

# **socialist** *appeal*

Disabled, students, single parents,  
unemployed...

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# **Reject Blair's attacks**

# **Socialist policies now!**

**The War in  
Chechnya  
see inside**

The Marxist voice of the labour movement price: £1

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1999



# The Livingstone affair—a turning-point for Labour

The Livingstone fiasco marks a decisive turn in the situation in Britain. It is a reflection of the processes at work in the trade unions and Labour Party. The election of a Labour government after 18 years of Tory rule was in itself an indication of the changed situation.

Since the election Blair and his cronies have sidelined the rank and file and systematically undermined party democracy. The party is now dominated by a right-wing pro-big business clique at the top. Under Blair's leadership the Labour Party is combining Tory policies with an undemocratic regime. Now we know what the Third Way means.

For a time the right wing has had things all their own way. Lacking any serious programme or perspective, the Campaign Group has been all but invisible. The rank and file had their heads down. In the absence of opposition, there was a mood of disappointment and despair in the ranks. Activists had begun to drift away and fall into inactivity. The GCs and branches were poorly attended. But now this is beginning to change.

The blatant attempts to block Ken Livingstone from the Party's shortlist for London mayor has led to a mood of fury throughout the movement. The Blairites are trying to pull the same stunt as in Wales when they blocked Rhodri Morgan, which in May resulted in the biggest electoral calamity in the history of the Wales Labour Party.

Now, with the failure to block Livingstone, Blair has received a decisive rebuff. The unelected committee that was supposed to block him at the first fence was split. The committee was hand-picked and stuffed with loyal Blairites, but it was forced to back down in the face of pressure from the London Labour Party. This shows in outline the process that will unfold in the next period in both the Labour party and the trade unions.

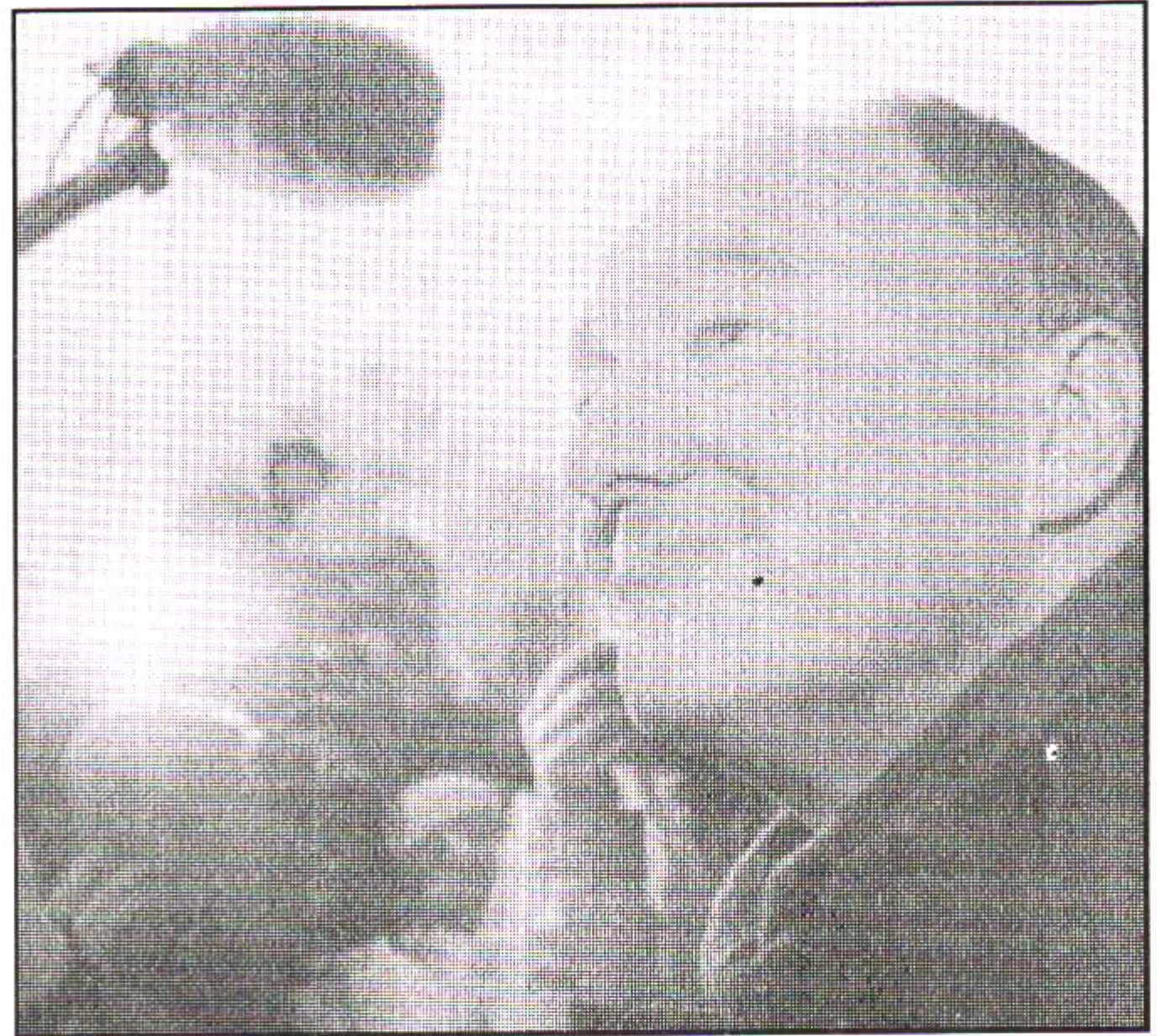
Discontent has been building up long before this, but lacked a focal point through which to express itself. The Livingstone affair has provided such a focal point. It is not just a question of Livingstone or even internal democracy. It is a manifestation of

the disgust and anger felt by workers at the policies and conduct of the leadership. Tony Blair's honeymoon is now well and truly over.

If Livingstone is allowed to stand in the election for mayor, he would obviously win by a big majority. The Tories are in chaos again as a result of the Archer scandal. But Blair is more interested in keeping himself and his clique in control than winning elections. By his actions he has already damaged the Labour Party. From the outset the Blair project has been about dismantling Labour as a party representing the interests of ordinary working people. At the same time Blair is cosyng up to his friends in the Liberals and One Nation Tories. Others in the PLP and the Cabinet do not share Blair's vision. The same is true of most of the union leaders. They do not want to see the Labour Party destroyed in this way. This fault-line will open up into an abyss as time goes on. The present revolt of the London Labour Party is a warning of bigger things to come.

At the heart of the present conflict is the question of the privatisation of London Underground. After years of sell-off scandals, there is a growing mood of opposition to these outrages. The Paddington train disaster brought this mood to boiling point. A recent opinion poll showed 75 percent favour the renationalisation of Railtrack.

The Blairites meanwhile are trying to be more pro-business than the Tories. This was yet again revealed in the budget. According to Gordon Brown, New Labour is now all about "Enterprise for all". Yet there is next to nothing for the old, the sick, the poor, the unemployed, the disabled. On the contrary, this government has taken away incapacity benefit from 300,000 disabled people, while giving pensioners a pitiful 75 pence a week extra. Giving a free TV licence to the over 75s from next autumn cannot disguise the Scrooge-like nature of these policies. In any case, up to 760,000 pensioners fail to claim mean-test-



ed income support, despite being entitled to it. While clamping down on people on social security and the homeless, the government has granted reduced capital gains tax, and given permission to "award" up to £1 million share options tax free. Even the Financial Times (10/11/99) is astounded by these developments. "What sort of government wants to slash capital gains tax for entrepreneurs while limiting access to incapacity benefit?" it asks. "Britain's Labour government", comes the astonishing reply.

While Cherie complains that she can't afford new clothes to wear to official functions, the poorest paid are asked to survive on a minimum wage of £3.60 an hour. Meanwhile Blair's new "homelessness Tsar" claims that the provision of a sleeping bag, a bowl of soup and the opportunity to sell the Big Issue is encouraging people to sleep rough. She should try it one of these cold winter nights. Homelessness and child poverty could be eradicated if Blair broke with big business and introduced socialist policies. They could begin by spending the budget surplus. It is an outrage that the government's coffers should be swollen with £12 billion while thousands are forced to sleep in the streets and one in three of our children grows up in poverty.

The Blairites have gone over lock, stock and barrel to big business. This is the most conservative Labour government in history. Blair openly admires Margaret Thatcher, and says that the founding of the Labour Party was a mistake. He has proposed that the Socialist International



change its name to the Centre Left.

According to Paddy Ashdown, he and Blair wanted to form a coalition government on three separate occasions since May 1997.

Livingstone may now be on the shortlist for mayor, but the battle is not yet over. Tony Blair has launched a ferocious offensive against him as the representative of "old Labour" and "the extremism of the 1980s". He specifically accuses him of being supported by "Trotskyists" in the London Labour Party. In reality, Livingstone is getting the support of the real London Labour Party, the trade unions (even Blair admits this) and the overwhelming majority of working people in London.

However, Livingstone himself is unpredictable. He has already promised to stand on the Labour manifesto and "not go off in a huff" if he disagrees with parts of it. Blair's ferocious attacks are just the opening shots in a campaign of dirty tricks to get Dobson elected. If this fails, Livingstone will probably be compelled to stand firm on his pledge to oppose the partial privatisation of London Underground. This would open up a new struggle inside the Party which would be reflected in every Labour Party branch and GC, not just in London but throughout the country. This will present a golden opportunity to raise the whole question of a socialist policy based on nationalisation and a democratic plan of production, starting with transport.

Every ward, GC and affiliated union should demand an emergency London Labour Party conference to decide the policies of the manifesto, including the proposed privatisation of the tube. It is a disgrace that Livingstone should have been asked to accept a policy which had not even been discussed or decided by any democratic body of the London Labour movement. Who says that it is "Labour's policy" to privatise the Underground?

The Blairites just assume that they can decide anything without reference to anyone else. Enough is enough. A tremendous campaign is now required to mobilise support amongst party members and in the affiliated trade unions to overcome the unfair weighting being given to MPs, MEPs and the like. These individuals need to be made to understand which way the wind is blowing. Those union leaderships who are refusing to ballot their members in London for fear that they might support Livingstone should be forced to do so. The RMT and other unions, who have been manoeuvred out because of their pro-Livingstone stand,

must be allowed to take part in the ballot.

But things must be pushed further. The Left in the Party and unions must organise a campaign to regain the party for the working class and socialist policies. Now is not the time for workers to be leaving the Labour Party. On the contrary, trade unionists should join up and fight to reclaim it. It's time to roll up our sleeves and get stuck in. Workers voted Labour for change, if we want that change, we'll have to change the Labour Party

Those who argued that the Labour Party was finished, that Blair had already succeeded in transforming it into a bourgeois party, have been decisively answered by the reaction of the Labour and trade union rank and file. When the workers want to fight back against Blair they do so through the Labour Party.

Socialist Appeal has always maintained that at a certain stage the process of opposition would be reflected inside the Labour Party. Now we see this process unfolding before our very eyes. Of course, it is only the early beginnings, but the symptomatic importance of these events is enormous. The Labour Party in London has begun to come to life. The membership has been roused. There have been packed meetings to discuss the Livingstone affair. These are only the first symptoms of a process that will unfold, with ebbs and flows, over several years. The Livingstone affair itself is only an episode. But whatever happens with Livingstone, the process of inner differentiation and radicalisation of the Labour party has begun. There will be a whole series of such episodes. Britain is still in a boom. Blairism will be rocked by the onset of a new slump, which despite their utopian fantasies they cannot avoid. The Labour Party and the unions will be shaken from top to bottom in the next period.

Leaving the party only plays into Blair's hands. Those who ran away are now lost in the wilderness. Stay and fight with us to defeat the right-wing careerists! For socialist policies and internal democracy!

- ✧ No more Tory Policies
- ✧ No new Privatisations
- ✧ Renationalise the railways and privatised companies
- ✧ Transform the Labour Party

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# Capital Idea



## Capitalism: In Sickness and in ill Health

The intensification of work now results in 24.3m days lost a year and more than 27,000 people being forced to give up work, according to recent figures produced by the health and safety commission. It says that work-related injuries and illness costs between \$14.5b and £18bn a year. More than 1m injuries are suffered at work and another 1.3m people are hit by ill health, with figures for stress and repetitive strain injury on the rise. The commission's annual report showed a 122% rise in illnesses.

## Japanese depression

Japan is experiencing its worst recession since the war. It has lasted about ten years, and threatens to destabilise the country. Every government has attempted to stimulate the economy by priming the pump in a typically Keynesian way. The total amount of cash pumped into the economy over the last seven years amounts to a staggering 124 trillion yen, roughly equivalent to Britain's entire output. This has given rise to one of the biggest public debts in the world, hitting 120% of output, with no success. In desperation and at the prodding of the west, the government is now embarked upon its ninth such attempt, spending more than 5 trillion yen. But the impasse of Japanese capitalism is deep-rooted and cannot be solved by Keynesianism, just as monetarism cannot solve the impasse of western capitalism as a whole. Both are head and tail of the same coin - and both mean attacks on the working class. ☆

# Ford bullies workers

**The worker at the centre of last month's Ford Dagenham walkout was Jaswir Teja, AEEU shop steward at the PTA. He talked to Socialist Appeal about what happened.**

"At the beginning of the shift, in my capacity as shop steward, I was talking to a worker who had a problem, when the supervisor approached me and told me in an aggressive manner to get back on the job. I told him I needed a minute as I was talking to my member about a grievance.

"Then the supervisor told me I couldn't continue and pushed me. I told him that was an assault, and he replied with irony in his voice: 'You take me for assault and I take you off pay.'

"I immediately rang the union convenor, and the stoppage took place.

"As a result, the company were forced to remove two supervisors - the bully boys - from the PTA. One was put in the tool-room, and the other upstairs in the office.

"The two supervisors had been on section for about three years. They were constantly trying to provoke people. Being on the young side, they were always trying to prove themselves, to show how big they were. They even threatened workers asking them to 'come out side' and the like.

"They were always on our backs: 'Do as you're told', 'Don't question what I say', 'I'm the king', and the rest of it.

"We just had enough of it. Everyone pulled together against the bullying and intimidation. This

hadn't been the first time either. There have been three or four stoppages over the past period concerning the way we were being treated.

"The supervisors were under pressure to push the workers with the introduction of lean production. So they put the workers under pressure to work harder, even saying we couldn't go to the toilet until the tea break. But even when we were due

our official break, they kept at us to do work. They would come into our relief area and start 'why aren't you working?', and then give us unnecessary work to do just to keep up the pressure: sweeping, painting, cleaning, etc. They felt they needed to put people under constant pressure, especially on the down shifts where there was no production.

"Ford has been pushing its workforce since 1993 to get 'lean'. Our jobs are regularly retimed to achieve "improvement" in output. They want to get the maximum out of every worker. They create a 'shortage of labour' to put pressure on other workers and refuse breaks. Workers are put under so much pressure that they can't do their job. Our supervisors used bullying to get their way, and even racialism was there. About 50% of our workers are black and Asian, but we were all united against the treatment melted out to us.

"Feelings were running high over these two supervisors. The walkout forced the company to back off - at least for a while - for fear of the reaction. We were not prepared to take any more. If they continued then a similar incident would occur again and again.

"So we got what we wanted. The two supervisors removed, and immediate discussions to get a 'fast-track' complaints procedure into place. The walkout got us a victory." ☆





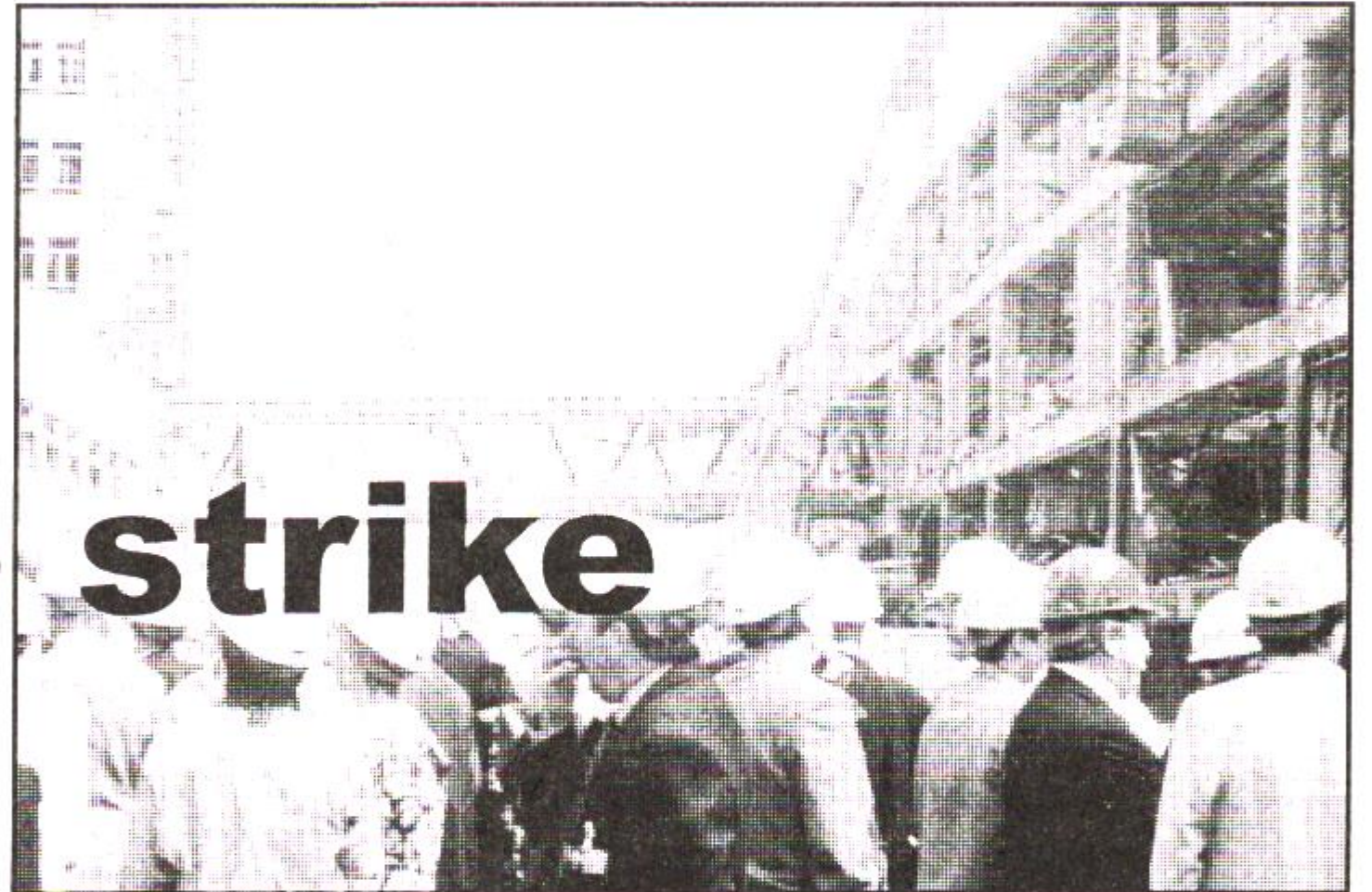
# Ford: Close vote is a warning to bosses

The acceptance by a narrow majority of 45% to 55% of the Ford Motor Company's final pay and conditions offer will now put pressure onto the workforce for higher productivity. There is now in place an alteration to the work standards agreement that will result in established numbers for off-line jobs increasing. Compulsory temporary labour has been introduced which will lead to a compliant section of workers too scared to challenge the Company for fear of losing renewal of their contract. There is also an agreement that allows the introduction of 'flexible shift patterns' following local and national agreement. This may mean the introduction of compulsory weekend working as part of the standard working week, putting enormous pressures on individual plants to accept if faced with closure or redundancies. The reduction in the working week by 1 1/2 hours only benefits part of the workforce, excluding all those on the 3-shift system. The 'inflation busting rise' that was trumpeted in the media is only 2.4% above inflation for this year with 1/2% for the second and third year. This still leaves Ford workers at the bottom of the motor industry pay league, despite a record profit increase of 11% this year.

