership posts only a hierarchy of committees and methods of electing and recalling members."... "The leadership were not interested in wielding power and were very clear".. that.. "nobody had to be any more powerful than anyone else." The BAWF had a confused and unclear programme but as the following quotes reveal, they were groping for the correct direction for the revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy.

The anti-elitism of the workers extend-

ed their conception of political enemies to include opposition to Zhao Ziyang and the reform factions of the party who they considered all to be part of one faction the 'harm the people faction'. (*Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, fall 1990, pp21-2). They viewed the Deng years as years of the victimisation of the working class. BAWF issued scathing attacks on the economic competence of the Government, "you leaders have made a complete mess of it. You excuse yourselves by claiming that 'having no experience in building socialism, we are taking a billion people across the river with us by feeling for rocks step by step ...' Well you have made quite a lot of people 'feel for rocks' for quite a few decades already. How much headway have you made ?

What about those who followed you but did not find the rocks, did they not all drown? You officials are playing with people's lives The decade of reform has no direction and no goals. Where do you plan to lead the billion people? Is there one official who can answer that? You said that 'let it be white or black a cat that catches mice is a good cat.' Well, let us ask you something. What if both white and black cat try to catch the same mouse wouldn't there be a fight?

This would definitely lead to confusion and conflict, causing deepening rifts. The outcome would be that the official cat gets fatter and fatter and the people's cat gets thinner and thinner. Is this the kind of cure you prescribe for the nation?" (ibid, p59).

The BAWF claimed to have costed the privileges for upper officials "Based on Marx's Capital, and the rate of exploitation of workers. We discovered that the 'servants of the people' swallow all the surplus value produced by the people's blood." This was not quite correct though it shows an understanding of the parasitical role of the bureaucracy.

Transferring central powers to enterprise managers had resulted in an increase in the power in the hands of local bureaucracies and Party cadres. "The meddling that resulted took the form of corruption profiteering and nepotism, and added enormously to inflationary pressures." (Lichtenstein op.cit.p12).

In the view of the BAWF inflation was caused neither by a "two tier price system or insufficient scope for free market activity. It is directly due to the fact that China is ruled by incompetent, corrupt and self serving dictators." (Walder, Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs, p20. no.29, 1992)

The BAWF blamed inflation on the corrupt trading practices of officials who through monopolising power over supplies, demanded extortionate prices to fill their own pockets. (ibid. p. 21) The BAWF demanded price stabilisation, an end to forced sales of treasury bonds to workers, investigations of official incomes and privileges, an end to discrimination against women in hiring practices and the right to freely change jobs. (ibid. p17) Their view of democracy proposed that the federation would supervise the Communist Party, and the legal representatives of state and collective enterprises, as well as protect the workers in other firms. One union activist explained their conception of democracy in terms of worker control of factory regulations and administration 'rules should be decided upon by everybody'. Independent organisation of the workers was to bring an end to one man rule in the factory and arbitrary decisions in work units. (ibid. p.18). The BAWF felt alienated 'not only from the political system but to a considerable extent also from the student leaders and intellectuals.' (ibid. p15). The students were criticised for the hierarchy of titles bestowed on their leaders, and for being like 'capitalists' for 'stumbling into chaos over money'. The union in contrast immediately counted any donations openly declared the sum and its intended use. (Activists quoted Walder ibid. p26). Whilst





allied with the student movement, as a result of being spurned by student activists they became openly critical of the students' methods of struggle, finding student attitudes a hindrance to the workers cause. Thus when the union advocated a general strike for May 28th the students rebuffed it demanding the union play a supportive rather than leading role in 'their' protest as a result that, "after May 28th we didn't advocate sympathy for the students any more." (Activist quoted in Walder *ibid.* p24).

Han Dongfang and Li Jinjin, two prominent activists in the Beijing workers movement, co-authored "The Joint Declaration (which) was one of the most radical and uncompromising documents of the entire 1989 pro-democracy movement. It called for a special court to be set up to try Li Peng and other 'enemies of the people' within the leadership, and it urged all officials in the Chinese People's Liberation Army to turn their guns on their oppressors." It threatened that the workers would use all peaceful means including strikes to achieve their goals and added... "With our blood we will reconstruct the walls of the Paris Commune." (Black And Monro. *Black Hands of Beijing.* p369) The political radicalism of the BAWF had widespread support amongst the Beijing population, it "was unprecedented and no doubt greatly alarmed officials who favoured a violent crackdown. The military operation of 4 June, launched despite the rapidly dwindling numbers of students and citizens on the square, was probably motivated in large part by these officials' mortal fears of

a workers' insurgency." (Walder *op.cit.*, AJCA., pp. 27-8).

The workers federation was the subject of the most cruel repression, they were the first on the square to be quelled. All those executed were either workers, peasants or unemployed, and incarceration conditions are far worse for workers than for students.

Even after the repression in Beijing the revolt continued for some days in Shanghai China's most important industrial city. The workers barricaded the city for a week after June 4th, returning to work after being warned by the City Government that there would be no food if this continued. Having lost Beijing, the central focus of the revolt, and without a clear strategy as to how to overthrow the ruling bureaucracy, Shanghai returned to normality.

protests

The rise of a workers movement in the Tiananmen protests may be seen as a precedent for future social conflict either in alliance with students and intellectuals or as an independent movement. BAWF had transformed the character of the student movement in a few weeks and after martial law was declared they were in effect, although not conscious of the need to take power, moving in that direction.

"Throughout vast areas of the city the masses had taken over the governance of Beijing into their own hands. It was the kind of spontaneous urban revolution that Karl Marx had said would inaugurate a communist society. And it was precisely the kind of spontaneous mass movement

that had always terrified the rulers of communist states." (*Lee Feigon China Rising*, p.213).

It is by no means inevitable that such a revolution if led by the workers would have had to end in the disaster which befell the USSR. The benefits of state ownership of land and the commanding heights of the economy, were and are still clear to see. Had the workers movement taken a lead earlier, armed with a clear Marxist programme, the entire course of Chinese and world history since 1989 could have been different.

The establishment of genuine workers' democracy, a democratically controlled economy managed by Workers Congresses linked together across China, would have provided a pole of attraction to the workers of the USSR and eastern Europe. A mass Marxist tendency linked to democratic students and workers organisations like BAWF could easily have penetrated the ranks of the Communist Party of China. Such a tendency could rapidly have won a majority of the urban masses and even within the CCP, and have led the most glorious of victories for the world working class. ■

Book of the month

Trotsky on China



Available from Wellred Books. H/B price £5.95 plus 20% for P&P at PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ

Splits at the top and revolution from below

Outraged by the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia, almost a million people took to the streets on the mainland. The Chinese Vice Premier Hu Jintao announced on TV that although NATO attacked China's embassy, "reform and opening up will continue." Voices questioning the pro-capitalist path have grown louder, gaining a base amongst CCP members, lower levels of the bureaucracy, the workers and youth.

by Heiko Khoo

China managed a 7.8 percent growth rate for 1998, these figures however conceal massive contradictions and conflicts. According to *Ming Pao Daily* (Hong Kong 19/3/99) since 1997, China's overproduction has reached a colossal scale. The value of overstocked commodities accounts for over 98 percent of the aggregate output value. In other words, of 100 items produced, only two are sold. In late 1997 China's overstocked commodities amounted to 3 trillion yuan leaving vast resources idle.