If the union had campaigned on all these issues a resounding rejection of the offer would have been achieved. Where shop steward committees recommended rejection at Dagenham Body, PTA and Basildon Radiator plant, majorities of between 86% and 92% rejection were achieved. In plants where the national recommendation to accept was put the offer was accepted. The

Company's final offer leaflet was so lengthy and in such small print that most workers didn't read it! None of the bad points were highlighted. Temporary labour didn't even get a headline, whereas a meaningless safety statement and other small benefits were given prominence. Without a clear lead being given from the union and the issues properly explained the workers were fooled into voting for acceptance. Those convenors who voted to accept the offer at the national negotiations must bear the consequences of their actions!

The company will continue to press ahead with their onslaught on conditions given the weakness of the leadership. The next battle will be in the New Year when the company plans to separate the components division Visteon from Fords, which if lost would lead to the break up of the Ford combine. A strike on this issue is still a possibility. ✧



## Asbestos site strike

**The Ministry of Defence buildings near the Admiralty Arch next to Trafalgar Square in central London were subjected to sustained picketing by building workers recently.**

Despite the prestigious location of this site, unsafe working conditions and appalling employment practices in the building industry are as bad here as anywhere in the country.

The giant building contractor Laings is undertaking massive renovation work for the MOD with much of the work subcontracted to a firm called Avondale.

Five building workers received one week's notice after raising their concerns over health and safety issues after finding asbestos in the course of their work.

Danny, one of the sacked workers, takes up the story.

"We had been employed on the site for about eleven weeks. We were told that there was eighteen months, possibly up to two years work on this job. To be fair to them they did have us on an induction course and we were told there that if we came across asbestos we were to report it and they (the employers) would have the specialists in.

"The five of us are bricklayers, we work a couple of floors underground, part of our work involves chopping holes in walls. The other week we were doing this when we hit clinkers which contain asbestos.

"We reported this and, just as we had been told on the induction, they sent in the specialists who cordoned off the area and began the work of removing the asbestos.

"However we were still working in very close proximity to this area. We had all been suffering the previous few weeks from headaches, blocked noses and generally feeling ill. This, along with one or two other problems we had over not receiving the correct pay and so on led us to raising our concerns with management once again.

"The following week we received one week's notice, the management were alleging there was no more work. This was a bit rich given that we had originally been told that there was at least eighteen months work and there were sub contractors still working on site."

The health and safety executive visited the site and put a prohibition notice on the

job. This clearly vindicated the actions of the men but there was still no sign that the firm was prepared to talk to the union about reinstatement. In fact things went from bad to worse with the main contractor Laings banning the union officials from not only this site but all its sites in London.

The following day a lunchtime meeting took place on the picket line.

There were around 30 to 40 men in attendance with support from the AEEU electricians from the Jubilee Line, other building workers from sites around London and a representative from the Southwark council workers shop stewards committee.

M.P. Jeremy Corbyn came to show his support and spoke to the meeting pointing out "we live in a society where those in power are paranoid about whistle blowers, anyone who does anything to expose dangers ends up being victimised rather than the employer who created the problem in the first place. This is a disgrace and an outrage. These men must be reinstated immediately with no loss of pay. ✧



# Teachers need a fighting stand



In the week of November 20th, the NUT are stepping up their opposition to the Government's proposals for performance related pay (PRP). In that week all local branches and schools are scheduled to call meetings and lobby MPs, councillors, school governors and so on. This is in addition to the boycott of appraisals which is already in place. However, many activists see the need to intensify the action and there are widening calls for a ballot for a one-day strike and national demonstration.

**Bryan Beckingham, Secretary Oldham NUT (in personal capacity)**

PRP will be a disaster both for teachers and education. It will divide teacher against teacher in activity that depends on co-operation and team work. The NUT's claim must be fought for instead: £2000 or 10%, whichever is the greater.

The Government claims to be investing huge amounts in education but at school level we do not seem to be getting much benefit from the £19 billion they claim is being put in.

Where is the money? Public spending as a proportion of GDP is the lowest for 40 years! From 1979 to 1990 it was 43%, 1990 to 1997 41.7% and it is estimated from 1997 to 2001 it will be only 39.7%. These figures do not compare with other countries such as Denmark (59.6%), France (51.8%) or Germany (46.8%). New Labour's much proclaimed commitment to education does rather wear thin when you note that the Institute of Fiscal Studies has calculated that, over the lifetime of this government, the rise in education spending is less than 2.9% a year.

So what about the real world in the classrooms? Well, take class size as a guide to real expenditure. Secondary schools' average rose from 21.7 to 21.8

between Jan 1998 and Jan 1999. This reflects the continuation of a trend which has shown a 1% rise over the last 10 years—excluding the private sector of course. For under 16 year olds, the average has gone up from 23.6 to 23.7. In primary school the average size at Key Stage 1 fell from 27.1 to 26.5 but has remained static at Key Stage 2.

To improve education, class sizes must be reduced. That is the main reason private schools are popular with those who have the money. Naturally they have smaller class sizes—Tony Blair has personal experience of this!

Spending must be increased. Instead of the divisive PRP, all teachers should get at least a £2000 pay rise. This would motivate teachers and in turn motivate the kids. The key question for most teachers is, however, workload. We are being inundated with new initiatives. Each one produces more bits of paper and more bureaucratic work for the classroom teacher. Many teachers are on the edge of a breakdown, especially in the Primary sector. They are often working 50 or 60 hours a week. Planning sheets for literacy, the same for numeracy, target setting, mentoring and

many more such great ideas (at least some of them) but all to be done in the same time scale. All this as you struggle to teach as well and each one with more work and more paper and more monitoring on your back!

The Blair leadership, embracing privatisation of education and the market forces, blame the 'conservatism' of teachers, but they are wrong. They say we use the fact that children live in poverty as an excuse but poverty and social deprivation do have a major impact on children. The recent series of excellent articles in the Guardian clearly showed that teachers can make a difference but the overriding factor that determines a child's success or not is poverty. This sits uncomfortably with New Labour because they have no strategy to tackle poverty. They prefer to blame teachers or to blame health service workers. 4 million children live in poverty in Britain and this figure is not going down. Instead of dealing with this, the government give tax concessions to big business and build up surplus money in the public accounts, refusing to really tackle the issues that matter. Teachers have had enough of taking the blame for the failures of this government. It is not us who are conservative. It is ironic that the most conservative Labour Prime Minister ever takes to task others for being the forces of conservatism!

Teachers are dedicated to education, but they are not able to work miracles without resources, decent pay and a reduction in the ridiculous workload. Every teacher must have non contact time as a matter of urgency. Class sizes must be reduced and classroom support assistants increased and paid a lot more!

Pressure is being put on the activists, facing the crisis affecting our members, but really the answer is for union action over pay and conditions. We need a massive campaign to win the members of all the teacher unions and parents to support the NUT lead. But to do this the NUT must give a real lead for no one else will. ✘



## Sick employers

Over 1,000 council workers in the London Borough of Wandsworth took strike action on 24th November, with up to 2,000 more ringing in sick. The public sector union Unison had organised the action over the Tory council's draconian attack on sick pay entitlements.

by Stuart McGee

Socialist Appeal spoke to Unison's London regional Convenor Geoff Martin who outlined the disgraceful proposals that are being put forward by Wandsworth, which, if successfully implemented would have wider implications.

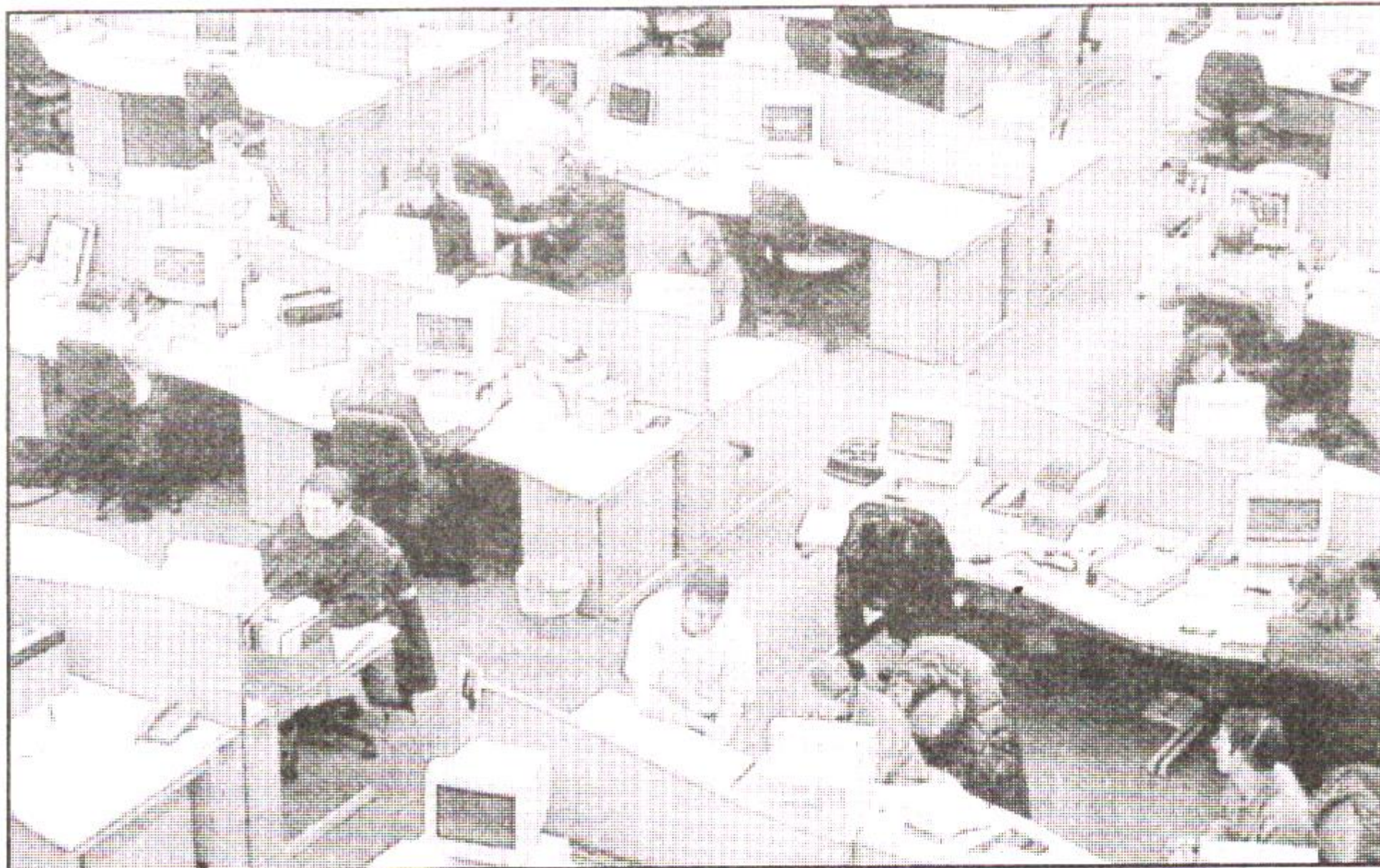
"The council are looking to introduce a scheme that would mean that if you are off work for more than five days you lose pay or will have to make up the hours lost by working overtime."

Mr. Martin continued "what this will mean in reality if they get away with it is that many workers will be coming into work when they are sick. We are talking about front line workers who provide essential services to some of the most vulnerable members of society".

The council already has the lowest levels of sickness absence of any London borough and it was suggested by some on the picket line that it might be more appropriate to look at councilors' attendance record at meetings given that many of them are picking up up to £6,000 a year in allowances.

The next stage in the campaign will be to organise joint union action with the other unions. But Geoff Martin concluded by pointing out, that this wasn't just a local Wandsworth issue. "The New Labour controlled London Borough of Haringey is facing industrial action on the 7th December. It is over a similar issue, they want to stop sick pay for the first two days of sickness and cut back on maternity leave. There was a massive vote in favour of action (over 85%) and these aren't the only authorities with plans to move away from national and regional agreements, Kingston and Croydon are already formulating plans to opt out. All of the authorities will be keeping an eye on the Wandsworth situation which is why it is so important. However it is clear that the union needs to develop a London-wide response to this and it is clear that local branches standing up to these kind of bully boy tactics deserve London wide backing". ☆

# "Dark satanic call centres"



**Thousands of British Telecommms workers across the country were out on strike on Monday 22nd November.**

**Workers at 37 sites across the country had voted by a massive 81% to take action, this despite concerted action by management to intimidate members of the Communications Workers Union into voting against action.**

Bullying was one of the central issues that the strike was over. A CWU spokesperson had described call centres as the "modern day dark satanic mills."

Anger and resentment among call centre workers had been building up for years and managements bullying and intimidatory techniques were bound to bring that mood to the surface sooner or later. Workers were being forced to deal with enquiries within a 285 second timescale. Such levels of stress cannot be kept up indefinitely.

The areas of work affected by the strike were those lines at centres dealing with sales, bills and repairs.

One CWU member who didn't want to named gave the following example, "can you imagine what it is like if you have an elderly confused person ringing in trying to explain a fault, you are trying to establish the exact nature of the problem and then having offer advice on what to do to see if it is a simple and straightforward problem or something that may require an engineer. Under these type circumstances it is a nightmare with these kind of time restrictions and management breathing down your neck".

Another bone of contention was that of the excessive use of non union agency labour.

"Its well known that the hundreds of thousands of call centre operators working all over the country are notoriously badly organised and are working under appalling conditions. In B.T the union has begun to get things organised, in fact this is the first action we have taken since B.T was privatised thirteen years ago. Why should the four thousand or so of us who work on proper contracts, who have at least started to get some issues looked at have our position undermined by excessive use of non union agency labour".

Of the four thousand union members involved there was 95% support for the strike on the day. The same conditions are repeated in call centres all around the country. This is a rapidly growing sector of employment where trade unionism can grow quickly and militantly.

Unless the management at BT come up with an acceptable compromise soon then call centre workers across Britain will be taking further action in December and January. ☆





# Tremendous success all round!

Every delegate and visitor who attended the first ever Socialist Appeal Industrial Conference was extremely impressed by the quality of the event. The conference, attracted nearly 80 trade unionists: miners, engineering workers, transport workers, civil servants, shopworkers, local authority workers, teachers, steelworkers and many others, who committed themselves to take up the struggle to transform the unions into effective weapons of struggle.

"The purpose of this conference", stated Steve Davison, AEEU member from Keighley and chair of the conference, "is to challenge the ideas of class collaboration, and prepare the forces to take on and challenge the right-wing at every level of the trade unions. There is a massive gap now between the troops and the officer corp, most of whom are rotten to the core." Steve went on: "In my own union, the AEEU, the regime is talking about merger with the MSF and the bankworkers union. As we jokingly say in the AEEU, we are soon to have a union full of bankers as opposed to a union run by a load of something that rhymes with bankers. They are idle, ill-informed, unaccountable, and spend more time fighting their own rank and file activists in a way that is nothing short of obscene. Their policy is one of open class collaboration not seen since the 1920s and 1930s. The only way this movement can be turned around is from the bottom up. Correct tactics and strategy are vital at this stage to begin the process of regeneration of the movement."

Jeremy Dear, national organiser of newspapers for the NUJ, opened the conference by castigating the crimes of class collaboration held by the TUC leaders.

He explained the attitude of 'social partnership' by referring to the approach of Sir Ken Jackson, general secretary of the AEEU. "Having been in TUC meetings with him, it is clear that the activists who said he wouldn't recognise a shop steward if he fell over one is correct. The reason why we were in the meeting



was that the AEEU leadership had signed a single union deal at the Western Mail and Echo in Cardiff to represent all members of staff. Despite the AEEU

only having 12 members out of 900 members, and the NUJ having 100 members out of a bargaining unit of 170, Jackson was keen to explain to us, that our approach to recognition was out-dated. Now was not the time to run a failed campaign of recruitment, he said. That was the 'back-door-approach.' We needed to use the 'front-door', which was to go directly to the employer, finding out what he wanted, and signing a partnership agreement, and only at that point seeking to recruit members."

"The Mail agreement says there will be no strikes; no decision making process for the union. At the TUC meeting, Jackson boasted of the union's successful strategy at Nissan, days before the company announced a 21,000 redundancy package, and the need for greater flexibility and longer hours. What clearer illustration could there have been of the complete failure of social partnership?" said Jeremy.

Jeremy then went on to explain the ills of lean production, multiskilling, and a host of so-called 'innovations', aimed at slashing costs. The 'interests of workers and employers are the same' is stated a thousand times at the TUC revealing that they have learned nothing from the history of our movement. All the time, the bosses have reverted to sacking, intimidation and other attacks to benefit their interests, to increase the unpaid labour from the working class.

"The employers would prefer no unions, but where they exist, they try to buy off union leaders with knighthoods, privileges, etc., to police their own members." Where this is insufficient laws have been introduced. Jeremy explained the enormous build up of anti trade union legislation now on the statute books. And how



employers run to court to prevent industrial action, the latest being the train companies to block a safety strike.

Any union agenda must be the total repeal of all anti-union legislation. "Yes we fight for repeal, but as the firefighters, postal workers and others have shown, where workers move, these laws are not worth the paper they are written on."

"We need to organise to change course. We have to build on the new generation. We however need to take a step further... with a programme that will challenge capitalism and a socialist programme for the unions and the Labour Party. That means organising the opposition."

Andy Viner, from ASLEF, spoke about the privatisation of the railways, and the attempt to privatise the London Underground. He outlined what had happened over the past decade, and the official campaign against privatisation which had rested on public opinion. This he said had been a mistake, and that only industrial action could stop privatisation in its tracks. "Unfortunately the rail unions refused to call strike action as it would have been a political strike, and placed in jeopardy the funds of the union", said Andy.

There is no alternative. We need co-ordinated industrial action of all the rail unions if we are to succeed. But we should go further and demand the renationalisation of the railways under democratic workers control and management.

A wide ranging discussion involved a whole number of trade union activists.





## INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCE



Brian Beckingham, an NUT branch secretary, outlined the problems within work and the union. He stated there was a big challenge before teachers as Blair and Blunkett want to take on and defeat the public sector, in the same way as Thatcher attacked the private sector.

Des Heemskerk, deputy convenor at the Basildon Ford radiator plant spoke about the strike action at Dagenham, the

day after Jackson made his comments about a strike-free Britain. Unofficial action has taken place over harassment and bullying, which underlies a build up of tension over years of erosion of conditions.



Foremen have been treating workers like dirt and there has been a reaction to this regime. At Southampton there has been an unofficial walkout over the pay offer and the strings attached, and reflects a new mood throughout the Ford workforce.

Rick McFarland, a UNISON health worker outlined the growing anger and frustration amongst health workers concerning pay and conditions, which was expressed by the rejection of the current 3% offer. He explained that "trade union full time officers were policing our stewards committees, lecturing us on how progressive we should be." At the same time, "especially on the psychiatric wards, things are stretched to the limit, and patients can't get basic care."

PCS rep, Phil Sharp, explained that the new 250,000-strong amalgamated union rejected the 4% pay offer, then balloted for action and 80% voted in favour. Underlying this vote was the speed-ups and pressures on staff. To the delight of the conference, Phil said that there could be action by Inland Revenue state which could see a backlog of tax uncollected.

Both Ron and Peter from UNISON outlined the threat of PFI, and its consequences. There has been a concerted campaign to con the public about PFI, who do not fully realise that huge sums of public money are handed out every year to private business to pay for PFI built hospitals

and the like. Peter gave the example of the campaign against a PFI hospital in Carlisle. The final costs of PFI over 30 years are horrendous. It took £67 million to build the new hospital. A private company AMEC borrowed £80 million for added value, for an immediate share payout. The fee is £10.8 million at 1997 prices. A compound

accumulative interest of 3% index linked per year equals £1020 million for a £67 million hospital. "That's what's happening now."

Ron also explained about the poor pay levels within the health service, and "how there were sighs of relief at union headquarters in calling off the strike ballot, as they tried all sorts to sabotage the ballot. However, with no time to campaign, we got 2 to 1 against accepting the deal; in some areas it was 10 to 1 accepting it." If we had been allowed a strike ballot it could have been a resounding success.

A worker in the employment service, Rachael Heemskerk (PCS), explained how the pay and bargaining structure was uniform, but "now we are agencies, clearly with a view to privatising us." Private companies had already been drafted in, like in Hackney, where Reeds are being used to implement the New Deal. The consequence of this is the splitting up of the workforce. If there was a dispute workers in different sections and agencies would be asked to cross the picket lines of fellow workers. "We are prevented from taking secondary action", said Rachael. "This is a recipe for confusion and disruption at local level, with disciplinary action hanging over our heads."

Ralph Quigley, from West Yorkshire, spoke about the AEEU conference which he attended as a delegate. "It certainly opened my eyes of how far down the road of social partnership my union had gone. They actually obtained £60,000 worth of sponsorship from employers to give little luxuries out to the delegates, including free drinks, trips (again with free drinks all night), and chips to play at the casino!" While there were employers logos everywhere, there was hardly an AEEU banner in sight. This shows how far this social partnership approach goes for the AEEU leadership, and is certainly an attempt to buy off members and get the right-wing agenda through, "It's all about collaboration, and it's the unions doing all the collaborating."

Other speakers from the floor were Juliana Grant and Veronica Patterson from the teaching unions, who dealt with the crisis facing education and the need to take up a political struggle within the Labour

Party. Kris Lawrie, a UNISON rep at St Andrews university spoke about the plight of young workers, especially students who are forced to take jobs to cover their loans and lack of grant. Mike Hogan (UNISON) and Graham Wilson (TGWU) dealt with the attacks on workers in higher education and on local authority workers. Heiko Khoo spoke about the Millennium bug and the disruption that could take place in workplaces.

Nabila, from the Pakistan Trade Union Campaign made an impassioned appeal for support given the new military coup in Pakistan. "People are living under desperate conditions and need the support of the Labour movement internationally. Please take the campaign into your unions, help us with petitions and raise the badly needed funds. We have to stand up and be counted. Thank you for your help."



The chair of the Joint Sites Committee and member of UCATT, Dave Smith, addressed the conference about the position in the building industry. He outlined a number of victories on the sites, especially in London, starting with the electricians on the Jubilee Line. "There was an important victory at Waterloo where 100 fitters had been left with no wages and out of work after the subbie had bounced the cheque. He had also stopped paying for their digs, and these workers were sleeping on the streets when we found them." We had 300 on the gate and blocked the road. We managed to get the blokes their money and even the airfares of the foreign workers. The sparks had about 8,000 out on strike against the pay deal a few weeks back, against the AEEU leadership. "Jackson came out for a strike-free Britain. Well that's fine as long as it is redundancy-free, exploitation-free at the same time."

The conference gave a warm welcome to Leonidas from the Greek building worker's union and Athens TUC. He brought best wishes from the Greek workers and went on to explain there was a growing interest in the British working class in Greece. He said he was impressed by the discussion. "It is clear we are facing the same attacks: privatisations, tightening of our belts, cuts, deteriorating conditions, the crushing of union rights and the endless pressure of the capitalists to increase their profits."

Leonidas explained the parallel struggle to transform the unions into fighting organisations. "The union leaders travel around in their expensive cars, own big houses. They are what Trotsky described as the lawyers of the capitalists in the working class." They are incapable of really



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responding to the crisis situation. The right wing leaders of the socialist parties and unions have given in to the new ideology of the market, due to the lack of participation and control of the working class. They are trying to cover their own weakness. "However, the period of capitalist stability is over."

Leonidas concluded with a rallying call to link up internationally, and quoted the optimism of Rosa Luxemburg, for workers to organise and put an end to the ugliness of capitalist reaction for ever.

Nigel Pearce, NEC member of the NUM spoke about the important links between the unions and the Labour Party. "There is no panacea in leaving the Labour Party to set up something new, as we have seen by what has happened to those who tried. Even though I shake my head when I listen to Blair, whatever they say, the party has certain roots in the working class. I went to Labour conference, and gave a report to the members. They won't let miners speak so I'm glad to get a lot off my chest today. Its appalling to listen to these people; they are nasty against the working class, and those who can't fight back."

The Blairites are relying on the union leadership to get their way. The unions still control over 50% of the party. The unions are allowing the Blairites to do things. "We have a Labour leader here who actually hates the Labour Party - detests it. The party he wants is with the Heseltines and Clarkes."

"It's the struggles outside the party that really count and will affect the party. Workers will turn to their traditional organisation when they turn to politics. And we should be there for when this time comes, preparing the ground", he continued. "What we want is a transformation of the unions and then the Labour Party."

The conference was summed up by Alan

Woods, the editor of Socialist Appeal, who analysed the world crisis of capitalism, and the coming upheavals in Britain and elsewhere. He began by saying that "there is an unfortunate tendency in the trade union field not to see the wood for the trees. To be

absorbed in the daily grind, and lose sight of the fundamental objectives. It is true that without the day to day struggle for advance under capitalism, the fight for socialism is impossible."

Alan referred to the fall of the Berlin wall which ushered in a fundamental change on a world scale. This is reflected in consciousness. "But nothing is automatic. It takes time for these process to work out. Things appear to be moving slowly, but this is not true. They are moving very quickly", he said. The perspectives of the capitalist class have been shattered.

"We have heard many contributions today which prove in "sleepy" Britain things are beginning to change, which has its roots in the crisis of capitalism on a global scale. The world is on the brink of a downswing that will transform the entire world.

"If we maintain ourselves firmly on our ideas, we can be confident that with the developing crisis, these ideas will gather a mass audience. It depends on you. Get active. Join us in our fight. Let us prepare the way for a mass Marxist tendency in Britain and internationally."

In a tremendous collection which showed the enthusiasm for our ideas, over £1,100 was raised towards the £4,000 Christmas Appeal launched by Socialist Appeal for new equipment. The conference ended with a rendering of The Red Flag and The Internationale. ✧



## Revolutionary Optimism at the Turn of the Century

by Leon Trotsky

Dum spiro spero! [While there's life, there's hope!]....If I were one of the celestial bodies, I would look with complete detachment upon this miserable ball of dust and dirt....I would shine upon the good and the evil alike....But I am a man. World history which to you, dispassionate gobbler of science, to you, book-keeper of eternity, seems only a negligible moment in the balance of time, is to me everything! As long as I breathe, I shall fight for the future, that radiant future in which man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the drifting stream of his history and will direct it towards the boundless horizon of beauty, joy and happiness!...

The nineteenth century has in many ways satisfied and has in even more ways deceived the hopes of the optimist....It has compelled him to transfer most of his hopes to the twentieth century. Whenever the optimist was confronted by an atrocious fact, he exclaimed: What, and this can happen on the threshold of the twentieth century! When he drew wonderful pictures of the harmonious future, he placed them in the twentieth century.

And now that century has come! What has it brought with it at the outset?

In France—the poisonous foam of racial hatred [The reference here is to the Dreyfus affair]; in Austria—nationalist strife....; in South Africa—the agony of a tiny people, which is being murdered by a colossus [The Boer War]; on the "free" island itself—triumphant hymns to the victorious greed of jingoist jobbers; dramatic "complications" in the east; rebellions of starving popular masses in Italy, Bulgaria, Rumania....Hatred and murder, famine and blood....

It seems as if the new century, this gigantic newcomer, were bent at the very moment of its appearance to drive the optimist into absolute pessimism and civic nirvana.

—Death to Utopia! Death to faith! Death to love! Death to hope! thunders the twentieth century in salvos of fire and in the rumbling of guns.

—Surrender, you pathetic dreamer. Here I am, your long awaited twentieth century, your "future".

—No, replies the unhumbled optimist: You—you are only the present. ✧



# The real crisis of poverty



In a recent article in the *Observer* (22/8/99) Secretary of State for Social Security, Alistair Darling said: "We have made a good start on the way to meeting the Prime Minister's pledge of eliminating child poverty in a generation."

The government's policies are superficially attractive, particularly to the middle classes who may see them as a way of having to pay less for benefits through taxation, but who in Ben Elton's famous jibe, "Don't want to have to step over the poor on their way to the squash court."

What are the government's Welfare Reforms - (well, for reforms read cuts!) The pledge to get rid of poverty sounds admirable - but what are the means? In many ways, it seems to come down to punishing the poor out of existence.

by Sheila Clarke

Jack Ashley, writing in the *Observer* on 10/10/99, takes issue with Blair's avowed moral crusade on welfare reform. He does not accept that all those who oppose change are the wicked "forces of conservatism". He says: "I believe that it would be wicked to accept some of the proposals which will hit thousands of severely disabled people."

The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill has been condemned by every major disability organisation in Britain. Ashley points out that it will mean 170,000 future disabled people will be unable to claim Incapacity Benefit and cut it substantially for others.

Existing rules mean that disabled people have to prove they are unable to work. "This has to be certified by a strict Benefits Agency doctor," says Ashley. In future it will become even more of a lottery, depending on where people live.

Presently, claimants have to have paid the required number of National Insurance contributions at some time. In future, this will need to have been in the previous two years. This will impact particularly hard on those in areas with a lot of unemployment. Ashley calls it a "lucky-dip scheme". "Those unlucky enough to become disabled while living in an area of high unemployment will lose £66 a week, their full incapacity benefit, no matter how severely disabled they are."

As if that were not bad enough, the Government has more plans. "Those who fulfil the stringent conditions... will be penalised if they also have an occupational pension."

This will cut in on pensions of just £2,652 a year. If their pension is more than £50 a week, they will lose 50p of benefit for every £1 over that figure. Ashley points

out: "As Incapacity Benefit is already taxed, this means that the effective rate of tax is 73% compared with a top rate of 40% for millionaires."

## Unemployed new deal

Turning to the unemployed, now that the government has introduced the Working Families Tax Credit, it claims that it has removed the final disincentive to getting a job. At the same time, it is increasing the sanctions for those who will not participate in the New Deal.

The scheme offers subsidised work, training or voluntary activity to unemployed youngsters between 18-24.

"At present, benefit can be stopped for six weeks for refuseniks, but the new rules will allow giro to be frozen for six months" (*Observer* 5/9/99).

The whole regime for the unemployed is becoming increasingly punitive. The Jobseeker's Allowance continues the cut from 12 months to 6 months benefit which was introduced by the Tories and the automatic disqualification of those not seeking work, from benefit.

But the latest rules mean that many of the claimants will be expected to report to the Job Centres daily - or risk losing benefit. They must also be prepared to take any job offered - or again lose benefit.

## Pension Provision

The Government is scrutinising every segment of the welfare budget. It boasts about the cuts it has made in Social Security Fraud. But it has not shown the same enthusiasm for ensuring that people come forward and claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

Much play is made of the 'ageing population' and how current benefits cannot be

sustained. This is at a time when Government coffers are stuffed with cash. In addition, the means are there to fund decent benefits for all - if the Government were only prepared to tax the people who could afford to pay most, a little more.

Instead, it pushes the idea of stakeholder pensions. This is another way of saying that the poor must not simply waste their money on essentials like food and clothes but should put some by, to provide for their old age.

The message rings hollow when recalling the huge scandal over pension mis-selling. Millions were persuaded to opt out of the SERPS government scheme or leave their occupational pensions, in favour of private schemes.

These made huge profits for the insurance company providers - but will not finance a decent life in old age for many of their holders.

Before the last election, Labour called for a return to pensions linked to wage rises, so that pensioners could share in the country's increasing wealth. But the standard Retirement Pension is only due to go up less than £1 a week, next year. The recorded inflation figures are low - but what is the reality for those at the bottom of the income scale?

## Fuel costs

The Consumers' Association has produced a report "Final Demand" which shows that the poor get the worst deal on fuel. It has launched a campaign against what it calls 'fuel poverty'.

According to the CA, 7 million people, or one in five households, live in fuel poverty - which they define as having to pay 10% or more of their income to keep warm.

Most of those in this group are either



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single parents or the elderly, which is the very group most at risk from cold. (More than 30,000 die each year from cold.)

Numbers unable to pay their bills are also increasing. The Guardian (27/8/99) quotes from the report that the number unable to pay their gas bills almost doubled last year as gas companies cut off nearly 30,000 homes.

The number of electricity disconnections decreased, but this is misleading.

Adverse publicity about disconnections has encouraged the companies to fit pre-payment meters in homes where there have been payment problems.

When they can't afford to pay to feed the meter, they effectively disconnect themselves - without the need for the company to take further action or go through the courts.

The Association estimates that one million electricity and 500,000 gas consumers disconnected themselves last year.

The problem is made worse because the utility companies charge higher rates on the meters. "Meter rates are on average about 7% higher than paying by cash, cheque or direct debit...[but] companies refused people in debt the chance to switch from meters to cheaper methods."

In the first quarter of 1999, the companies obtained 24,000 warrants to install meters or cut supplies and forced their way into over 5,000 homes.

The Guardian quotes Sharon Darcy, principal policy researcher at the Consumers' Association: "It is crazy that those with the least money are paying the highest prices. Companies are being allowed to behave like the Sheriff of Nottingham... The government must take immediate action to end this problem."