By some estimates as much as 70 percent of state-owned enterprises are operating at a loss which is responsible for 20 to 30 percent of the banks' bad debts. The money supply has grown rapidly whilst loan efficiency has dropped rapidly. This is because low-efficiency loans represent a large percentage of bank loans. As a result, though big loans were injected again, no output was evident, and this has increased the danger of financial collapse. To resolve these problems Beijing pressed ahead with enterprise 'reform'. State enterprises were turned into joint-stock companies or sold off creating a huge increase in urban unemployment.

"Official estimates put the urban unemployment rate in 1998 at 4 percent. Hu Angang of the Chinese Academy of Sciences estimated it to be 8 percent. Feng Lanrui of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) estimated that if the number of unemployed in the countryside and laid-off workers as well as new entrants to the labour force are included, the unemployment rate on the mainland will hit 25 percent this year." Cheng Ming (Hong Kong, 1/4/99).

The journal *Daidai Sichao* explains that of over 100 million workers at state enter-

prises, 30 million either have been laid-off or have not received wages and pensions. The number tops 50 million if their family members are taken into account. The population of impoverished rural areas stands at 48 million, while at the other pole over one million mainland households are millionaires.

The private sector has expanded considerably over the past year, from 24 percent to 33 percent of the national economy. Capitalist enterprises employed 13.5 million, foreign owned enterprises employed 17.5 million, add to this independent businesses, and private town and village enterprises and total private sector employment has reached over 100 million. Even these figures are an underestimate for many collective enterprises are effectively run as private companies.

The main CCP factions are engaged in open conflict which in a distorted form represent the real struggle of contending social forces. Last year a book called "Crossed Swords" was published, it advocated the defeat of the Left creating heated controversy.

capitalism

Premier, Zhu Rongji was the foremost proponent within the leadership of rapid moves towards capitalism. However, early last year, Zhu Rongji was all in favour of selling state enterprises, but at the national economic work conference late last year, he changed his tone by saying: the problem with state enterprises has nothing to do with the ownership-management relations. "The main problems are duplicate construction, mismanagement, and waste."

At the recent World Trade negotiations he offered even greater concessions to the USA than he had been given permission to and faced sharp criticism when he returned to Beijing. Zhu Rongji represents the pro-capitalist tendency within the CCP, which dominated Party membership till recently, but the mood in the CCP is shifting.

Li Peng, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee was trained in the USSR. He sees China's problems not in the lack of capitalism but in so called 'scientific management' and the technical development of industry and science. The success of the Three Gorges Dam, Hydroelectric project is to be his personal mark on Chinese history.

Politically he is famous for his role in suppressing the protests on Tiananmen Square in 1989. He takes a far more cautious view of the moves towards capitalism and leans on the Left in the party to put pressure on the pro-capitalist factions.

President Jiang Zemin is wise enough to see the dangers inherent in the current phase, and has sought to slow down the 'reform' (closure and privatisation) of state owned industry and to balance between the pro-capitalists and the anti-reform factions. He has insisted that the State maintain close vigilance against threats to social stability, and called for the Security Services to "nip destabilising factors in the bud" by which he primarily means worker activists.

Outside of Government the leading national figure of the Left faction in the CCP is Deng Liqun running a number of anti-reform journals and think tanks, in a recent speech he said,

"There are all kinds of 'reforms.' Whenever we see the word 'reform' we simply cannot force people to keep saying 'Support! Support! Support!' without asking any questions, or without letting them ask any questions. Such things should not be allowed in this world."

He attacked certain local governments for 'selling over 90 percent of public enterprises to capitalists, "turning public ownership into private ownership", "socialism into capitalism", and "workers from being the master of enterprises into employees."

This Left faction inside the CCP stands



Li Peng

in opposition to the privatisation of industry, sections have begun to advocate that Workers' Congresses, (which officially are supposed to control company management) become instruments of democratic control of Industry.

The Workers' Congresses like the official unions have largely been dead shells, but it is certainly possible that they could become instruments of genuine workers control on the basis of mass strikes, demonstrations and protests against factory closures and privatisation

Desperate conditions have created a wave of protests and terrorism. Following the assassination of Li Peiyao, a vice chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC), Zou Jingmeng, a member of the standing committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, was also gunned down in broad daylight in Beijing. During the past 20 years, no public security personnel were ever dispatched to protect deputies to successive NPC's. The latest NPC, however, specifically asked every delegation to be accompanied by the leaders of its public security system.

Almost the entire leadership now fears a revolt by the workers.

Cheng Ming Reported on 1st February 1999, "that provinces (regions) and cities including Beijing, Tianjin, Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong, Jilin, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Henan, and Sichuan have all told the central authorities that party and government departments at the local level have come under pressure, that public dissatisfaction has reached the boiling point. Officials from Shandong and Henan even said, 'The workers take to the streets demanding work, saying they have to live. There is a lot of public sympathy for them. What is the provincial government to do? If this situation spreads, it is entirely possible that large-scale disturbances may occur.'"

According to a report by the Chinese Academy of Social Science in the first nine months of 1998, 2,500 explosions and over 5,000 cases of demonstrations and protests occurred across the country, from Tibet to Xinjiang, from Hunan to Fujian, on all manner of issues. Laid-off workers and pensioners who have not been paid protest outside factory gates and government offices. Their demands are displayed on the banners they carry: "Give us food", "We need to eat."

Thus the attempt to introduce capitalism under the control of the bureaucracy produces massive contradictions and can lead to an attempt to restore state ownership and planning but with real workers' democracy and workers' control. On the other hand a world capitalist slump could lead to sections of the bureaucracy trying to restore the old system of state ownership but under bureaucratic control. ■

Free the Nigerian students!

A number of student activists have been arrested and badly beaten in Nigeria as a result of their involvement in the campaign against the increase in student fees. They were arrested on Monday 10th May, in the students' union bus of the LAUTECH students. A further three students were arrested the second day on the university campus, for leading the campaign for their release and continuing the campaign against the imposed fees. They are still being held. Other students are in danger of being arrested and are wanted by the police. Some have gone missing.

Last week the University of Ibadan was closed down as a result of student protests against fees. Those arrested were charged with incitement and breaking the University gate lock! The Magistrate refused to grant them bail and adjourned the case till the 29th of June! The arrested students are in a bad state as they were all beaten by the police and they have been refused food since they were arrested last Monday! They have not even been able to have a bath or change their clothes since they were arrested.