### Children in poverty

A third of all those under 18 - more than 4 million children - are living below the poverty line according to recent research. Treasury figures show that this country has higher poverty levels than Greece and Portugal.

The number of children living in households with less than half the average income, has tripled since the 1970s according to a report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Paul Grigg, co-author of the report and senior research fellow at the London School of Economics, said: "Poverty in the childhood years damages an individual's life chances when they reach adulthood. Earnings are lower and joblessness rates higher for adults who grow up in poverty."

The Guardian (14/9/99) quotes from the Treasury's fourth report on the modernisation of Britain's tax and benefit system. Reviewing nearly 30 years research, it concluded: "On 'difficult to let' estates, one in four children gains no GCSEs [the national average is one in 20] and rates of

truancy are four times the average... There is considerable evidence that growing up in a family which has experienced financial difficulties, damages childrens' educational performance..."

David Blunkett and the Department for Education think they know different. They follow a dictat that 'poverty is no excuse'. Their remedy for problems of truancy is to threaten parents with £5,000 fines.

The majority of kids who play truant tend to come from poorer homes. The parents are often people who can't afford to feed and clothe their kids well. The household may be on benefits - because there are no jobs!

If kids are bullied - the fine won't help persuade them to attend. The parents could even end up in jail for non payment. The kids may go into care - which is another form of punishment and has no better record of either controlling kids or helping them to make a success of life.

Blair talks about equality of opportunity - just as the Tories did in the seventies - but achieving real equality demands much more.

The Labour movement has given this government a lot of time - hoping that they will come through with some policies to benefit the mass of people in the end - but that patience has been sorely tried - and it is running out. This is demonstrated in some of the demands now coming from the Trade Union conferences and the Labour Party itself.

### No Means Tests

The movement must speak out and campaign against these attacks on ordinary workers and the Welfare State. Blair should be told that he stands no chance of being re-elected unless he begins to defend, rather than to attack, the working class - still the vast majority of the population.

We must have a Social Security system which supports the disabled by assisting them to make their contribution to society and paying them a decent income.

Benefits should not be means-tested or denied to those in need, who should be assessed by doctors not being paid to try and disqualify them.

Labour must provide a decent living pension for all with voluntary retirement at 55. ☆

# The class divide

## The Dollar Democracy

Next year's race for President of the United States of America is looking to be the most expensive ever. Big business hopefuls from both Republican and Democratic Parties are ploughing in millions of dollars to woe the electorate into voting Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum. George W. Bush, the leading Republican contender, has already raised about \$60m (dollars), while the Gore campaign aims for at least \$40m. On a local level things are a lot cheaper. Mrs Clinton has set her heart on raising \$20m-\$25m to fight for the New York US senate seat. "Campaign finance reform is needed", says Mr Patric of, a venture capitalist. And he should know, he was instrumental in raising £4m in two days for Clinton at celebrity parties.

An American Labour Party armed with a socialist programme would be able to cut through this corruption and sleaze which has characterised the two party system since its inception.

## Sale of the Century

While the Blairites attack the homeless, the crisis in local government finance is forcing councils to get rid of their council housing stock to the private sector in the form of housing associations. Glasgow and Birmingham are negotiating the transfer of their entire housing stock of more than 90,000 homes to housing associations. Other applications for stock transfers - privatisation - are Sunderland (39,000 homes), Dudley (29,000), Walsall (29,000), Calderdale (13,000), Warrington (11,000) and Blackburn (10,000).

Birmingham reckons that the under-investment on its stock has been £2bn and is deteriorating at a rate of £25m a year. As the Blair government has not given back the money stolen by the Tories, councils are being urged by the government to privatise their stock. All this under Tory legislation!

The banks and building societies are getting in on the act. The National Westminster is the biggest funder with 29 deals. This is followed by Nationwide (23) and the Halifax (21). Business is good for the finance houses, as on average a stock of 10,000 properties bring in £25m annually. If the Labour government was up to scratch it would take over the banks, write-off the debts of local authorities and provide interest free loans to build proper housing and renovate/refurbish the present housing stock. ☆



# The third way? No way!

According to Tony Blair the "Third Way" is about "traditional values in a changed world". "It draws vitality from the two great streams of left of centre thought, democratic socialism and liberalism whose divorce this century did so much to weaken progressive politics across the world". These values, according to Tony Blair are individual liberty and social justice, equal worth, opportunity, responsibility and community.

By Barbara Humphries

The changes which have occurred in the world are globalisation, new technology and the changing role of government. If this does not sound like a new ideology this is probably because the Third Way represents the triumph of "pragmatism over theory." He says "we must acknowledge certain realities such as the fact that the state no longer has a major redistributive role, the earlier cornerstone of social democracy." In other words the Third Way accepts completely the philosophy of the capitalist economy, whilst attempting to govern with a social conscience. The theory can be seen in the practicalities of the policies of New Labour - the Working Families Tax Credit, the New Deal and Minimum Wage, the development of public/private partnerships, and the government's commitment to be tough on crime in the name of reviving a community spirit. It can also be seen in what New Labour has not done in terms of not reversing Tory cuts in public expenditure and not taking into public ownership industries which have been privatised.

Sociologist and supporter of Blair, Anthony Giddens has attempted to put more theoretical flesh on the "third way". He openly argues that old style socialism, by which he means both communism and social democracy, although they were both in their own ways completely different, is now finished for ever. They both relied on the state to redistribute wealth, be it through nationalisation or taxation. The fact that one of them accepted ownership of the majority of the economy by private capital and the other did not is supposed to be an irrelevant detail! Where they both have a point is that social democracy "is" operating in changed conditions and that is why it seems worse than the Labour Party of the 1940s, 1950s or 1960s. It is not just that Labour leaders have mysteriously got worse! The changed conditions are a result

of the end of the post-war economic boom which allowed for economic growth and an expanding welfare state in the main capitalist countries of the world.

Before analysing the origins of the Third Way or New Labour, it is worth looking at some quotes from the capitalist press. Tony Blair has campaigned to take Third Way values to Europe. In the run up to the European elections he and Gerhard Schroder of Germany drew up "Europe the Third Way", an attempt to reject tax and spend policies and embrace the free market. "We must combine the economic dynamism that Europe desperately needs with the commitment to social justice that remains at the core of our beliefs" said Blair. The Independent claimed that the Third Way was an idea "whose time is come". It argued that the attempt to reconcile the best aspects of the Thatcherite revolution (flexible markets and enterprise) with the traditional values of social justice was a worthwhile one. According to the Financial Times it said "most of the right things about the market economy". "More importantly it rejects some of the wrong-headed ideas still current on the left". Only the Daily Telegraph and the Wall Street journal expressed scepticism. But the most emphatic endorsement of New Labour came from the Guardian, the paper which consistently campaigned against the Tories while they were in office, and is now seen as the guardian of New Labour. Their editorial, "Thatcher's legacy - she changed Britain and created Blair", coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the election of the Tories in 1979 said the following,

#### Thatcher

"Still Margaret Thatcher has earned a genuine place in history. She changed the face of the British economy. With her programme of privatisations, she slimmed down a state which had become flabby and overstretched, reconciling Britain forever to the market. She effected the change brutally, and with great pain, but it was a change we had to make. Our partners in Europe are having to undergo that process now; thanks to Thatcher we were ready for the global marketplace sooner than they were.

That basic shift has been recognised,



even embraced by Labour, They have ditched state socialism once and for all, reinventing themselves as the champions of enterprise. That has left the Conservative Party without a message, flailing around for something to say. They cannot escape the Lady's shadow; nor can they claim to be her true heirs. That mantle has gone, bizarrely to Tony Blair. It is probably this - the common commitment of both main parties to the market, coupled with a prime minister in her own image - that is Thatcher's greatest legacy". (April 1999).

So if the Third Way is simply the adjustment of social democracy to the values of the free market, why and how has this occurred? What was characteristic of old Labour and what remains today? Why has the Labour Party embraced the free market?

Formed from the trades union movement in 1900 the Labour Representation Committee aimed to get the cause of labour represented in Parliament. It recognised that there was a basic antagonism between the classes in society. The existing two political parties, the Liberals and the Tories, represented employers and could not represent workers. The principle of labour independence was there right from the beginning. A leaflet issued by the Labour Representation Committee in 1901 claimed "This is a new movement...It originated in the desire of the workers for a party that really understands it and is prepared to deal with their grievances and has grown to its present strength by the sys-



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tematic attacks in the press and the Law Courts upon combined labour and its funds. It is the workers' reply to the aggressive action of the Federated Masters and Trusts. But upon this conflict between capital and labour neither a Liberal nor a Conservative Ministry can be trusted to stand by the workers."

### Clause Four

In 1918 the Party adopted a constitution committed to public ownership (Clause 4, Part 4). None of this was accidental. The 1945 Labour election manifesto reiterated the point that a vote for the Liberals was the same as a vote for the Tories. Blair may think that he can change the party in the present but he cannot change history! Old style socialism was associated with public ownership and class politics. In 1945 the Labour Government nationalised some of the basic industries in Britain - the mines, railways and public utilities. But this was not socialist nationalisation. These were industries which were losing money, the capitalists were glad for the government to take them over as long as they received compensation and they ran the boards. The workers had no say.

Supporters of the Third Way and the free market also attack the tax and spend policies of Old Labour. In the 1930s the Labour Party, after the 1931 election defeat, was converted to Keynesianism. Indeed so was much of the capitalist class on a world scale. The New Deal in the United States was seen as an interventionist model for some trades union and labour leaders. The Conservatives, however, who ran Britain for the 1930s were reluctant to commit themselves to that path. But the destruction caused by World War Two emphasised the need for economic planning in reconstruction and there was a popular determination not to go back to the years of mass unemployment. The post war boom formed the basis for a Keynesian strategy for the best part of a quarter of a century, not just in Britain but internationally. The Bretton Woods Agreement allowed governments to take an interventionist role. Like selective nationalisation and the welfare state this was not fundamentally challenged by the Conservatives when they were returned to office in the 1950s. This was the post-war settlement of which the 1945 Labour Government was the architect in Britain. Growing prosperity and economic growth were taken for granted by both main political parties.

Nevertheless during the Wilson Government of 1964-1970 there were signs of some of the features associated

with New Labour. The emphasis on modernisation, "the white heat of the technological revolution". Just as Tony Blair likes to imitate President Clinton, Harold Wilson liked to model himself on President Kennedy. Political activism within the Labour Party was at a low ebb. The Party had run out of steam. Anthony Crosland in 1960 wrote that "The elan of the rank and file is less essential to winning elections. With the growing penetration of the mass media political campaigning has become increasingly centralised and the traditional local activities, the door to door canvassing and the rest are now largely ritual". The Labour Party machine collapsed. In local elections Labour lost cities like Sheffield and Leeds for the first time since the 1930s, only four out of twenty London boroughs were retained.

### Keynesianism Abandoned

However the crucial change in direction was to come during the life of the 1974-79 Labour Government. The election of the Tories in 1970 had marked the re-emergence of class warfare in Britain on a scale not seen since the 1930s. Unemployment rose to half a million. The Tories announced attacks on the trades union movement which led to national strikes of the miners, dockers and transport workers. The mood within the Labour Party changed, with the left making gains. The party committed itself in 1974 to an irreversible redistribution of wealth towards working people and their families. However by 1975 the effects of the end of the post war boom decisively hit the British economy. There was a crisis for sterling and the International Monetary Fund demanded a cuts package. This was a defining moment for the Labour Party in the post war years as well as for British capitalism which was seen as the "basket case of Europe". The Labour Party abandoned its commitment to Keynesianism once and for all at the behest of the IMF. In 1976 Callaghan, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, made an infamous speech, quoted favourably by monetarists such as Milton Friedman. He said

"We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all honesty that that option no longer exists and that in so far as it ever did exist it worked on each occasion since the war by inject-



ing bigger doses of inflation into the economy, followed by a higher level of unemployment as the next step." He added "The willingness of industry to invest in new plant and machinery requires of course that we overcome inflation but also that industry is left with sufficient funds and has sufficient confidence to make the new investments - I mean they must be able to earn a surplus and that is a euphemism for saying they must be allowed to make a profit. The wealth must be created before it is distributed."

This speech to the 1976 Labour Party Conference in full view of the world bankers was to tear the party apart. Cuts in the welfare state were now on the order of the day. The Labour Government was set on a collision course with the party membership who saw the crisis as a reason for more radical socialist policies, not less. The government was taking the line that the crisis of British capitalism had to be solved at the expense of the working class. This was to be the fundamental basis of every government, Labour or Tory to the present day! The social contract with the trades union movement, which had been based on voluntary wage restraint in return for maintaining the "social wage" was under threat. This was to lead to the winter of discontent and the defeat of the Labour Government in 1979. The Labour leadership launched a witch hunt against the membership of the party, directed initially at the Marxists in the Labour Party Young Socialists, but also at supporters of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and hundreds of activists in the constituencies and trades union branches who supported the left, and left wing politicians such as Tony Benn and Eric Heffer. Marxists at the time predicted a possible split in the



## LABOUR PARTY

Labour Government, similar to 1931, when in times of financial crisis, the Labour Cabinet failed to get acceptance for cuts in unemployment benefit and the then Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald set up a national government, with a handful of Labour ministers, Conservatives and Liberals. In the event this did not happen. The Labour Government soldiered on until 1979 when it lost the election.

Labour was not to win another election until 1997. During that time the gains of the labour movement were reversed by successive Tory governments, including large scale privatisation, closure of industries, reform of the welfare state and attacks on trades union rights. Under the impact of these defeats the Labour Party itself changed. When Labour won the election in 1997 all vestiges of the election commitments of the 1970s and 1980s had gone. Tory policies including government spending targets were maintained. It seemed that the only difference was a set of values, putting a human face on capitalism.

### Labour's Left

Tony Blair claims that Labour lost four elections because of the influence of the left-wing of the party. The impact of the crisis in the 1970s led the left to make demands for change. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy was successful in obtaining the automatic reselection of MPs. Labour Party democracy was the main focus of the left in the party. It was the right wing establishment who were on the defensive and resistant to change at this time. The left was also committed to more nationalisation and increased public expenditure. The Alternative Economic Strategy however, which attracted support within the Party and trade unions was essentially a Keynesian document at a time when the ruling class were moving towards monetarism. Only a full socialist programme of nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy would have been a genuine alternative. This was argued by the Marxists in the Labour Party.

However at no time, in spite of its growing influence did the left actually win control of the Labour Party! The right wing of the party always maintained the leadership. The policies of the left were most influential in the early 1980s. In 1980 after one year of the Thatcher government, Labour was at 50% in the opinion polls, the Tories were at 34%. Thatcher had become the most unpopular prime minister since the war! She could not win even the majority of her cabinet to monetarist policies. Unemployment soared to over 3 million. The Labour Party organised marches in Liverpool, Cardiff and Glasgow.

Labour was on course to win the 1983

general election, until the Falklands War which cut across the continued crisis for British capitalism. The election victory of 1983 gave the Tories, and the Thatcher leadership in particular the majority in Parliament they needed to take on the labour movement. Within a year we were into the longest national strike in the history of Britain - the 1984/1985 miners strike. To this day the defeat of the miners is seen by the ruling class as the critical battle in the struggle against organised labour.

### Witch Hunt

The Blairites blame the left for the disunity which took place in the party in the 1980s. But it was the right wing who organised the most vigorously to promote civil war within the Party. Organisations such as the Solidarity Group and the St Ermins Group of Trade Union leaders organised to defeat left wing resolutions on the National Executive Committee and the Party conference. Decisions taken by local general management committees and the Party conference were ignored. Left candidates such as Peter Tatchell in Bermondsey and Pat Wall in Bradford North were not endorsed. Former left winger, Michael Foot became party leader and a prisoner of the right wing. Not content with attacking gains made by the left in the party, some of the right split away to form the Social Democratic Party amidst much media hype. This short lived experiment split the Labour vote in the critical years of the 1980s allowing the Tories to win, on a minority vote. Furthermore the Labour leadership disowned the 1983 election manifesto, calling it the "longest suicide note in history". This was what lay behind the 1983 election defeat. Attacks on the left of the party continued under the leadership of Neil Kinnock. Where the Labour left gained control of local parties, such as the Greater London Labour Party, Liverpool and Sheffield, successes were gained for the Labour Party. Like the miners these received more attacks than support from the leadership of the Labour Party! Neil Kinnock went on to lose another two elections. In spite of the approval he obtained from the Tory press for his attacks on the membership of the Party they felt that he could not be trusted in government. Labour even lost in 1992 when Thatcher had been discredited after the defeat of the poll tax. The defeat of the poll tax of course owed nothing to the leadership of the Labour Party.

So why was Labour electable in 1997? The Tories were divided and discredited. Their handling of the economy after black Wednesday was under question. Their administration was littered with sleaze and incompetence. Perhaps even the ruling

class in Britain were worried about the social consequences of the Tory's "counter-revolution." One third of children live in poverty. Unemployment remained high. An underclass had developed. A percentage of the population would never know what it was like to have a job. The social security bill was soaring in spite of public expenditure cuts. The destruction of working class communities had been all part of the Tory offensive against the labour movement. But now the social fabric of the country was under threat. These excesses had to be sorted out whilst maintaining a free market, low tax economy. So New Labour was called upon after 18 years to repair the damage! Electable meant acceptable to the capitalist press and the ruling class in general.

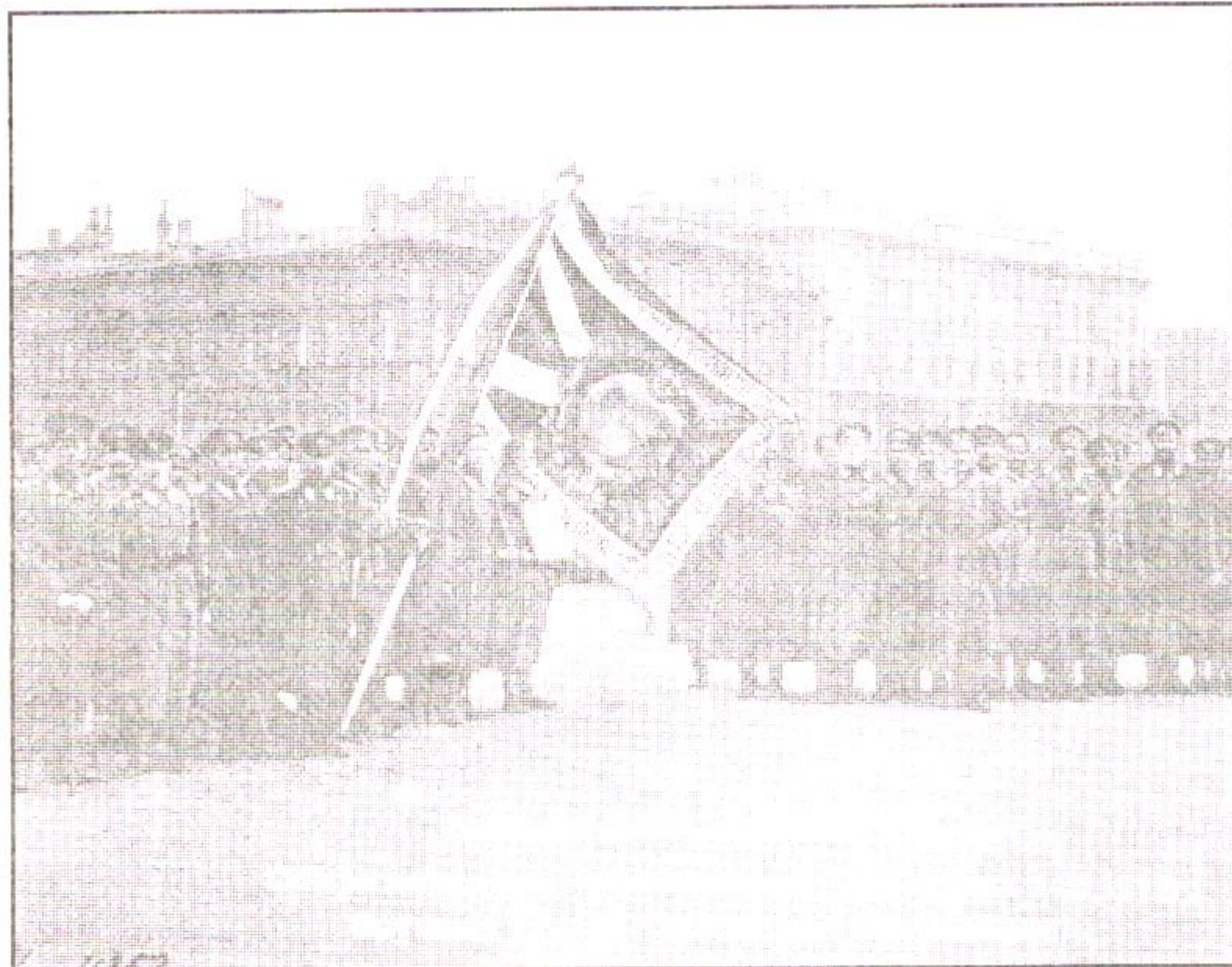
The Third Way has more in common with socially concerned Tories and Liberals of the 19th century, than with 20th century socialism. At the end of the 19th century the British ruling class were concerned about casualisation, ill health and malnutrition amongst the lower classes for similar reasons. Lack of education and skills meant that Britain's workforce was not competitive. Today we hear a lot about the politics of social exclusion. Much of Labour's strategy is aimed at these problems. This will only work as long as the economy can provide jobs. A world recession will undercut all Labour's commitments to the long term unemployed.

### Third Way - no solution

Little or nothing has been done to address the problems facing the working class as a whole, job insecurity, longer hours and pressures at work, and declining public services. These all result from the crisis of capitalism. The policies of four Tory governments and now New Labour may be designed to stop people from fighting back but they have not solved the basic problems which faced the Labour Party conference 25 years ago. Privatisation has proved to be inefficient, corrupt and no answer to the lack of investment in public services. It is still opposed by the majority of people in this country. The Third Way (if there is such a thing) has no solution to the fundamental inability of the capitalist system to ensure prosperity and security for working people. ✧



# The meaning of October



*The apologists for the ruling class always seek to present revolution as a bloodthirsty event. The reformist leaders throw in their two-ha'pence, by posing as peace-loving parliamentary democrats. But history demonstrates the falsity of both assertions.*

*The bloodiest pages in the history of social strife occur when a cowardly and inept leadership vacillates at the decisive moment, and fails to put an end to the crisis of society by vigorous action. The initiative then passes to the forces of counter-revolution which are invariably merciless, and prepared to wade through rivers of blood to "teach the masses a lesson."*

*In the second of his two-part series on the history and significance of the Russian Revolution, Socialist Appeal editor, Alan Woods analyses the ebb and flow of the revolutionary events from April to the seizing of power in October and draws out the lessons for the workers' movement today.*

*This article was first published in 1992.*

In April 1917, the reformist leaders of the Soviet could have taken power "peacefully" - as Lenin invited them to do. There would have been no civil war. The authority of these leaders was such that the workers and soldiers would have obeyed them unconditionally. The reactionaries would have been generals without an army.

But the refusal of the reformists to take power peacefully made bloodshed and violence inevitable, and put the gains of the revolution in jeopardy.

In the same way the German Social Democratic leaders handed back the power won by the German workers and soldiers in 1918, a crime for which the whole world paid with the rise of Hitler, the concentration camps, and the horrors of a new world war.

Instead of taking power, the Menshevik and SR leaders entered the first coalition government with the bourgeois leaders.

The masses at first welcomed this, believing that the socialist Ministers were there to represent their interests. Once again, only events could bring about a change in consciousness. Inevitably, the socialist ministers became the pawns of the landowners and capitalists, and above

all of Anglo-French imperialism, which was impatiently demanding a new offensive on the Russian front.

These same "socialists" who had held a pacifist position earlier, once they crossed the threshold of the Ministry, instantly forgot their Zimmerwald speeches and enthusiastically backed the war. A new offensive was announced. Measures to re-introduce discipline in the army reflected an attempt to re-assert the power of the officer caste.

The mood of the workers in Petrograd was near boiling point. As a warning shot and a trial of strength, the Bolsheviks considered an armed demonstration to put pressure on the Congress of Soviets in June.

The party was giving voice to the growing feeling of frustration of the Petrograd workers, summed up in slogans, directed at the reformist leaders of the Soviet: "Take over state power!" "Break with the bourgeoisie!" "Drop the idea of a coalition and take the reigns of power into your own hands!"

The idea of an armed demonstration caused an hysterical reaction on the part of the middle-class leaders who launched a campaign of slander, misrepresenting it as an attempted coup. The Menshevik Minister Tsereteli warned ominously that "people who did not know how to use arms must be disarmed."

As a small minority in the Congress of Soviets (which the demonstration was planned to coincide with), the Bolsheviks decided to retreat. The idea of an armed demonstration was dropped. In its place, the Congress of Soviets itself called an unarmed demonstration on July 1st. This attempt to out-manoeuvre the Bolsheviks backfired.

## Growth of Consciousness

The workers and soldiers came to the "official" demonstration carrying placards with the slogans of the Bolsheviks: "Down with the secret treaties!" "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!" "No to the offensive!" "All Power to the Soviets!"

In a revolution, even such extremely democratic and flexible organisations as the Soviets were not capable of reflecting the rapid shifts of mood of the masses. The Soviet lagged behind the factory committee, the factory committees lagged behind the masses. Above all, the soldiers lagged behind the workers, and the backward provinces lagged behind revolutionary Petrograd.

The process of the growth of consciousness is never uniform. Different layers arrive at different conclusions at different times. There is always a danger that the more advanced layers of the class will go too far too soon, and become separated from the majority, with calamitous consequences.

Infuriated by the offensive, the most radical sections of the Petrograd garrison were preparing for an armed demonstration. Realising that the provinces were not yet ready for a showdown with the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks tried to restrain the soldiers, but eventually were compelled to put themselves at the head of the demonstration in order to prevent a massacre.

As the Bolsheviks had warned, the government seized on the opportunity to crack down on the movement, leaning on more backward regiments.

The "July Days" ended in a defeat, but thanks to the responsible leadership of the Bolsheviks, the losses were kept to a minimum, and the effects of the defeat were not long-lasting.



## RUSSIA

A revolution is not a one-act drama. Neither is it a simple, forward-moving process. The Russian revolution unfolded over nine months. The Spanish revolution took place over seven years - from the fall of the monarchy in 1931 to the May Days of Barcelona in 1937. Within the revolution, there are periods of breathtaking advance, but also periods of lull, of defeat, even of reaction. Thus the February revolution was succeeded by the reaction that followed the July Days.

The Bolsheviks were accused of being German agents and mercilessly hounded, arrested and imprisoned. Lenin was forced to go into hiding, and then move to Finland.

### Counter-Revolution

From February onwards, the counter-revolution had been biding its time, hiding behind the coat-tails of the Provisional government. The offensive, and the crushing of the Bolsheviks in July, now tilted the pendulum to the right. The officer caste began serious preparations for a coup d'état, culminating in General Kornilov's uprising at the end of August.

Only the courageous reaction of the workers and soldiers saved the revolution. The railway workers, risking their lives, refused to drive the trains, or mis-directed them. Kornilov's army found itself without supplies, without petrol, disorganised and disoriented. Agitators, mainly Bolsheviks, got to work among Kornilov's troops and won them over. Kornilov ended up a general without an army.

Reluctantly, the Mensheviks and SRs were forced to legalise the Bolsheviks. But by now the masses had begun to realise the true state of affairs.

In an early article on the revolution, written between sessions at the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations in 1918, Trotsky recalled events still fresh in his mind: "The growth of the influence and strength of the Bolsheviks was undoubted, and it had now received an irresistible impetus. The Bolsheviks had warned against the Coalition, against the July offensive, and had foretold the Kornilov rebellion. The popular masses could now see that we had been right."

Panicked by the advance of Kornilov's "savage division," the reformist Soviet leaders had been compelled to arm the workers. The position of the Bolsheviks now became decisive in the Petrograd soviet. Moreover, the time was growing near for the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, at which the Bolsheviks were assured of a majority.

At one point, the counter-revolutionary policies of the reformist leaders of the Soviets had inclined Lenin to consider dropping the slogan "All power to the Soviets," and substituting for it the idea of

taking power through the factory committees.

This fact shows the extreme flexibility of Lenin's tactics. There was no question of making a fetish out of any organisational form, even the Soviets. However, the Soviet form of direct elections from the workplaces and garrisons represented a far more democratic expression of the will of society than any regime of bourgeois parliamentary democracy known to history.

One of the most blatant lies about October is that the Bolsheviks were "undemocratic" because they based themselves on Soviet democracy rather than a parliament ("Constituent Assembly"). The argument is that Lenin and Trotsky represented, not the masses, but only a small, tightly disciplined group of conspirators. For these critics, October was not a revolution, but a "coup."

The truth is very different. The Soviet system in 1917 and the years immediately following the revolution was the most democratic system of representation of the people ever known. Even the most democratic models of bourgeois parliamentarianism cannot compare with the simple and direct democracy of the Soviets. Incidentally, the Russian word "soviet" merely means a "council" or "committee."

The Soviets were born in 1905 as extended "strike committees." In 1917, the workers soviets were broadened to include representation by the soldiers, who were overwhelmingly peasants in uniform. Representatives to the soviets were elected directly by their workmates and instantly recallable. Compare this to the present system in Britain, where parliaments are elected every four years on average. There is no means of recall. Once a parliament is elected, it cannot be removed until the next general election. Governments are free to renege on their promises - and invariably do so, in the knowledge they cannot be removed.

Most of the parliamentarians are professional politicians, with no contact with the people who elected them. They live in another world, with high salaries and expenses which puts them in a different social category to the people they are supposed to represent.

In a revolutionary situation, where the moods of the masses change rapidly, the cumbersome mechanisms of formal bourgeois democracy would be utterly incapable of reflecting accurately the situation.



Even the soviets, as we have seen, often lagged behind.

In his 1918 work, Trotsky characterises the democracy of the Soviets in the following way: "They depend on organic groups, such as workshops, factories, mines, companies, regiments, etc. In these cases, of course, there are no such legal guarantees for the perfect accuracy of the elections as in those to municipal councils and zemstvos (a kind of elected district council in the rural areas under tsarism, AW), "but there is the far more important guarantee of the direct and immediate contact of the deputy with his electors. The member of the municipal council or zemstvos depends on an amorphous mass of electors who invest him with authority for one year, and then dissolve. "The Soviet electors, on the other hand, remain in permanent contact with one another by the very conditions of their life and work: their deputy is always under their direct observation and may at any moment be given new instructions, and, if necessary, may be censured, recalled, and replaced by somebody else."

The right wing socialists tried by all means to prevent the soviets from taking power. First, they organised the so-called "Democratic Conference," calling for a "responsible" Ministry. This satisfied nobody, and was attacked from the right and the left. The rapid polarisation between the classes doomed all the manoeuvres of the "centre" to defeat in advance.

The endless intrigues and combinations of the politicians contrasted with the desperate position on the front that cold and wet Autumn. The mood in the villages was increasingly impatient.

The right wing socialists argued that the peasants should wait for the election of the "Constituent Assembly." The Bolsheviks demanded the immediate transference of the land to the peasants' committees. The slogans of "peace, bread and land" won the mass of the peasants over to the side of the Soviets. By October, the stage was set for the last act in the revolu-



tionary drama.

Contrary to a widespread prejudice, revolution is not the same as insurrection. Nine-tenths of the work of the revolution consisted in winning over the decisive majority of the workers and soldiers by patient political work, summed up by Lenin's slogan: "Patiently Explain!"

The main blows of the Bolshevik propaganda and agitation were directed, not against the right-wing labour leaders, but against the class enemy - the monarchy, the landowners, the capitalists, the Black Hundreds (fascists), and the liberal bourgeois Ministers in the coalition government.

### **Bolshevik Majority**

By October, the Bolsheviks had a clear majority in the Soviets. Trotsky insisted that the date of the insurrection should be timed to coincide with the opening of the Congress of Soviets, where the Bolsheviks would win the majority of the Executive Committee, and could therefore act with the full authority of the Soviets, which comprised the decisive majority of society.

A point is reached in every revolution where the question of power is posed point-blank. At this stage, either the revolutionary class goes over to a decisive offensive, or the opportunity is lost, and may not return for a long time. The masses cannot be kept forever in a state of agitation. If the chance is lost, and the initiative passes to the counter-revolution, then bloodshed, *civil war and reaction will inevitably follow.*

This is the experience of every revolution. We saw it in the period of 1918-23 in Germany, and in Spain from 1931-37. In both cases, the working class paid for the crimes of the leadership with a ghastly defeat, the fascist dictatorships of Hitler and Franco and the Second World War, which nearly resulted in the destruction of civilisation.

Such is the importance of leadership that, ultimately, the fate of the Russian revolution was determined by two men - Lenin and Trotsky. The other leaders of the Bolsheviks - Stalin, Kamenev, Zinoviev - repeatedly vacillated under the pressure of middle-class "public opinion" - in reality the prejudices of the upper layers of the middle class, the intelligentsia and educated liberal leaders masquerading as socialists. These leaders represented the first confused, amorphous strivings of the masses to find a way out by the shortest road.

### **Cruel Deception**

However, the workers and peasants learned by experience that this alleged short-cut represented a cruel deception. This experience, together with the correct policies, strategy and tactics of Lenin and Trotsky, prepared the ground for the massive shift of opinion in the direction of Bolshevism. This would never have been

possible if the line of the conciliators had been accepted.

Lenin was constantly being accused of "sectarianism" by the enemies of Bolshevism - and by a section of the Bolsheviks leaders who wanted a "broad left front" with the Mensheviks and SRs, and were terrified of being "isolated." This fear was even more pronounced after the experience of July.

With the exception of Lenin and Trotsky (who joined the Bolsheviks in the period of reaction during the Summer, together with an important group of non-party Marxists, the Mezhrayontsy), most of the other prominent Bolsheviks favoured participating in the "Democratic Conference" and even in the fake "pre-parliament" which was set up at this Conference - a "parliament" without any powers, elected by nobody and representing only itself.

The old party leaders reflected the past of the workers and peasants, not their present or their future. Finally, the Bolsheviks demonstratively walked out of the "pre-parliament," to the general applause of the workers and soldiers - and the horror and indignation of the conciliators.

Thanks mainly to the work of Trotsky, the Petrograd garrison was won over to the Bolshevik cause. Trotsky made use of the Military Revolutionary Committee, set up by the reformist-led Executive of the *Soviet, to arm the workers in defence*

against the reactionaries. The workers in the arms factories distributed rifles to the Red Guard. Mass meetings, demonstrations and even military parades were held openly on the streets of Petrograd.

Far from being the work of a tiny, secret group of conspirators, the preparations for the insurrection involved a massive participation by workers and soldiers.

John Reed, in his celebrated book *Ten Days that Shook the World* gives a graphic eye-witness account of these mass meetings, which were held at all hours of the day and night, **addressed by Bolsheviks, left SRs, soldiers recently arrived from the front, and even anarchists.** Even in the February revolution, there had been few meetings such as this. And all spoke with one voice: "Down with Kerensky's government!" "Down with the war!" "All power to the Soviets!"

### **Revolutionary Petrograd**

The power base of the Provisional Government had shrunk practically to nothing. Even those conservative regiments drafted in from the front became infected by the mood of revolutionary Petrograd. The support for the Provisional Government in the capital collapsed immediately the workers began to move. The insurrection in Petrograd was a virtually

bloodless affair.