The President of the State Nigerian Labour Congress (trade unions) along with some other trade union activists went to the court to show their solidarity with those arrested and to stand as guarantors for them in case they were granted bail.

As the transition to civilian rule is now about to be carried out, these arrests are an absolute scandal, and must receive the maximum publicity possible.

The names of the arrested are:

Akinrogunde Tosin, (UNILORIN, University of Ilorin)
Isiaka Adegbile, (O.A.U., Ife)
Gbenga, (Acting President of the LAUTECH students' union)
Ropo, (NANS Zone D Treasurer)

Lekan Odewu, (UNILORIN, University of Ilorin) and five others.

Letters demanding their immediate release should be sent to:

**Nigerian High Commission
9 Northumberland Avenue
London WC2N 5BX
Tel: 01-839 1244**

Letters bringing the case to the attention of the Labour government, asking it to protest to the Nigerian government about the arrests, should be addressed to:

**Right Honourable Robin Cook MP,
Foreign Secretary,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
King Charles Street,
London SW1A 2AH**

Every trade union, Labour Party branch, GMC, trades council and any other Labour movement body must be approached for support. The struggle for democratic rights abroad, it part and parcel our our struggle at home in the interests of working people.

Please send a copy of any letters of protest you do manage to get sent to the Nigerian Solidarity Campaign address:
Nigeria@socappeal.easynet.co.uk

The Nigerian Solidarity Campaign has to organise food for the arrested students because if you are arrested in Nigeria you have to feed yourself in detention. Also the campaign in Nigeria will also involve expenditure. If they are put on trial, they will be involved in legal costs. These comrades are in dire straits financially and need every penny that can be raised in Britain.

Cheques should be made payable to the 'Nigerian Legal Defence Fund' and sent to PO Box 6977, London N1 3JN.

Nigeria facing economic disaster

According to the *Financial Times*, Nigeria is going through "the worst economic crisis since independence in 1960". And this crisis is magnified a thousand fold by the world crisis of capitalism which has reduced the demand for oil. Thus Nigeria, which depends heavily on oil exports is expecting state revenues to fall by about 50% in 1999. This means that compared to last year's \$9.8bn expected revenue, this year the figure is expected to fall to around \$7bn.

by Fred Weston

Growth in gross domestic product has been gradually grinding to a halt. It fell from 6.4% in 1996 to 3.9% in 1997, to 2.0% in 1998. This year the economy is expected to enter into recession, with a fall in production of about 1%. These figures show quite clearly that on a capitalist basis no improvement for the masses can be expected. On the contrary things will get worse, as imperialism and its Nigerian stooges attempt to extract even more profit from the labour of the masses.

In the last ten to fifteen years the population of Nigeria has been growing at the rate of 3.85% a year, while the economy has been growing at an average annual rate of 2.2%, not even enough to guarantee a stable standard of living. The fact is that the Nigerian ruling class is totally incapable of even using the existing productive forces. Capacity utilisation stands at an incredible 26%! That means that Nigerian industry is only producing about one quarter of what it could produce. This figure alone shows how totally bankrupt the Nigerian ruling class has become. It cannot even fully exploit the production of oil. The collapse of the oil refineries has meant that Nigeria, one of the biggest producers in the world of crude oil, has been forced to import fuel, adding further to its external debt!

Any further foreign loans will not be used to invest in Nigeria, but will only be used to pay the interest on the outstanding loans. In reality Nigeria has more than paid back its debts. All the interest paid over the years amounts to more than has actually been borrowed from these imperialist bloodsuckers. This is confirmed by figures provided by the *Financial Times* (February 23, 1999), "During the 1990s, Nigeria has

been a net capital exporter to the tune of some \$2.5bn a year". So who has been financing who? These figures show that rather than the imperialist countries financing Nigeria, the opposite has been the case.

The only real solution, the only serious proposal, is, therefore, repudiation of the foreign debt because paying the interest on the external debt of over \$30bn would cost \$3.6bn a year. That means that more than half the oil revenues would be consumed by interest payments, leaving very little for other expenditure.

Meanwhile the living standards of the masses have been falling. Annual income per head in the early 1980s was \$1,000. It has now fallen to a mere \$300. Everything is in short supply, fuel, food, clothing, jobs, shelter, electricity and water. The whole infrastructure is collapsing, power plants work well below capacity, the oil refineries are unable to meet demand due to lack of investment in maintenance.

The interview with Nigerian workers that we are publishing in this issue graphically outlines the effects of this overall economic decline on the day to day lives of the working masses. It is also within this context that we have to understand the developing wave of strikes that is taking place in Nigeria. Since last summer we have witnessed a growing wave of militancy on the part of the Nigerian working class, in particular on the part of the government workers. The big issue was the minimum wage. Initially the Federal government had conceded 5,200 Naira (about £37) per month. Then it announced in this year's budget that it could only afford 3,200 Naira (about £23). This has further enraged the workers

who are stepping up the level of strikes all across the country.

mass movement

It is this growing mass movement that explains why the military regime has been forced to concede the present "transition" to civilian rule. May 29th is the handover date. In reality, there is nothing "democratic" about the present "transition". There is no real parliamentary democracy, no real freedom to organise into parties. The three parties allowed to stand in last February's elections are all capitalist parties.

Both Obasanjo, the President-elect, and Falae, the leader of the opposition, represent the interests of the capitalist class. Obasanjo served his class between 1976 and 1979 when he was military dictator, and Falae served under the dictator Babangida as Finance Minister. Both of them are prepared to bow down to the dictates of imperialism.

The ruling elite hopes that by loosening the reins from above it can forestall the movement of the working class. But for the masses "democracy" is not an abstract thing. For them it has meaning in the sense that they hope it will bring some alleviation from the gruesome poverty in which they are forced to live.

For now the workers are being asked to "wait for democracy", both by the "business community" and their own leaders in the Nigerian Labour Congress. But once the "hand-over" takes place the workers will take the struggle onto a higher level. In a later issue we will take up in more detail the general political and trade union situation that is developing in Nigeria. ■



General Abubaka

Everyday living hell for Nigerian workers

Socialist Appeal spoke to two workers in Lagos (Nigeria) who described the conditions of work in the various factories they have worked in.

"We can start by describing the conditions of work at the Niger Biscuit factory in Apapa, Lagos. Over 500 workers are employed there. They work two twelve hour shifts, seven days a week. that means they work an 84 hour week. Daily pay is 70 Naira (47 pence!). Most workers have to spend 40 Naira a day on travel expenses (27 pence). That means that for a 30 day month they earn 2,100 Naira and spend 1200 on travelling. That leaves them with a monthly take home pay of 900 Naira (£5.33).

In the past they could at least count on being able to feed themselves on the biscuits, but now they have introduced stringent controls and the workers are not allowed to eat them. Some, obviously still take some to eat, but they have to do it secretly for fear of losing their jobs.

The workers eat at the canteen outside the factory, on credit as their wages don't cover their expenses. That means that at the end of the month the workers are in debt. So after a month of exhausting work there is not even the satisfaction of taking home a wage packet.

Because the workers are in debt to the food-sellers, the sellers take advantage by giving the workers smaller portions for the same price, because they know the workers will not complain as they count on this

source of food to survive until pay day.

The sellers keep an account of the credit waiting for the workers' pay day. Sometimes they use the factory supervisors to deduct what is owing to them directly from the workers' salaries.

Because the workers cannot make ends meet they can never pay off the whole debt. But a condition for getting new credit is that they pay off at least a part of debt at the end of the month, so the debt keeps growing. I have known workers with debts of up to 2,000 Naira at the end of the month, practically their whole salary. They have to pay off at least half of that at the end of the month, thus piling up further debt."

Where does the workers' salary go?

"There is transportation which takes up half the salary. Then there is the rent, which is at least 400 Naira per month. If a worker has a family (as most of them do) he has to feed them, clothe them, pay the children's school fees. If he is young and unmarried there is the pressure from his parents to provide some income.

The company provides no medical care. If a worker gets injured that is his own business, and he has to pay for it out of his miserly wage. The same goes for medical care for his family.

Rent is at least 400 Naira per month. To have a healthy diet of three meals a day for an individual you need to spend at least 100 Naira per day. That is well beyond the means of many workers. So

usually a worker will skip at least one meal, if not two. Many workers will go to work hungry and eat their only meal of the day at the factory where they have access to credit, and thus it goes on in a vicious circle."

What is the situation like in the other factories you have worked in?

"Apart from the Niger Biscuit company there are other companies that operate in a similar fashion, like Tonobi Plastics (ex-Rubber Shoes), Ijora Textile Company, Sasoplas, Nigefia Limited, Wahum (glass making). The conditions are the same in all these factories because of the very low wages. The workers get into the situation of accumulating IOUs, which means that most months the workers go home without any salary as it all goes to pay off the various IOUs.

In all these factories the whole work force is casual labour, so there is no Trade Union, and therefore no organised dissent. There is a large turnover. This is a conscious policy of the bosses to stop the workers from organising. There is so much unemployment that the bosses can just take on new workers.

One of the methods of checking the workers is to make a member of the boss's family (or from his tribe) supervisor over the others, so that they will be very loyal and make sure no-one protests.

One of the most infamous of these companies is Bagco Bags. They produce bags for cement, salt, etc. Often the workers are subjected to humiliation at the end of every working day. The company has security men that engage in body searches, in a room equipped with Close Circuit TV. The workers are stripped completely naked, both men and women. The supervisor, who is always a man, is watching through the CCTV system. At the end of the day they poke fun at the women commenting on their bodies."

How many hours a day do the workers have to work?

"In all these companies the working day is long and tedious. It always leaves the workers mentally and physically drained. When there is a union the company can be forced to run three shifts of eight hours each, but where there is none it is usually two 12-hour shifts.

At the Niger Biscuit factory the day shift starts at 6 am and goes on until 6 pm. To





get to work the workers must be up at least by 4 am. Walking out on the streets at that time in the morning is very dangerous, as the streets are infested with armed robbers who operate at night. Often a worker will be attacked by a gang of armed robbers who will remove the few Nairas he has in his pockets, or if he has none they will remove his wrist watch or shoes, or even his neck chain."

What happens if a worker arrives late?

"If the workers arrive late the boss will deduct money from their salaries. An example is the Bemil Security Company, where if a worker comes late they will deduct the money from his salary. For arriving ten minutes late they can deduct 50 Naira, or he can even be sent home, depending on the mood of the supervisor that day.

If you are absent for a day they will deduct two days' salary (about 300 Naira, £2, in the case of Bemil Security where wages are a bit higher than at Niger Biscuit).

Are there any other unjustified deductions from workers' wages?

"Another injustice is the so-called National Housing Fund which workers are obliged to contribute to. They have at least 50 Naira a month deducted from their salaries. This fund is supposed to be financing the building of cheap accommodation for the workers, but so far none have ever been built.

There is also the problem of damage to or theft of company property. The workers are always held responsible and the cost is deducted from their wages.

It is also very common for workers to receive their salaries late, often one or two months in arrears. One of the most striking examples is what has been happening at the Delta Steel Company, where workers are owed up to 36 months back pay. As a result at least 44 workers have died of hunger. Whole families face total destitution."

How are women treated?

"Most of these factories prefer employing women, because wages for women are lower, although they often do the same work as men.

A case in point is Skaymports Nigeria Limited. They export charcoal. Most of the women's work consists in carrying big sacks of charcoal onto the trucks. All these women are casual labourers, with absolutely no rights, no rights to maternity leave, etc. Most of these women are the breadwinners in their families because their husbands cannot find work.

I personally witnessed the plight of pregnant women. I saw women walking to work until the last day before giving birth. They cannot afford to miss a day's work, because this would mean hunger for their families, and no food for the new baby. I saw two women having a miscarriage in the factory. Both women lost their babies. Neither of them received a single Naira of compensation. Due to the lack of any Trade Union organisation or rights no one could do anything.

We tried to form a Union, but the boss manoeuvred as usual with his own relatives as supervisors.

Work started at 7 am and finished at 9 pm, with a thirty minute break. And if you didn't meet your quota for the day the supervisor would declare that you had not worked for that day."

What are the living conditions like?

"The workers all live in the same areas in shanties. They live in one room apartments, unfit for human beings. The roofs leak, so during the day there is intense heat and at night the cold comes in. The floors are not cemented but are just soil. When it rains the houses are flooded out and the workers have to leave until they dry out. The impression upon entering these districts is one of entering a war zone with row upon row of crumbling houses. The walls have big cracks in them, the plaster is falling away and quite often bits of the roof have been blown away by the wind.

In these one room apartments it is not uncommon to find a family of ten.

There is no water, no proper sanitation. Sewage spills down the roads. There are no medical facilities in these districts, no hospitals or clinics. Due to the unsanitary conditions and the overcrowded nature of these areas diseases are on the rise, such

as cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, yellow fever. Last year there was an epidemic of cholera and cerebral spinal meningitis.

The areas of Lagos we are talking about are Ajegunle, Mushin, Agege, Ijora-Badiya, Orile, Amukoko, Tolu, Okoko-Maiko, Maroko. These are all high-density areas. Possibly, more than five million people live in them.

Women and children have to dedicate a large part of their day to fetching water, as in most cases the water supply can be as far away as three or four streets, but often due to the scarcity of water they may have to walk even further to get their water.

There is no such thing as a "bathroom". Usually this will consist of four metal sheets tied together to make a makeshift shower. There is hardly any privacy as most often the person bathing is in full view of the public.