Some years later, the celebrated Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein made a film called *October*, which contains a famous scene of the storming of the Winter Palace, during which there were a few accidents. More people were killed and injured then than in the actual event! The propaganda of the bourgeois against the October revolution is a crude falsification of history. The actual seizure of power took place smoothly, and with very little resistance. The workers, soldiers and sailors occupied one government building after another, without firing a shot.

How was this possible? Only a few months earlier, the position of Kerensky and the Provisional Government appeared to be unassailable. But in the moment of truth, it found no defenders. Its authority had collapsed. The masses deserted it and moved over to the Bolsheviks.

The very idea that all this was the result of a clever conspiracy by a tiny group is worthy of a police mentality, but will not stand a moment's analysis from a scientific point of view. The overwhelming victory of the Bolsheviks at the Soviet Congress underlines the fact that the right-wing reformist leaders had lost all their support.

The Mensheviks and SRs won only one-tenth of the Congress - about 60 people in all. The Soviets voted by a massive majority for the assumption of power.

*Lenin moved two short decrees on peace and the land which were unanimously approved by Congress, which also elected a new central authority, which they called the "Council of People's Commissars," to avoid the bourgeois ministerial jargon. And power was in the hands of the working people.*

### **A New October**

Now, seventy five years later, the film of history appears to be being played in reverse. The Soviet working class has paid a terrible price for the crimes of Stalinism. The collapse of the bureaucratic regime has been the prelude to an attempt to move back to capitalism. However, as Lenin used to say "history knows all sorts of transformations." On the road of capitalism, there is no future for the working people.

On the basis of their experience, the workers of the former USSR will come to understand that fact. The old ideas, programme and traditions will be re-discovered. The basis will be laid for a new edition of the October Revolution, on a qualitatively higher basis, not only in the former Soviet Union, but on a worldwide scale. ☆



# Again, on the Soviets and the Party in a Proletarian Revolution



In our country, both in 1905 and in 1917, the soviets of workers' deputies grew out of the movement itself as its natural organizational form at a certain stage of the struggle. But the young European parties, who have more or less accepted soviets as a "doctrine" and "principle," always run the danger of treating soviets as a fetish, as some self — sufficing factor in a revolution. Yet, in spite of the enormous advantages of soviets as the organs of struggle for power, there may well be cases where the insurrection may unfold on the basis of other forms of organization (factory committees, trade unions, etc.) and soviets may spring up only during the insurrection itself, or even after it has achieved victory, as organs of state power.

by Leon Trotsky

Most highly instructive from this standpoint is the struggle which Lenin launched after the July days against the fetishism of the organizational form of soviets. In proportion as the SRs and Menshevik soviets became, in July, organizations openly driving the soldiers into an offensive and crushing the Bolsheviks, to that extent the revolutionary movement of the proletarian masses was obliged and compelled to seek new paths and channels. Lenin indicated the factory committees as the organizations of the struggle for power. (See, for instance, the reminiscences of Comrade Ordzhonikidze.) It is very likely that the movement would have proceeded on those lines if it had not been for the Kornilov uprising, which forced the conciliationist soviets to defend themselves and made it possible for the Bolsheviks to imbue them with a new revolutionary vigor, binding them closely to the masses through the left, i.e., Bolshevik wing.

This question is of enormous international importance, as was shown by the recent German experience. It was in Germany that soviets were several times created as organs of insurrection without an insurrection taking place — and as organs of state power — without any power. This led to the following: in 1923, the movement of broad proletarian and semi — proletarian masses began to crystallize around the factory committees, which in the main fulfilled all the functions assumed by our own soviets in the period preceding the direct struggle for power. Yet, during August and September 1923, several comrades advanced the proposal that we should proceed to the immediate creation of soviets in Germany. After a long and heated discussion this proposal was rejected, and rightly so. In view of the fact that the factory committees had already become in action the rallying centers of the

revolutionary masses, soviets would only have been a parallel form of organization, without any real content, during the preparatory stage. They could have only distracted attention from the material targets of the insurrection (army, police, armed bands, railways, etc.) by fixing it on a self — contained organizational form. And, on the other hand, the creation of soviets as such, prior to the insurrection and apart from the immediate tasks of the insurrection, would have meant an open proclamation "We mean to attack you!" The government, compelled to "tolerate" the factory committees insofar as the latter had become the rallying centers of great masses, would have struck at the very first soviet as an official organ of an "attempt" to seize power. The communists would have had to come out in defense of the soviets as purely organizational entities. The decisive struggle would have broken out not in order to seize or defend any material positions, nor at a moment chosen by us — a moment when the insurrection would flow from the conditions of the mass movement; no, the struggle would have flared up over the soviet "banner," at a moment chosen by the enemy and forced upon us. In the meantime, it is quite clear that the entire preparatory work for the insurrection could have been carried out successfully under the authority of the factory and shop committees, which were already established as mass organizations and which were constantly growing in numbers and strength; and that this would have allowed the party to manoeuvre freely with regard to fixing the date for the insurrection. Soviets, of course, would have had to arise at a certain stage. It is doubtful whether, under the above mentioned conditions, they would have arisen as the direct organs of insurrection, in the very fire of the conflict, because of the risk of creat-

ing two revolutionary centers at the most critical moment. An English proverb says that you must not swap horses while crossing a stream. It is possible that soviets would have been formed after the victory at all the decisive places in the country. In any case, a triumphant insurrection would inevitably have led to the creation of soviets as organs of state power.

It must not be forgotten that in our country the soviets grew up in the "democratic" stage of the revolution, becoming legalized, as it were, at that stage, and subsequently being inherited and utilized by us. This will not be repeated in the proletarian revolutions of the West. There, in most cases, the soviets will be created in response to the call of the communists; and they will consequently be created as the direct organs of proletarian insurrection. To be sure, it is not at all excluded that the disintegration of the bourgeois state apparatus will have become quite acute before the proletariat is able to seize power; this would create the conditions for the formation of soviets as the open organs of preparing the insurrection. But this is not likely to be the general rule. Most likely, it will be possible to create soviets only in the very last days, as the direct organs of the insurgent masses. Finally, it is quite probable that such circumstances will arise as will make the soviets emerge either after the insurrection has passed its critical stage, or even in its closing stages as organs of the new state power. All these variants must be kept in mind so as to safeguard us from falling into organizational fetishism, and so as not to transform the soviets from what they ought to be flexible and living form of struggle into an organizational "principle" imposed upon the movement from the outside, disrupting its normal development. ✧



# Russia's Chechen war - storm clouds over the Caucasus

On a world scale, one crisis follows another. Scarcely have the echoes of the bombs in Kosovo died away than a new conflict has erupted in the Caucasus. The pages of the western press are full of stories of death, destruction and human misery on a vast scale. What is the meaning of this war and what attitude should socialists take towards it?

by Alan Woods



The last time Russia tried to launch a "small victorious war" against Chechnya in the mid-1990s, it ended disastrously. It dragged on for two years, was a huge financial drain, caused at least 80,000 dead, and ended in a humiliating defeat. Since 1996 Chechnya won a temporary and unstable de facto "independence". But this situation could not last. On its own, landlocked Chechnya could hardly be viable, even without the external pressure from Russia. Moreover, the reactionary nature of Chechen nationalism played a fatal role. The secessionists seriously miscalculated when they tried to play the Islamic card and intervened in the neighbouring states of Dagestan and Ingushetia, despite the fact that most people in these republics, as in Chechnya itself, are not Islamic fanatics, but inclined to secularism. The threat to establish Islamic fundamentalist regimes on its southern borders was too much for Moscow to swallow. Now the Chechens stand to lose the de facto independence they had won. Russia cannot accept the total loss of the Caucasus, which would mean the entry of American imperialism into its strategically important Southern flank. There is also the little matter of the enormous oil and mineral reserves to consider. It is clear that the Russian army is prepared to carry matters to the end in order to "pacify" Chechnya—even if that means laying waste the whole country.

The offensive in Chechnya was preceded by a series of bomb explosions in Moscow and other Russian cities. This caused widespread panic in the population and was immediately blamed on Chechen

terrorists. However, to this day no clear evidence has been produced to confirm these accusations. No Chechen group has ever claimed responsibility. The nature of the targets is also very strange. In the past, Islamic terrorism has been directed against targets such as American embassies. But this time the targets were residential flats, mostly in poor areas. The bombings produced results that were useful to the Russian government and the general staff, but not to Chechnya. The mood of anti-Chechen hysteria whipped up by the mass media served to prepare the masses psychologically for the new offensive. In all likelihood it was a provocation organised by a section of the ruling clique. The deaths of ordinary working class Russians would be a matter of small consequence to these elements. As a result, the war has been generally popular in Russia and Putin's support in the opinion polls has increased to the point that he is being spoken of as a possible candidate for the presidency.

The war has proceeded with spectacular brutality. It is being carried out with the traditional unconcern for human life that has always characterised the Russian general staff. They have never treated the peoples of the Caucasus very gently, as the bloody history of the tsarist conquest of the region shows. But the anti-Russian propaganda in the West reeks of hypocrisy. They are no more concerned with the fate of the Chechens than they were with the Kurds or the Kosovar Albanians. To the degree that the present conflict is part of a wider struggle for control of the Caucasus, the West is also an interested party and

largely responsible for the wars that plague the region. Its aims have nothing to do with morality or humanitarianism, but consist of a cold, calculating manoeuvre to undermine Russia's influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia in order to get possession of the oil and mineral wealth of that region.

The West looks on in pretended horror as the Russian army proceeds to reduce the towns and villages of Chechnya to rubble—conveniently forgetting that they did exactly the same in Yugoslavia. But whereas the Americans lost no time in issuing threats and ultimatums to Belgrade over Kosovo in order to justify their aggression against Yugoslavia, this time they are extremely reticent. After all the hue and cry over Kosovo, the Americans and British have fallen strangely silent over Chechnya. That is because of the shameful way they bombed Yugoslavia. How can they complain now about the Russian bombing of Grozny? That Christian moralist Tony Blair has limited the extent of his moral outrage to two letters to Moscow, which no doubt will have the Russian generals trembling in their boots!

The Russian generals will only answer—with every justification—that they have only followed the example of NATO in Yugoslavia. True, some politicians in Moscow are getting concerned about Western calls for negotiations with the Chechens. After all, this will cause difficulties with the IMF! But in fact the response from the West has been muted. After Yugoslavia, what can they say? More to the point, since Russia is not Yugoslavia, what can they do? In any case, the opinions of western governments is not upper-



most in the minds of the Russian military at this moment in time! The reason for Western reticence is obvious. NATO dares not issue a direct military challenge to Russia. This, indeed, was one of the main motives of the Russian army—to show the world that they are still “masters in their own house”, and no longer prepared to be humiliated before the entire world. The Chechen war is intended as a display of Russian military power, to show the world—not just the Caucasus—that Russia is not to be trifled with.

### The military and the Kremlin

The new war in Chechnya is a further evidence of a shift of power in Russia in the direction of the military. The generals are now clearly in the saddle. Not only are they deciding the war agenda in Chechnya, but they are doing so without regard to the opinions of Yeltsin and his clique. Ten years of privatisation and “market economics” have not only bankrupted Russia. They have led to a serious deterioration of the army’s fighting capacity. The military have not received proper investment for ten years. This means they are probably ten years behind America now. And it is clear that they are seething with discontent. They have decided to go their own way, regardless of what Yeltsin and his clique think or say.

Once having got a taste of political power, the officer caste will soon get used to it. Eventually, they will ask themselves why they need the civilian politicians—that corrupt pack of thieves and traitors—at all. The perspective of a coup grows more likely as the crisis becomes deeper and no party shows a way out of the mess. Here the leaders of the so-called Communist Party have played a fatal role. Having capitulated to capitalism and limited themselves to playing games in parliament and flirting with the military and nationalism, they are preparing the way for a coup.

Although Russia has achieved a partial stabilisation after the collapse of August 1998, it is clear that the situation in Russia cannot be maintained. The August economic collapse was a mortal blow against the market reformers, and the war in Kosovo was a further nail in their coffin. Moscow is in the grip of a constant crisis. This is now affecting the most sensitive centres of power, including the army, which is rapidly becoming alienated from the pro-western clique that has bankrupted and



humiliated Russia. At a certain point there will be a further economic collapse, which will have the most profound effects. Already there is a massive reaction against the market, against “reform”, against capitalism, against the West and against America. The Kosovo crisis acted as a catalyst which brought all these tendencies to the surface. Now the Chechen war has carried matters one stage further.

So far, the war has been going well for Russia. Having concentrated enormous forces in the region, they have imitated the tactics used by NATO in Kosovo, using heavy artillery, rocket and air bombardments to subdue the enemy, while avoiding costly fighting on the ground. They have showed themselves prepared to use the most brutal methods, razing villages and even towns. They appear to have surrounded Grozny, the capital, as well as other towns. Any suggestion of peace initiatives at this stage will therefore only infuriate the generals. The Russian commander in Chechnya, General Vladimir Shamnaov, has publicly stated that he and his colleagues would resign rather than obey an order to stop fighting. If a ceasefire were called, “some believe the country would be driven to the brink of civil war,” he warned ominously.

The situation in Russia is very unstable. Serious commentators in the West are under no illusions about the perspectives. They are afraid that the whole of the reform programme will go into reverse. In fact the only way to begin to solve the crisis would be through the restitution of a nationalised planned economy. Given the degree of collapse, it is astonishing how the nascent bourgeoisie has managed to hold the line for so long in Russia. The only thing that is propping them up is the betrayal of Zyuganov and the leaders of

the Communist Party which permitted them to achieve a temporary and very fragile stabilisation. The war in Chechnya was clearly provoked by the Kremlin as a diversion. This can have a temporary effect but will eventually turn into its opposite.

### Crisis of the regime

The war in Chechnya is a turning-point for the Russian military. They have decided to go their own way, regardless of what Yeltsin and his clique think or say. But, having got a taste of political power, as we explained earlier the officer caste will soon get used to it. Inevitably they will wonder why they need the corrupt pack of thieves and traitors that make up the civilian politicians at all.

So far, because of the tactics employed by the Russian army, the war has cost relatively few (Russian) lives. But as time passes the war’s popularity will begin to decline. This would especially be the case in the event of a bloody conflict on the ground. Putin’s popularity has sharply increased. The private Public Opinion Foundation reports 29 percent of voters intend to vote for Putin in the presidential election—up from just two percent in September. This compares with about 20 percent each for CPRF leader Zyuganov and ex-Prime minister Primakov. But this is not necessarily an unmixed blessing for the Prime Minister. Boris Yeltsin is notoriously jealous of popular prime ministers, and has a habit of suddenly removing them. After three months in office, it may soon be time to get rid of him! The constant crises and in-fighting at the top is a reflection of the impasse of the regime. This must be resolved one way or the other. If Putin is removed in the middle of the war, it may turn out to be one governmental crisis too



much.

The tendency towards Bonapartism is clear. Moscow is buzzing with rumours and the press is full of the type of comments tending to justify dictatorship: "Society is ready to accept an iron hand," says Nikolai Petrov, an analyst at the Carnegie Institute in Moscow. "Democratic needs are on a back-burner," adds Igor Mintusov, chairman of Moscow political consulting agency Niccolo M. Putin, a KGB bureaucrat, is not too much bothered about democracy, in any case. He has already reinstated controls on the media—as if they were not sufficiently controlled already!

A fight to the finish in Chechnya sooner or later will mean extensive ground fighting. This will entail many Russian casualties, which will affect the mood at home. There are certain indications that this process may already be beginning. According to some opinion polls in Russia (although these are often unreliable), only a third of Russians surveyed said that they believed their forces would win the conflict. In another poll, reported by the Guardian on November 11, two-thirds of Russians said that they were concerned or "ashamed" about the conflict.

From a purely military point of view, the outcome of the present war is not in doubt. The Russian steamroller will flatten all opposition. If in the process they also flatten the whole country, they will not be much concerned about it—just as the British and Americans were unconcerned about the flattening of Kosovo and Yugoslavia. Having taken all the main centres, Russian forces will push the remaining rebels into the southern mountains, isolating them in the Winter and then chopping them up piecemeal. This could easily lead to Russian incursions across the Georgian border in hot pursuit of Chechen rebels. Thus, the war will tend to spread.

The whole of the Caucasus is now a battleground between Russia and the West, with Turkey acting as the puppet of US imperialism. Russia is exerting heavy pressure on Georgia, whose president Eduard Shevardnadze is striving to join NATO. This is like a red rag to a bull for Moscow. The recent assassination of the prime minister of Armenia and other MPs underlines the chronic instability in the whole region. It has tied Armenia more closely to Russia and further isolated Georgia. The storm clouds of war hang over the Caucasus, threatening millions

with new horrors of death, destruction and misery.

### **For a Leninist policy!**

This war will not solve anything, but can be a spawning ground for terrorism in the future. The indiscriminate use of brute force by Moscow will sow the seeds of bitterness and hatred which can last for a generation. This is not in the interests of either Chechens or Russians. Although Moscow can take Grozny and occupy the country, it can be faced with years of terrorism and guerrilla activity costing countless lives and further embittering relations between the peoples. But the ruling clique in Moscow, true heirs of the old Stalinist school, do not care about the sufferings of millions, as long as their power and privileges remain intact. They will answer terrorism with more repression and violence, irrespective of the cost in human lives and suffering.

It goes without saying that Marxists condemn the bullying of small nations in the Caucasus and defend the right of self-determination of the Chechens and all the other peoples of the region. But this does not exhaust the matter. Lenin was for the defence of the right of self-determination, but he was also implacably opposed to bourgeois nationalism and separatism. We are opposed to the attempt to compel the Chechens to accept rule from Moscow by the use of naked force. But that does not mean we support the madness of the separatists or Islamic reaction. In fact, it appears that the actions of the nationalists, which have brought nothing but ruin to Chechnya, have lost them the support of the people. Compared to the nightmare of the last ten years, the period of the USSR must now seem like paradise lost to most Chechens.