Often these shanties may be bulldozed. A case in point is Maroko, where the poor were driven out without any alternative arrangement. The government justified this by saying the area is a security risk. In reality it is because it is on Victoria Island right next to where the rich live in huge mansions or modern high rise buildings."

What about the education system?

"The level of illiteracy is extremely high, as more often than not the children are withdrawn from school to be sent to earn a few Naira on the streets. The extremely high level of poverty forces many young teenage girls into prostitution. Sometimes they will prostitute themselves simply for a meal, or the miserly sum of 20 Naira (13 pence).

Added to this there is the further burden of having to pay such taxes as tenement rates, water rates, TV and radio tax. TV and radio tax costs 100 Naira monthly. Water rates can be 500 Naira for one house. Tenement rates can be 200 Naira. School fees are disguised as 'examination levies'. That explains why so many families are forced to remove their children from school.

It is a never-ending vicious circle of poverty. We have had enough. The workers and poor cannot go on living like this any longer. It is about time something changed." ■

Alan Wynne friend, fighter, Marxist

Alan Wynne, a longstanding Merseyside comrade died on 6th May 1999.

Alan, who joined the Marxist wing of the labour movement in 1977, was well known throughout the movement in Merseyside not only for his work in NUPE (now part of Unison), the Labour Party and Wirral Trades Council but also because of his consistent and unwavering support for the ideas of Marxism.

Alan joined NUPE in the early 1970s when he was an ancillary worker in Clatterbridge Hospital. He quickly became Chair of the Wirral hospitals branch and was a key figure in several local disputes. One of these disputes took place in 1982 when Alan led a sit-down protest which resulted in Wirral Health Authority scrapping plans to privatise ancillary work in its hospitals.

Perhaps Alan's most important contribution as a NUPE activist was his determination to spread union membership across all grades and occupations, recruiting and representing not only ancillary workers but also nurses and other previously unorganised staff.

Alongside his work in NUPE, Alan played an equally important role in the Labour Party—being an active member for more than two decades. He defended the ideas of Marxism, even through periods when he was literally a lone voice. He was at the forefront of many of the campaigns organised by the local Labour Party and was a tireless worker in local and general elections. Those who joined the Labour

Party looking for concrete political ideas and analysis were invariably drawn to Alan, who made Marxist ideas relevant to everyday situations and ordinary people.

His campaign work covered everything from the Miners Strike to the Liverpool Dockers and everything in between—most notably his work in fighting the Poll Tax.

illness

Throughout his life Alan was dogged by illness—and it is a testament to his character that he will be remembered not for his illness or disability but for his politics and his personality. Diabetes resulted in him losing his sight at the age of 25 and in later years made him reliant on kidney dialysis. most recently, he was forced to undergo the amputation of both his legs. It would perhaps have been easy for Alan to just give up on life or retreat into bitterness; he did neither. For Alan Wynne, life was not only worth living, it was worth fighting for.

Alan Wynne was not an armchair socialist. If Marxism is about not only understanding the world around us but changing it then Alan Wynne was a Marxist through and through.

Alan died at the age of 44—but he will always be remembered by those who knew him as a courageous and inspiring figure.

"For forty three years of my conscious life I have remained a revolutionist; for forty two of them I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I had to begin all over again I would of course try to avoid this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. I shall die a proletarian revolutionist, a Marxist, a dialectic-

*cal materialist, and consequently, an irrec-
oncilable atheist...."*

"... My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today than it was in the days of my youth.... Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full."

Leon Trotsky, Last Testament, February 1940.

by our Merseyside comrades

Message from the **Socialist Appeal**
Editorial Board

"It was with terrible regret and sadness that we heard of the news of Alan's death.

Alan was an outstanding comrade, whose whole life was dedicated to the emancipation of the working class from the ills of the capitalist system. Despite his physical handicaps, he participated fully in fighting for socialist ideas. His enthusiasm and dedication was an inspiration to all of us.

His departure will be an enormous loss, especially on Merseyside.

Alan would have wanted us not to mourn his death, but to rededicate ourselves to the cause of socialism, and to redouble our efforts in the struggle itself. We commend Alan's legacy to the new generation. Together we will conquer a new world without war, poverty, unemployment and misery. We cannot replace a comrade like Alan. He was unique. His memory will be with us for all time."

MEMORIAL APPEAL

In memory of Alan Wynne, *Socialist Appeal* has decided to set up a special fund to raise £500 towards a national banner.

The banner, which will be dedicated to Alan, will hopefully provide a fitting and lasting tribute to a comrade who stood alongside countless workers in struggle on picket lines, demonstrations and meetings.

Please send all donations to:
Socialist Appeal
c/o 53 Barnsdale Avenue
Thingwall
Wirral L61 1BE.

Cheques should be made out to 'Socialist Appeal'.



Letters MATTERS

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Dear comrades,
I am carefully reading the main article in this month's Socialist Appeal. I'm taking my time over it deliberately. It is an excellent article, which has cleared up many questions I had about the war. John Pilger in last week's almost unreadable New Statesman was quite good too. Of course, only Socialist Appeal makes any sense, discussing things from a class analysis.

On the domestic front, New Labour has really shot itself in the foot in Wales. Even the Evening Post questions the viability of New Labour in Old Labour heartlands. People are far more prepared to give Plaid a chance than support on the cup of New Labour. Clearly its social reforms have had little impact upon the majority of workers in Wales. Give my regards and congratulations to everyone on the journal, it really is an excellent read and is reawakening my appetite for socialism again.
Mark Ludlam, Swansea. ▲



Dear comrades,
The situation in Canada is changing. There is a general mood of discontent and questioning of the dominant ideas in society. Opposition to the war in Yugoslavia is consistently the strongest amongst working class youth and public demonstrations are beginning to have a very 'young' feel.

In concert with the political mobilisations we also see a wave of trade union activity. Canada now has the highest strike levels in any G7 country, and picket lines are becoming a common sight. At the same time, large industrial unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) are actively organising service sector workplaces, bringing a new layer of young trade unionists into activity. British Columbia has witnessed the first unionised McDonalds in the world. The union activity is also starting to move towards more political rather than just 'union' aims.

Nurses in Saskatchewan held an 11 day

illegal strike against the NDP provincial government's lack of health care funding and received wide support from the general public.

However, the leadership of the New Democratic Party are attempting to emulate Blair and adopt the "Third Way". But their victory is far from certain. Many older NDP members who remember the past struggles are worried about the rightward shift of the party. At the British Columbia Young New Democrats Conference we unanimously passed a resolution against the 3rd Way and secured the Federal Liason position on the executive to push the anti-3rd Way campaign at meetings around the country. The YND has adopted a position against the war in Yugoslavia which calls for a 'workers solution' and support for a UN monitored peace (the now official NDP position) was defeated. The BC YND banner was prominent at the anti-war May Day rally in Vancouver that attracted 3000 people.

comradely,
Alex Grant, Vancouver. ▲

NUT: Massive majority for action

The struggle to defeat the government's proposals for Performance Related Pay (PRP) took a stride forward this month.

*by Bryan Beckingham
Oldham NUT Secretary*

On June 7th industrial action by the NUT begins. The action we have voted for is to boycott all appraisal schemes. These can be used to obtain the targets and information needed to impose PRP on teaching staff. The appraisals are central to the government's plans to implement PRP by September 2000. The vast majority of teaching staff oppose PRP. It is divisive and cost controlled by budget considerations. What we need is a good pay rise for all teachers. The New Labour government are attempting to motivate teachers with a promise of a rise if they jump through a number of hoops - and continue to do so. The vast majority of teachers

know they are already working hard. In fact they are overloaded with work and they need the proposed PRP linked to pupil performance, exam results and target setting etc. like they need a hole in the head.

Once again the government is carrying out Tory government proposals for the same reasons. They want to weaken the public sector unions and they are starting with the teachers. We have to resist. Our members have shown they understand the need to try to stop PRP. The vote was overwhelming:

YES vote 58410; NO vote 2599; spoilt 50; returned 61059.

This is a 95% vote in favour of boycotting appraisal. The turnout was a credible 34.6%. This compares with an average 29% turnout in the local elections!

This action will be implemented from June 7th, but we will need to ballot for further action. The members have given a mandate to step up our campaign. The union leaders must now ballot for a one-

day strike, with the calling of regional rallies and meetings during that day. We must intensify not reduce the campaign against the disaster of PRP.

This government has to be made to listen to reason. Spend the £1 billion in one year on a pay rise for teachers, that is about £2000 each, and this would be a good start to a rise that would motivate and reward teachers.

Stop carrying out Tory policies! End privatisation of education! End the EAZ threats and the selling of LEA services to private bidders! Restore democratic control of education through the LEAs!

The money is there for public spending, so let's see more of it reaching the classrooms. Spend the money less on back of envelope initiatives and more in the classrooms on pay, conditions and reducing all class sizes.

A vote for Christine Blower for General Secretary will help ensure we strengthen and continue our action. ■

Murder in the workplace

A review of *Bosses in the Dock*,
Dispatches, on BBC 2
 by Andrew Williams

Adrian Bird, a young building worker was working in a trench when the brakes failed on the mechanical digger. The driver recalls the look of horror on his workmate's face as the vehicle—completely out of control—collapsed on top of him. The 27 year-old had been engaged to be married. Instead his life was snuffed out in the most horrific manner. There was no safety device on the vehicle which could have prevented this accident, although it is legally obligatory.

The Health and Safety Executive ordered the company, Tarmac, to make it safe. But the same company had been issued with 114 such orders in the past ten years. The firm repeatedly found guilty of "risking workers lives by failing to introduce stop locks." Such orders were plainly just ignored. The firm was then pleaded guilty to negligence in a magistrate's court, and received a derisory fine.

Commenting on this case with breath-taking cynicism Tarmac stated: "We can never be complacent about safety. Our company is playing a leading role in improving standards."

Three months later another labourer on a Tarmac site, Mick Green, was buried alive in a trench 14 feet deep that collapsed on top of him. He suffered a fractured skull and damage to his lungs. His girlfriend could scarcely recognise the disfigured body covered in mud which she saw in the hospital. After ten days in a coma, he died.

subcontractors

At the time of the accident he was working for a sub-contractor for Tarmac, with no proper documented provisions for safety or anything else. In the three previous years no fewer than five prohibition notices had been served on Tarmac because of its failure to exercise due control over its subcontractors. There had been two convictions. But that was no consolation to Mike Green and his family. The firm was fined just £3,000—for corporate murder.

These cases are no exceptions. They are absolutely typical of the slaughter and mutilation that takes place in the workshop in Britain every day. The monstrous state of health and security in British industry was

the subject of an excellent edition of the *Dispatches* programme, which was put out under the title *Bosses in the Dock*.

The programme opened with a truly harrowing case. An employee of British Steel—one of the worst culprits—had a job which involved driving a hermetically sealed vehicle into a building full of scalding steam. One day, while operating this vehicle, the driver was horrified to see the door fly open. Driven to the back of the cab by the onrush of searing vapour, he searched desperately for the safety exit—only to find to his horror that it had been welded shut. There was only one way out—straight into the seething inferno.

By some miracle he survived the ordeal. After months in terrible pain in an intensive care unit, he emerged alive, but crippled and hideously disfigured. The driver had not been told that the safety door had been welded shut. The court was not informed that British Steel had had previous offences. It was fined a total of £10,000—a mere trifle for a company of this size.

gutlessness

One of the central messages of this hard-hitting documentary was the complete impotence and gutlessness of the government's Health and Safety Executive. In the great majority of cases, the HSE does not even bother to investigate. Thus, out of a total of 46,000 accidents at work reported to the HSE, a staggering ninety per cent were not investigated.

The contrast between industrial law and criminal law is blatant. Ordinary cases of murder and manslaughter are prosecuted by the police and the guilty party faces serious penalties. But when it comes to the relations between Wage Labour and Capital, life becomes cheap. The workers' right to health and even life itself comes a poor second to the bosses' profits. Just imagine the public outcry if ninety per cent of criminal cases were not even investigated by the police!

When challenged on the scandalously small number of investigations, a spokesperson for the HSE said: "I rely on our inspectors in the field, who speak not only to the management but also to the trade unions." (!)

Even when a case is investigated by the HSE, there is no certainty that those responsible will be found guilty, let alone punished and made to mend their ways. Far from it. In ninety per cent of cases the HSE decides not to prosecute. No action is

taken to prevent the slaughter in the workplace. Machines remain unguarded. Workers lose thumbs and fingers. No problem at all!

The spokesperson for British Steel explained: "We do all in our power to avoid accidents, but, after all, we must accept that ours is a dangerous industry." To which a lawyer on the programme retorted: "That is no excuse. On the contrary. If an industry is acknowledged to be dangerous, that is all the more reason why the management should take even more stringent safety measures."

The British Gypsum plant at Runcorn is a subsidiary of British Steel. Apart from numerous warnings over the past ten years, it has been convicted seven times in that period for infringements of safety. The fines added up to a total of £10,000. But the company's profits are £163 million a year. Tarmac's profits are £184 million. Yet it has to pay out only £11,500 for the death of a worker and a mere £3,000 for injury. This is not even a slap on the wrist! No wonder the same firms continue to carry on with the same inhuman disregard for the lives of their workers.

counter-offensive

This documentary highlighted the crude reality of the bosses' counter-offensive against workers' rights and conditions which has reached incredible levels in recent years. Clearly, no reliance can be put on organisations like the HSE, which in any case is underfunded and understaffed. It is necessary to rebuild the union organisations from the bottom up, and fight to impose workers' control of health and safety. And it is also about time that the Labour government stopped posturing as "the Party of business" and started carrying out legislation in the interests of those who voted for it. A good place to begin would be to scrap all Tory anti-union laws and introduce legislation that would really put the bosses and their system in the dock.