The only real solution to the problems of the Chechen people would be the fullest autonomy within a Socialist Federation of the Caucasus in a voluntary union with a socialist Russia. Separation on a capitalist basis would represent no solution. The collapse of the USSR has proved to be a disaster for all the peoples. There were and are sound economic reasons for maintaining the union. But on the basis of a totalitarian bureaucratic regime, this became synonymous with oppression from Moscow. Now any attempt to forcibly reunite the old republics of the USSR on the basis of gangster capitalism in Russia

would be an even greater disaster. The prior condition for the emancipation of the peoples of the ex-USSR is the overthrow of capitalism—above all in Russia, but also in all the other former republics of the Soviet Union.

What is required is a democratic socialist regime in which all the peoples of the former Soviet Union can voluntarily come together on the basis of complete equality and fraternity. By pooling their colossal human and natural resources in a common plan of production, they could quickly eradicate all the poverty, backwardness and suffering which now condemns millions to a life of fear and misery. On the basis of modern technology, it would be possible to do what could not be done after 1917—to begin to move in the direction of socialism. The old oppressive state would be replaced by a free association of the peoples united in the common purpose of building a new and genuinely civilised society in which the nightmare of war, chauvinism and ethnic strife would be merely bad memories of a barbarous past. The vision of a genuinely democratic soviet federation would have a tremendous impact on all the oppressed peoples of Asia, beginning with Iran and Turkey. As in 1917-20, the example of the Soviet Union would kindle a beacon of hope that would ignite the flames of socialist revolution throughout the world. That is the only goal worth fighting for at the dawn of the new millennium. ✧



# That was the century that was

The Christian measure of human history is not the only one. But, after the domination of Western capitalism over the last 200 hundred years, it's increasingly become the calendar of the globe. Jewish, Muslim, Chinese and other calendars have been submerged by the dominant religious faith of the first millennium. In the second millennium, Christianity was proselytised by the swords of Spanish and Portuguese armies in 'Latin' America, by the missionaries brought by slave traders to Africa, and finally by merchant adventurers to Asia. Now we 'celebrate' the start of the third millennium because that calendar dominates, although, of course, the history of the human species and even of human 'civilisation' is much, much older.

by Michael Roberts

But what is the biggest lesson of the last thousand years that we should take into the next? The most startling point is that in the first millennium there was practically no growth in global output - subsistence was the name of the game. And for three-quarters of the second millennium, the increase in output of human labour time was very gradual. It has only been in the last 250 years that world GDP has accelerated, with the onset of industrial capitalism. Between the supposed birth of 'Christ' and the year 1000, world GDP grew just 10%! Between 1000 and 1800 it rose less than four times. But from then on, it has jumped 40 times! Such is the power of capitalism to develop the productive forces of human labour power, something Marx so accurately predicted in his short essay, the Communist Manifesto, as early as 1848.

Along with the increase in global output has been the explosion of the number of human beings. The population remained stagnant during the first millennium and then grew slowly up to 1800. But it has multiplied by six times since then. And the UN has just announced the sixth billion person this year.

With the rocketing population has come urbanisation, the other great phenomenon of capitalist millennium. Up to 1800, the human world was largely an agricultural society. Until then less than 15% of the human population lived in towns. Now across the globe, 80% of the industrialised world's population are city dwellers and urbanisation is sweeping the so-called

developing world too. In 1800, there were just six cities with more than half a million people (Peking, London, Canton, Tokyo, Constantinople and Paris, in that order). Now, the combined population of six of the largest cities (Mexico City, Tokyo, New York, London, Chongqing and Shanghai) are equal to all the people in globe's towns in 1700!

Capitalism has exploited the productive forces as no other social system before it. It brought the division of labour to speed up production; it brought the use of technology to raise productivity; and it brought production for sale and for a profit to drive the owners of capital harder and harder to exploit the labour time of the working population - a truly stupendous combination of labour, technology and trade.

Although capitalism may have brought more combined development of the globe than ever seen before, it also brought the most uneven development - both between the owners of capital and the owners of nothing but labour power, and also geographically across the world between the owners of property. And it brought the most horrendous wars, pogroms and holocausts the human race has ever experienced. Capitalism is global, but so is misery and cruelty it brought with it.

The world at the end of second millennium has never been so unequal. On average the 7m Swiss have annual incomes 113 times the 200m Indonesians. Switzerland's total annual income is four times larger than Indonesia's. India with a population nearing 1bn generates the same income as seven million Swiss enjoy.

For the average owner of human labour power across the globe, the situation is worse than it was at the beginning of this century of industrial manufacturing capitalism. When Henry Ford launched his model T Ford motor car, he paid (reluctantly) his assembly workers about \$750 a year, equivalent to the price of two of his cars. The Wall Street Journal at the time said these were 'criminally high' wages. Now auto workers in Brazil or China earn less



than \$1000 a year, less than one-fifteenth of the cost of cars they make.

And economic wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a minute few. The US stock market is valued at \$11 trillion, or 53% of the world's stock market value. Yet Americans are just 5% of the world's people. And we know (from this column and elsewhere) that even that wealth is wildly unequally distributed within the US. Bill Gates, the world's first \$100 billionaire has more personal wealth than is valued in all stock markets of Asia outside Japan.

Alongside this grotesque accumulation of capital in the second millennium has been the poverty of the overwhelming majority. Life expectancy in Asia and Africa does not exceed 50 years. Infant mortality is still one in ten. In the US there are 2000 doctors for every one million people; in Indonesia, there are less than 100. Only 10% of the children of the world's poorest countries get a secondary education. The World Bank estimates that 1.5bn people earn less than \$1.50 a day.

As we go into the new Christian era, never before have there been such huge differences in the living standards for such a large number of people across the globe. In the last 200 years, GDP per head has risen 20 times in the rich 'North-West' while it has increased only 2.5 times in the poor 'South-East'. In 1800, the UK was the world's richest country with an annual income per person less than twice that of the world's poorest nations. Now the richest countries have GDPs per head that are 50 times larger than the poorest nations.

In 1800, just two decades before Marx's birth, everyone in the world was basically poor except for a few rich aristocrats, landowners and merchants and wealth was pretty evenly spread between



nations. Now after 200 years of industrial capitalism, most people in the world are 'basically poor' except for a few multi-billionaire capitalist moguls and their hangers-on. But the difference is that the wealth is very unevenly spread between nations as well.

Marx predicted this uneven global development in his book, *Capital*. "it is not true that the most fruitful soil is the most fitted for growth of the capitalist mode of production. This mode is based on the dominion of man over nature." Thus, the very advantage that the world's richest nations in terms of natural resources had, was a disadvantage in the era of modern industrial capitalism ("where nature is too lavish, she keeps man in hand, like a child in leading strings. She does not impose on him any necessity to develop himself"). Thus, the countries with a need to increase agricultural productivity to survive led the way towards modern capitalism ('necessity is the mother of invention'). As Marx said: "it is the necessity of bringing a natural force under the control of society, or economising and of subduing on a large scale by the work of man's hand, that first plays the decisive part in the history of industry".

So it was that agricultural productivity rose first in the West and along with the development of towns, merchants and innovators. With superior technology (and arms technology in particular), the capitalist merchants and their private soldiers were able to conquer whole continents and subjugate them to their will in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Then in the era of colonial domination of the 19th century, the imperialist industrialising economies of Europe were able to destroy the industrial buds of growth in Asia, Africa and the Americas. The proportion of industrial workers in the Indian population actually fell from 19% in 1810 to just 8% in 1900. Indian manufacturing and construction workers had reached 35% of the population in 1881. By 1917 they were just 17%!

As a result, the living standards of the 'developing' world were paralysed. In 1780 the daily wage of an English urban worker was worth about 7 kgs of wheat, for an Indian worker it was 6 kgs. By 1910 an English worker could earn the equivalent of 33 kgs of wheat while there had been no change for the Indian worker. Now a worker in the industrialised countries earning £60 a day (or £300 a week, the supposed average wage in the UK) gets the equiva-

lent of 1250 kilos of wheat compared to an Indian worker's 37 kilos.

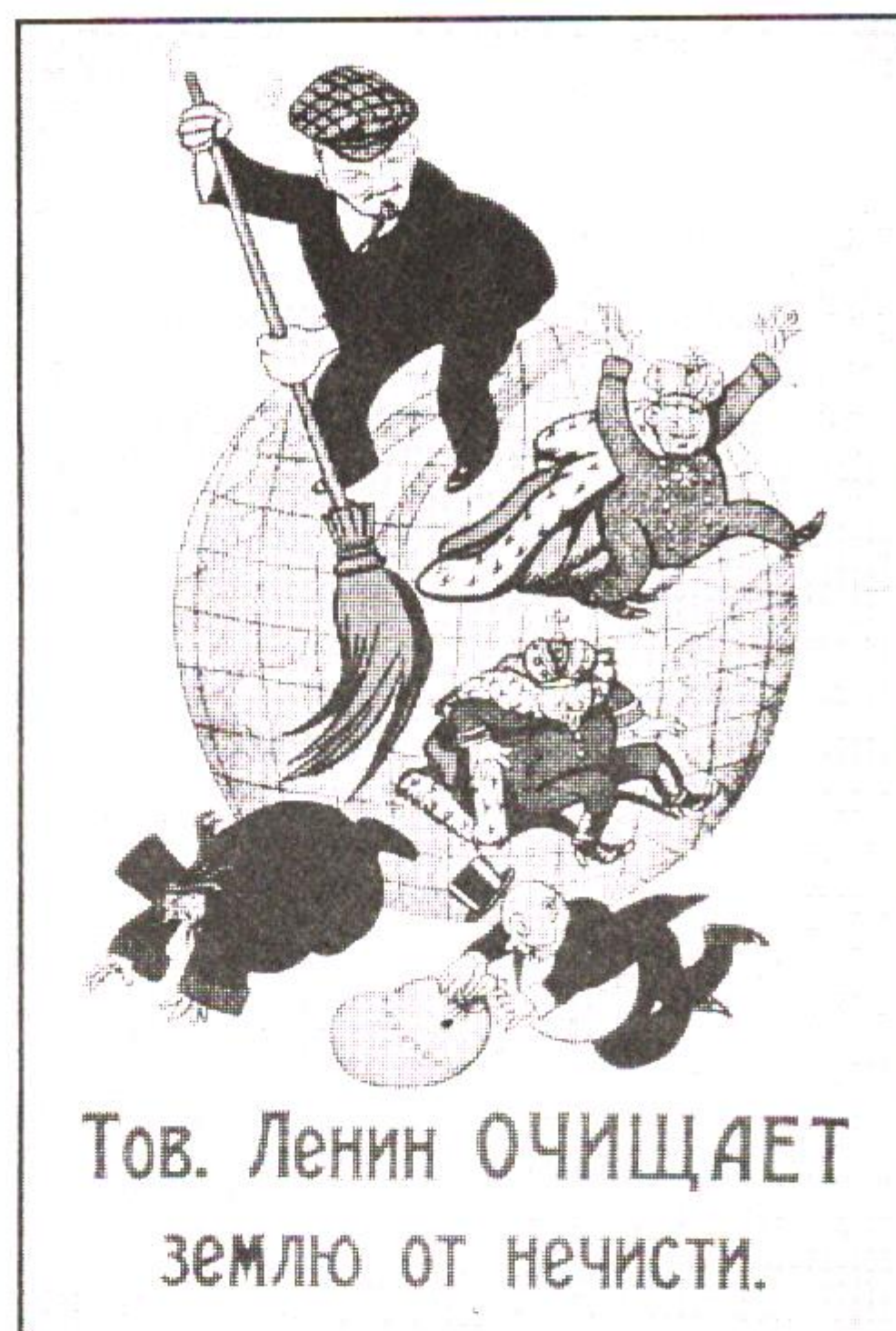
Under capitalism, those who are first are able to crush those who follow. The last two centuries of industrial capitalism have proved that. Far from capitalism spreading its 'prosperity' across the globe, as the ideologists of capital propound, its tentacles have destroyed the ability of the vast majority of the world to develop their natural resources and to raise their living standards.

Even worse, the exploitation of the globe's natural resources is now increasingly in the control of just a few thousand multinational companies, mainly owned by people in the imperialist 'West'. According to a new UN study, the world's 60,000 international capitalist companies produce 25% of the world's output and over 50% of the world's industrial output. As Marx foresaw, modern capitalism has become global. While world trade has been rising at about 7% a year in the last decade, the movement of capital across borders has been rising at over 12% a year.

This very expansion is sowing the seeds of destruction for the capitalist system of human organisation. For, as inequalities grow, so has social instability. The 18th century was one of wars (colonial seven-year war) and revolutions (French) in Europe, the birth place of industrial capitalism. The 19th century was even more unstable as wars (Napoleonic, Prussian), revolutions (1830, 1848, 1870) and counter-revolutions scarred Europe and the US (the American civil war, 1861).

The 20th century was unprecedented in its wars, engulfing the world twice as imperialism fought over the wealth exploited in the 19th century. There was a war somewhere in the world every day of the century. The extent of the technical power to destroy human beings (and the natural world with it) is now awesome. And so is the division of wealth and power between the tiny minority who rule and the vast majority of the ruled. Either that will be swept away, or the world we live in (and us) will be as extinct as the dinosaurs by the end of the next century.

The other unprecedented feature of the 20th century was the struggle of a new force for change, the working class - the class that owns nothing but its ability to work. It has become now the largest class in the globe, exceeding that of the peasantry. It first fought for dominance in the



Russian revolution of 1917 and then in successive struggles across Europe, Asia and Latin America.

So far it has failed to become the dominant class in human society. But it took the capitalist class about 300 years from 1500 before it became dominant both economically and politically. The working class has had a relatively short run at it. And, as the last two centuries of the second millennium have shown, the world in all its economic, social and political elements, is speeding up at a geometric rate. It won't take the new class so long to succeed to dominance as it did the capitalist class.

And this new class, for the first time in human history, is the majority. As such, it stands for: from each according to its means; to each according to its needs. That's because the mode of production upon which the working class stands is social, not private as for capitalism. If the working class succeeds in establishing its mode of production around the world, that will herald an even stronger expansion of human productivity than capitalism did in the second millennium. But this time it will be evenly, not unevenly, produced and distributed. That will take the human race onto a new plane of prosperity for the majority and bring the end of social conflict, wars and genocide. That's the real message of the new millennium. ✧



# Indonesian masses demand change from new President

Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur as he is popularly nicknamed, became the third ever Indonesian president amidst great hopes for economic, political and social change. His government is a compromise between the so-called "reforming" bourgeoisie and the interests of those capitalists/military layers who benefited most from the Suharto era. Even if the opinion polls indicate a high degree of support and confidence in the new government, very rapidly the masses will take their fate in their own hands, because this government will be unable to resolve the urgent questions facing the poor masses. Although the economic situation stands first in people's preoccupations, the most immediate threat to the new government comes from the risk of disintegration of the Indonesian Archipelago.

by Jean Duval

The centrifugal forces which have reappeared following the end of the Suharto regime are now blowing across the peripheral islands like Malukka, Kalimantan, Irian Jaya and of course Aceh. The impatience of the people of Aceh is very visible. Aceh is a rebellious province in the North of Sumatra where an independence movement has been simmering since the '70's. Since 1989, Aceh has been living under martial law. This has left more than 2,000 people dead and 150,000 displaced. With the example of the independence of East Timor in mind, the Acehnese also want an immediate referendum. Almost 1 million people demonstrated at the beginning of November in Banda, the capital, to demand a referendum on independence.

Gus Dur has blown hot and cold on this question. At one moment he declared his support "in principle" for a referendum, but later claimed that he cannot believe the Aceh people really want to opt out of Indonesia. His solution lies in a combination of political decentralisation, tax pay-backs and partial military withdrawal. The separation of Aceh would raise the prospect of a rapid dissolution of "unitary Indonesia". This will not be accepted by Jakarta. Aceh is economically also very sensitive. A highly industrialised area, investments in gas and oil extraction are heavily concentrated there. The Suharto clan's interests have fused with those of the Aceh Mafia. Suharto's son Bambang Triatmojo, with his Singapore-based company, has a 20-year contract to deliver gas



from PT Arun to East Asia.

With this contract, Bambang's company becomes one of the biggest sea hauliers in Asia, transporting 10 percent of the world's total liquefied natural gas. His company has also expanded into Gulf countries, like Qatar. The military intervention and human rights violations in Aceh are indeed related to the protection of those domestic and foreign capitalist interests.

East Timor shows the real attitude of the Jakarta oligarchy and the military towards the constituent nations of Indonesia. It is a policy of ruthless exploitation and repression in the name of Indonesian nation building. The United Nations intervention in late September has not stopped the country being ruined by the militias and the army. Basic infrastructure was virtually obliterated in the violence led by pro-Jakarta militias. 70% of all buildings have been destroyed and 75% of the population displaced as a result of a scorched earth policy. The militias still continue to intimidate the Timorese refugees in the Western part of the island.

The independence of East Timor will be of course very formal in a surrounding imperialist environment. It will be financially and economically completely dependent on Portugal, Australia, the IMF/World Bank and the oil companies. The National Council of Timorese Resistance, grouping all political forces, has a policy of submission to those interests. Nobel laureate Jose Ramos-Horta, the diplomatic face of the East Timorese independence movement, caused some nervousness in the oil industry when he said earlier this year that he wanted the Timor Gap Treaty (arranging

the royalties between Indonesia and the oil companies) to be renegotiated. But he has since backed away from that stance and taken a more conciliatory approach. "The only thing wrong with the treaty is who signed the treaty," he said recently. "There is nothing wrong with the terms ... No mining company should have any concern whatsoever. In the end it's in our national interest."