Firms that, by commission or omission, kill and maim working people must be made to pay in full for their crimes and the money used to benefit the victims, their families and the workforce as a whole. Those who persist must be nationalised (or, as with British Steel, re-nationalised) with minimum compensation on the base of proven need only. Only when industry is placed under the democratic management and control of the workers can this nightmare in the workplace be ended and working people be treated like human beings. ■

Art for revolution's sake at the Barbican

Most people are unaware of the kind of art that developed in Russia in the years before, during and shortly after the 1917 revolution. For many years 'Socialist Realism' was equated with Soviet Russia. This was a form of art which many will remember as those pictures of muscular workers hammering away at anvils or working in the fields. This kind of art in fact had nothing to do with the revolutionary period prior to the consolidation of Stalin's grip on power. Although there existed a conservative school of art in the immediate period following the revolution, this was not the dominant force in Russian art at the time.

By Fernando D'Alessandro

In the years building up to the 1917 socialist revolution a revolution was also developing in Russian art. Similar developments could also be traced in the field of literature. The artists that dominated the revolution in art were such figures as Malevich, who was acclaimed as the leader of avant-garde art in Russia. He developed his own movement - Suprematism.

Another parallel movement was that of the Constructivists, represented by artists such as Tatlin and Rodchenko. Other famous artists from this period are Chagall, Kandinsky, Goncharova.

What is striking about this period of

Russian art is the absolute freedom of expression which the artists were able to enjoy. They themselves saw the October revolution as a liberation, and supported it.

Malevich joined the Federation of Leftist Artists after the February revolution. In August of 1917 he was elected chairman of the Arts department of the Soviet of Soldier Delegates in Moscow, and after the October revolution he was put in charge of the national collection in the Kremlin.

Lenin and Trotsky advocated a policy of pluralism in the arts, allowing all schools of thought to develop. It was thanks to this spirit of freedom that the first museum of modern art anywhere in the world was founded in 1919 and opened to the public in Russia in 1921. Two years later Malevich became its director.

Just as the revolution allowed the stultified society of Tsarist feudalism to make a leap into the twentieth century in the field of women's rights, with the granting of some of the most advanced laws on divorce and abortion, it also allowed the artists to take control of the development of art. The artists themselves were to run the museum. Their idea was that it would not be a museum for dead art but a centre of experimentation and development of art. They had plans to develop such centres all across the Soviet Union. (Unfortunately that was not to be as within a few years the Stalinist regime was to put an end to this period of artistic revolution.) Late in his life Engels had noted the early symptoms

of these developments when he explained that in Russia "major modern industry is grafted on to primitive peasant communes and the intermediate stages of civilisation are represented" and therefore there was "nothing surprising about the appearance of the most incredible and bizarre combinations of ideas." Thus in the midst of the

extreme economic and social underdevelopment of Tsarist Russia there emerged the most advanced forms of thought, both in the arts and in politics.

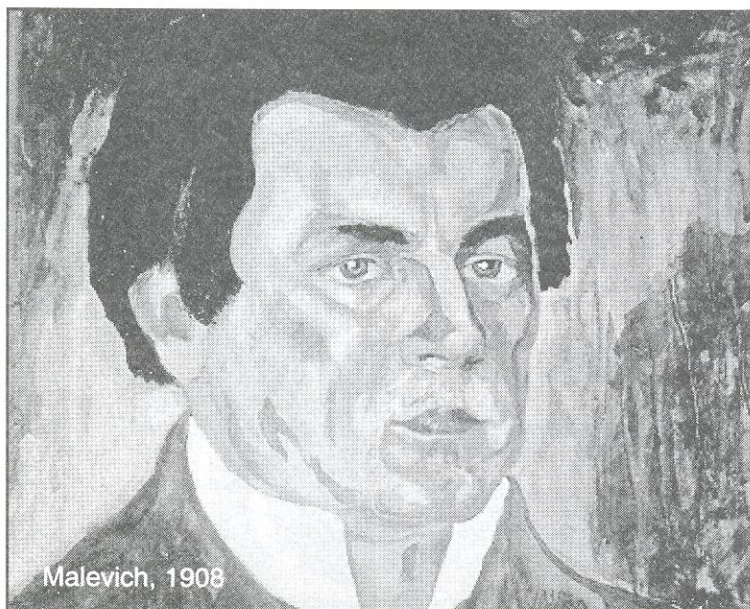
Unfortunately the isolation of the revolution prepared the conditions for the Stalinist reaction of the latter half of the 1920s. Thus while Trotsky's Left Opposition was being hounded, the developing Stalinist regime also decided to put an end to freedom in the arts. Malevich had managed to accumulate over 500 works of avant-garde art in his museum. In 1926 these were transferred to the older State Russian Museum, and eventually ended up in the store rooms to disappear for decades.

Socialist Realism

Stalin was to promote the opponents of Malevich and his colleagues. These were to create the 'Socialist Realism', a negation of everything the revolutionary artists stood for. As in all fields of life the Stalinist regime could not tolerate any form of independent thought, whether in politics or art, whether in science or in literature.

Fortunately the works of art survived, and can be viewed and appreciated. You have a chance to see some of them at the Barbican Art Gallery in London (Tel 0171 638 4141). The ticket to get in costs £6, but if you go after 5pm in a week day you can get in for £4. Wednesday is the best day to do that as it stays open till 7.45pm. Forty of the 500 or so works of art collected by Malevich are on display and can be viewed until 27th June. You can view the works of the Suprematists and the Constructivists. You can view Malevich's famous 'Red Square' and Rodchenko's reply 'Black on Black'. As you walk through the exhibition you can get a feel of the intense debate taking place in Russian art in that period of revolutionary upheaval.

You can get a glimpse of an essential part of what genuine socialism should be: a free struggle between different currents of thought. Neither capitalism nor Stalinism can allow art to develop to its full potential. While you appreciate these works of art you should remember that we still have an unfinished task ahead of us, the genuine socialist transformation of society, a society where the abilities of men and women, in all fields of life, will be able to develop to their full capacity. ■



Malevich, 1908

'Reason in Revolt' great success in Pakistan



At the end of March, invited by the newspaper of the Pakistan Marxists, *The Struggle*, Alan Woods visited Pakistan to launch the new Urdu translation of *Reason in Revolt*.

The launch campaign was an outstanding success and had a tremendous repercussions. Over one thousand people attended the meetings which, for reasons of time had to be limited to Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore. Everywhere the audiences displayed enormous enthusiasm for the ideas of Marxism.

The first meeting, at Karachi university, was attended by 140 people. The second, held in the city centre was the biggest meeting of the Left in Karachi for twenty years. What was particularly noteworthy was the fact that the meeting was attended by representatives from all the ethnic groups in Karachi—a city that has been torn apart by sectarian and ethnic strife for years. Sindhis and Mohajirs, Pushtoons, Punjabis and Baluchis all united in their interest in the revolutionary internationalist message of Marxism.

Rawalpindi

The packed meeting at the Press Club in Rawalpindi followed in the same spirit. The speaker was frequently interrupted by applause, and at the end the chairman—a veteran of the Pakistan People's Party—announced that "this meeting is the beginning of the revolution in Rawalpindi."

After that Alan attended the annual conference of *The Struggle*, with a total attendance of 240 Marxists from every area of Pakistan, where he spoke on international perspectives. The conference,

which was held only a few kilometres from the Indian border, was remarkable for the fact that it was the first meeting of the Pakistan Left since independence to be attended by two Indian comrades, who were given an ecstatic welcome by the delegates.

The campaign culminated in the final meeting in Lahore, attended by about 300 people, including all the leading trade unionists and left intellectuals of the city. One of the speakers, a famous historian, told the audience: "You must read this book. This is a book that will change your lives." And he added: "Here in Pakistan we have had a very distorted impression of the ideas of Trotsky until now. We must completely reappraise our ideas on this subject." For the first time ever, a public meeting on the Left in Lahore was addressed by an Indian Marxist, Professor Bharna from Faridabad, who praised *Reason in Revolt*

both for its content and style. The ovation which he received was still more poignant for the fact that this meeting was held on the day of the anniversary of Pakistan's independence—that ghastly orgy of mutual slaughter between Hindus and Moslems.

The book launch received very wide coverage, both in the Urdu and English-language press.

Writing in the biggest Urdu daily, the celebrated columnist Munnoo Bhai commented:

"The people listened to Alan Woods' speech with rapt attention. With immense ease he deals with questions of politics, economics, finance, science, technology, history and philosophy. Bearing in mind the general level of those attending these meetings (mainly workers and youth) it may seem that it would have been difficult for them to grasp the complexity of these issues. But Alan knows well how to do it, and makes them understand and absorb these issues."

This article had a circulation of half a million and there was a tremendous response to it from all over the country. Orders for *Reason in Revolt* came pouring in. The success of the campaign is all the more satisfying because of the rise of fundamentalism in Pakistan which poses a serious threat to the working class. The supporters of *The Struggle* have a proud record of fighting against this menace. The publication of *Reason in Revolt* in Urdu will provide them with a powerful weapon in the fight against reactionary obscurantism. ■



Bolshevism

the road to revolution

There have been many books and potted histories of Russia, either written from an anti-Bolshevik perspective, or its Stalinist mirror image, which paint a false account of the rise of Bolshevism. For them, Bolshevism is either an historical "accident" or "tragedy," or is portrayed erroneously as the work of one great man (Lenin) who marched single-mindedly towards the October Revolution. Alan Woods, in rejecting these "theses", reveals the real evolution of Bolshevism as a living struggle to apply the methods of Marxism to the peculiarities of Russia.

Using a wealth of primary sources, Alan Woods uncovers the fascinating growth and development of Bolshevism in pre-revolutionary Russia. The author deals with the birth of Russian Marxism and its ideological struggle against the Narodniks and the trend of economism.

The book looks at the development of Russian Social Democracy, from its real founding congress in 1903, which ended with the split between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, through to the 'dress rehearsal' of the 1905 revolution. Here the rise of the Soviet form of organisation is explored, together with the transformation of the party (RSDLP) from an underground organisation to one with a mass workers following. However, the defeat of the revolution led to four years of political reaction within Russia and the near disintegration of the party. Alan Woods traces the ebb and flow of the party and the role of Lenin as its principal guiding force.



The author then explores the eventual revival of the party's fortunes from 1910 onwards, the creation of the independent Bolshevik Party two years later, and the isolation of Marxism during the first world war. The final section of the book deals with the Bolsheviks' emergence during the February Revolution and, after a deep internal struggle, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, the party's eventual conquest of power in October.

Bolshevism: the road to revolution is intended as a companion volume to Ted Grant's *Russia: from revolution to counter revolution*, which is also available from Wellred.

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Vsievobod Volkov (Trotsky's grandson)

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Big sales push needed

The propaganda that spews forth on our TV screens every day, attempting to demonise the people of Serbia and to justify the horrific bombing of hospitals, TV stations and refugees brings to mind James Connolly's description of the press republished in this issue of *Socialist Appeal*. It truly is a "sewer pipe" for the pouring out of filth.

These lies need to be answered, help us to get the truth about the war, and about the bosses attacks and the disaster of the free market to workers and young people by selling *Socialist Appeal*.

Our sellers on the recent Mayday marches have led the way this month. 100 copies were sold in London at the biggest Mayday demo in the capital for many years. In Edinburgh too our sellers had a successful day with the journal and with our latest pamphlet on the Balkans Crisis.

Anti-war meetings and demos have been taking place around the country, these should all be attended by sellers armed with journals, pamphlets, subscription leaflets and wherever possible book-stalls.

On recent demos in London our pamphlet putting the internationalist case for a

socialist federation of the Balkans has become a bit of a bestseller. Copies can be ordered from the usual address.

Socialist Appeal supporters should organise local public meetings on the war, the recent elections, and putting the case for socialist ideas.

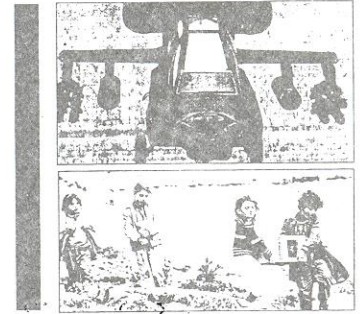
In the last few weeks four public meetings in London on the war have been attended by over 160 people.

25 people attended a public debate organised by *Socialist Appeal* supporters on the environment in Cambridge University. Just a week later around 40 students attended another public meeting on the Balkans war, and established an anti-war committee in the college. This example should be followed around the country.

The local election results, especially the parliamentary and assembly elections in Scotland and Wales should have sent a shudder through the labour movement. There will be Labour Party members around the country looking for an explanation of these results. These elections demonstrate a profound disillusionment with Blairism which must mean that there is a growing number of workers looking for the socialist alternative we put forward

Balkans War

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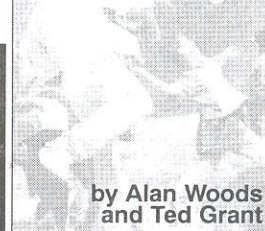
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socialist appeal fights for

☆ **Socialist measures in the interests of working people!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies.

☆ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage. £4.79 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.**



☆ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.

☆ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people. ☆ No to sectarianism. For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.

☆ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.

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☆ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.

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☆ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

★ **Join us in the fight for socialism!**

Socialist Appeal supporters are at the forefront of the fight to commit the Labour government to introduce bold socialist measures. We are campaigning on the above programme as the only solution for working people. Why not join us in this fight? For more details:

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