But the new era opening with the election of Gus Dur will see the increase in the levels of organisation and activity of the farmers and workers' movement which is still quite divided. It is the increasing political and social opposition of the workers' movement in particular which will unmask the real nature of this government, as an attempt at cosmetic reform to stave off the revolutionary potential. The nightmare of national disintegration can only be averted with a new common cement in the form of a common social identity in the struggle for a democratic, voluntary and socialist federation of the Indonesian islands. ✧



## Students fight for free education

Student anger against tuition fees and New Labour's attacks on education has reached new heights with a demonstration of around 15,000 in central London on November 25th. With a carnival like atmosphere, marching to the sound of drums and whistles, students from all over the country came to voice their protest against the imposition of fees and for the restoration of grants. As Dawn from the London School of Economics pointed out, "This is much better than last year, there's lots more people and its much louder."

**Tom Rollings, St. Andrews University**

An increasing number of young people are being excluded from entering higher and further education because they can't afford it. At the same time there are now thousands of students entering a lifetime of debt, struggling simultaneously in low paid and part time jobs to make ends meet. This means that students not only struggle financially but also have less time for their studies. It also made it more difficult for many to participate in the demonstration held on a Thursday.

The effect of these pressures has been seen in local protests from the occupation of Goldsmiths to the rent strike at Cambridge. The national demonstration called by NUS provided a focal point for this anger.

Whilst applauding the decision to call the demo, this was in response to the pressure from below from students keen to fightback. Had more effort been made to build the demo by the NUS leadership it could undoubtedly have been even bigger.

Even so the thousands who marched through London provide a clear indication, and a warning to Blair and Blunkett, that students are not just going to sit back and take these attacks. What we need from the NUS leadership now is a clear lead and a way forward. Demonstrations like this mustn't just be used to let off steam, they must be part of a campaign combining local, regional and national events, drawing in education workers, sixth form, further education and school students all of whom have something to gain from fighting to scrap the fees and restore the grant.

To those who ask where the money should come from, then what about the £12 billion budget surplus the government

is sitting on. For that matter what about the £130 million given to Indonesia because

they couldn't afford to pay for the hawk fighters they had ordered from the government - that's about the same amount that students are being asked to pay each year in fees.

The demo was a great success. Now the NUS leadership must build on that success. If they don't then students will have to take the initiative themselves and build a new leadership from below. In every town and city a struggle should be organised against fees that draws in lecturers, teachers, FE and school students. A struggle involving local action and national action, linking students and workers, can defeat these attacks and win free education as a right and not a privilege. The Tories tried to introduce fees in the mid-eighties. They were defeated then by a massive student movement and the fact that the Miners' strike coincided with student protests. A movement now uniting the experience and organisation of trade unionists with the enthusiasm, the anger and the elan of the students would be unstoppable,

70 plus copies of our new publication Youth for Socialism were sold, demonstrating that students are interested in socialist ideas as well as fighting fees. ✨

## Stop repression against student activists in Mexico

On November 5th, 50,000 students on strike from the UNAM university marched through the streets of Mexico city, despite government threats of using anti-riot police.

250,000 students at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, have been on strike for over six months now against the introduction of tuition fees of about 210 US dollars, which would prevent all students from working class families enrolling.

The beginning of the movement coincided with the mass mobilisation of workers at the electricity company against privatisation. Both struggles combined and we saw hundreds of thousands of workers marching together with the students, including a demonstration of half a million people.

The students have also got the solidarity of university teachers and workers and their struggle has got the support of the population at large. In October 350,000 people participated in a poll organised by the students with 90 per cent supporting the students' demands.

The students occupy the university premises where they celebrate weekly mass meetings which elect representatives to a central strike committee, CGH.

The students committee to defend state education, CEDEP, has actively participated in the strike and was crucial in advancing the proposal for a democratically elected strike committee with representatives from all schools. We have also defended the need to unite with the labour movement and to spread the strike to students of other universities as the only way forward.

Unfortunately the CGH was dominated initially by those who wanted to reach a 'deal' with the rector behind the students' backs. This was decisively rejected in the mass meetings at a majority of schools and a new leadership was elected. The new, more 'radical' CGH has not been able to offer a way out either. This has been going on for more than 6 months and a section of the students is already tired. This is reflected in less attendance at the weekly mass meetings, although students still participate massively in the demonstrations.

CEDEP insists on the need to create a permanent, fighting, democratic and national students' organisation with a clear programme and tactics. Whatever the outcome of the strike this will be proof of the students readiness to fight for their rights.

So far, the students have resisted all

attempts by the authorities to break the strike through slanders in the press, repression, etc. on two separate occasions the university authorities have used the 'porros', gangs of thugs paid by the authorities, to expel the students from the occupied schools. Both times the students, with the support of the local population managed to repel them. Two student leaders were kidnapped by these thugs and severely beaten up before being released.

In a new attempt to stop the movement, the rector has presented 350 court cases against leading activists of the CGH. Some of them already have other court cases pending. We appeal to all youth and student organisations and to the labour movement in general to send protest messages demanding the withdrawal of all court cases and the immediate opening of negotiations with the student representatives to:

**rectoría de la UNAM**  
[www\\_unam@serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx](mailto:www_unam@serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx)  
<http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/rectoria/htm/opinion.html>

**With copies to**  
**Comite General de Huelga**  
**Comité Estudiantil en Defensa de la Escuela Pública**  
[militan@mail.giga.com](mailto:militan@mail.giga.com)  
**And to the paper La Jornada**  
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# KARL MARX

**Karl Marx,**  
by Francis Wheen published by  
4th Estate

**Reviewed by Steve  
Jones**

"It is time to strip away the mythology and try to rediscover Karl Marx the man." So notes author Francis Wheen in the introduction to this new and, for once, reasonably sympathetic biography of Karl Marx.

At the start he comments dryly on the way in which capitalist commentators have taken great care to try and link Marx to crimes from the like of Stalin and Kim Il Sung: "Only a fool could hold Marx responsible for the Gulag; but there is, alas, a ready supply of fools." Anyone who has picked up copies of the assorted tomes on the Russian revolution produced by the likes of Orlando Figes and Richard Pipes will know what he's getting at. Wheen even manages to dig up a book published by a Reverend Richard Wurmbrand as recently as 1976 called (wait for it) 'Was Karl Marx a Satanist?'—evidently something to do with Marx having a very bushy beard!

Wheen also notes that recently many economists have started taking Marx's analysis of the nature of capital quite seriously again. As he says, the question of globalisation was predicted and understood by Marx over a century before the issue became commonplace. However, they study Marx to learn how to make and keep more money. We study Marx for the reasons he intended—to change the world and change it for the better.

Many of those who have reviewed this book have expressed surprise that Marx did indeed live a life the same as everybody else. They seem to assume that Marx spent his whole life from cradle to grave in the British Museum, like a monk, writing and thinking and are therefore quite shocked to discover that he went on pub crawls in the West End of London and the like. So Marx drank and smoked—shocking! Who would have believed it! He also lived in conditions of great poverty, often in ill health, reliant on support from his great friend and collaborator Engels, and produced over 50 volumes of material including his great work on the nature of Capital.

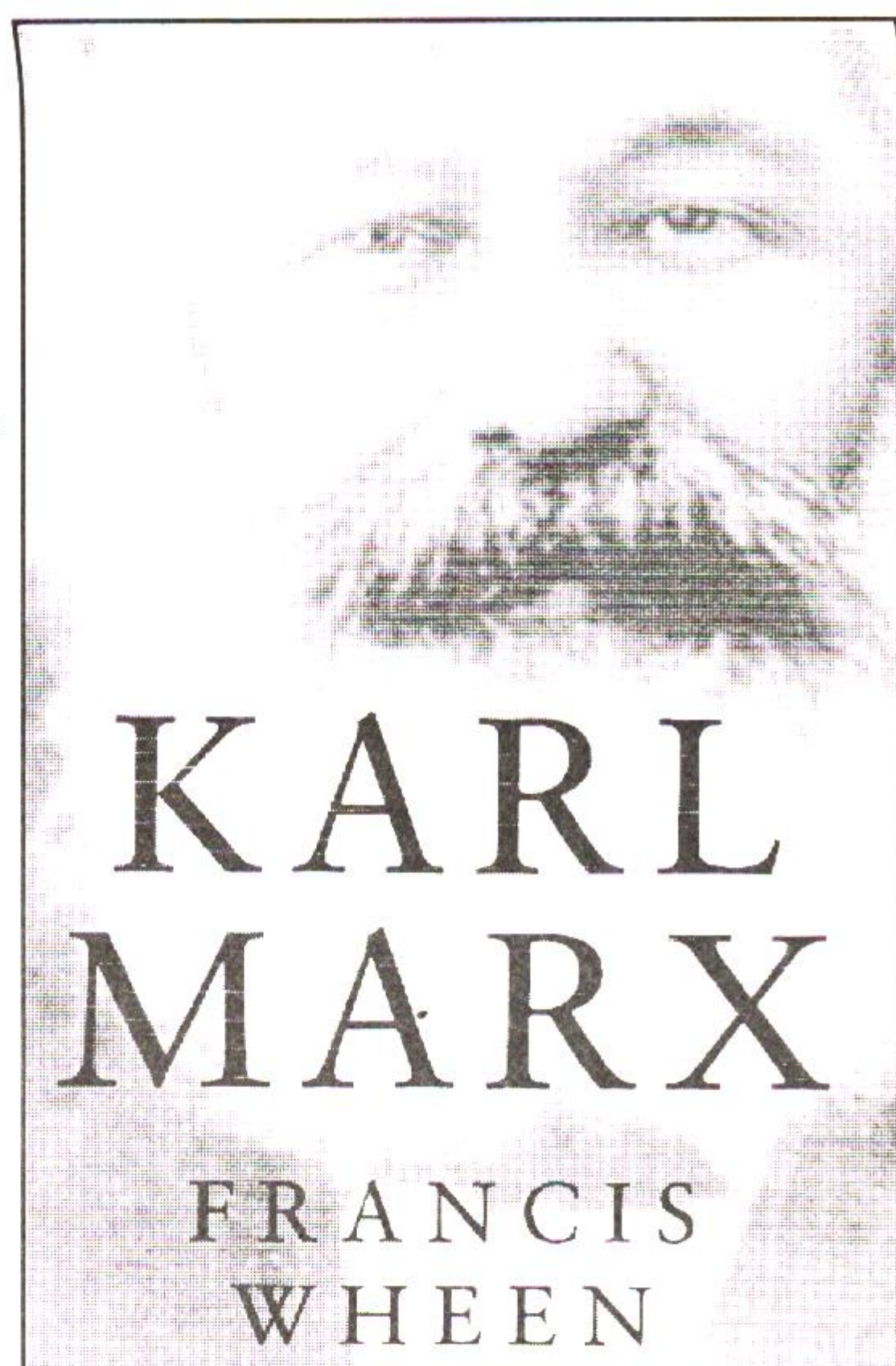
Readers unfamiliar with Marx's early life will find this book very informative. Marx was born in Trier in the Rhineland on

May 5th 1818. A member of a reasonably prosperous family, he went to Berlin University supposedly to study law but very quickly came absorbed by questions of philosophy and, in particular, the ideas of Hegel, joining up with a group of Young Hegelians called the Doctors' Club, where he would first come into conflict with the authorities. Moving first to Bonn and then to Cologne, he found the doors to academic employment shut in his face, so it was that he drifted into journalism, writing for the liberal *Rheinische Zeitung*. Here he quickly became its dominant force, engaging in a daily battle of wits with the official censor. However, it could not last forever, in January 1843 the *Rheinische Zeitung* was closed down by order of the state and Marx moved on to work for an exiles paper in Paris. By this point he had started to develop Hegel's ideas on dialectics linking them to a materialist view of society based on an understanding of the struggle of classes. As Wheen comments "He (Marx) took nothing for granted, turned everything upside down—including society itself... Marx's theory of class struggle was to be refined and embellished over the next few years... but its outline was already clear enough..."

Accepting in 1844 an offer to write for *Vorwärts!*, the one uncensored German language paper left which still adopted a radical line, he began to study in detail the essential writings of British political economy and made full notes and commentaries on them. Wheen makes an telling point here: "Marx's work has often been dismissed as crude dogma, usually by people who give no evidence of having read him. It would be a useful exercise to force these extempore critics—who include... Tony Blair—to study the... manuscripts, which reveal the workings of a ceaselessly inquisitive, subtle and undogmatic mind."

What is clear is that by now Marx had moved far beyond his contemporaries in understanding what Wheen calls the "structural faults of society... and why the wrecking ball was urgently required." At the heart of this was Marx's analysis of the proletariat as a revolutionary class able to resolve the seemingly unresolvable.

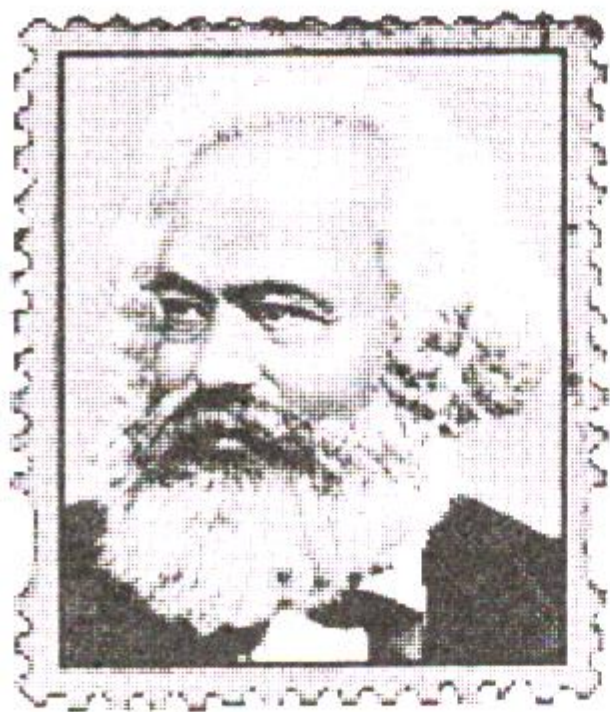
With the writing of the famous Communist Manifesto we enter more familiar territory. Marx's road from here would take him through revolutionary and political



upheavals. To Belgium, to Paris again then on to Germany. A refugee like many in the wake of the failed uprisings of 1848, he ended up in London where, under often desperate conditions, he was to embark on his most important projects, a task which he would continue with until his death in 1883.

Wheen's book does manage to give a graphic, if somewhat odd at times, account of how Marx linked his writings to his practical work in the political movement. At every stage he struggled to see his ideas brought to fruition on the world stage, studying every movement of the working class, every crisis of capitalism. The book's style is clearly aimed at a non-academic readership (so at least it is readable). Although his facts seem well marshalled enough, he does occasionally resort to an interest in scandal and some bizarre touches like reproducing the transcript of a Monty Python sketch! At the end of the day, the best way to assess and study Marx's ideas is to actually read his writings. This book does at least lessen the impression of Marx as just a great thinker. He was more than that, he was a great revolutionary as well. ☆





# MAIL

## CORRESPONDENCE

Socialist Appeal, PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ email: [socappeal@easynet.co.uk](mailto:socappeal@easynet.co.uk)



Dear Comrades,

As we approach the festive season, peoples' minds tend to turn to giving. However, an item which I have just seen in the papers puts the 'giving' into a different light.

For the shops this means ensuring that you give as much of your hard earned dosh as possible to them so that they can record record profits and pay their bosses nice fat bonuses. But, funnily enough, this generosity doesn't extend down to the actual staff on the shop floor. They have to work all manner of hours over this period for, at best, just the normal overtime rate. Many on casual contracts don't even get that. Now I read that the TUC have discovered (about time!) that between 1994 and 1997 bosses pay and extras went up by an average of 16% as against just 4% for their staff. So much for all pulling together in the 'inclusive' society.

Keep up the good work

A reader



Dear Editor,

The obsession that some Labour leaders have with big business is well known. However, a body called Democratic Audit has taken a good look at the various task forces,

policy forums and quangos which the government have been setting up or appointing people to. Evidently of the 2,500 people currently 'serving' on the 320 task forces in existence, over 71% of them are from private or public companies. Against that only 2% are trade unionists and less than 15% come from consumer bodies. Democratic Audit have noted that big business and the City dominate all the main essential bodies often to the exclusion of all others apart from government reps. These bodies are often secretive, unaccountable and can have tremendous power and scope in their activities. They

note that the draft bill for freedom of information would, if it became law, make it even more difficult to see what these bodies are up to. Under the Tories these unelected bodies were all packed with cronies from big business and the like, now it seems things have only got worse under New Labour's somewhat unusual job (for the boys) creation scheme.

Steve Jones (London)



Dear comrades,  
The fact that Ken Livingstone is even on Labour's selection shortlist for the position of London mayor shows how the Millbank

Tendency supporters at the head of the Labour Party are still susceptible to pressure from below. Although the electoral college makes a victory for Ken less likely it does not make such a result impossible. Socialists in the Labour Party and the trade unions must do all we can to mobilise the vote for Ken. This could send a clear message to Tony Blair that anti-democratic practices are not accepted by ordinary people. What is the point in devolution if London is not allowed who it wants as its mayor?

Ken is the obvious choice for Labour and for London. Many have taken to attacking the GLC in an attempt to lose Ken votes. But the GLC gave Labour a lead in London over the Tories which Labour could not achieve nationally at that time. Despite its problems and mistakes, the GLC did create jobs and try and do something about poverty. Most importantly it got more people onto public transport. Tony Blair says this is his aim but then proposes privatising the tube. Railtrack's record is one of inefficiency and a appalling disregard for passengers. Following the Paddington rail disaster surely these same people should not now be put in charge of the Underground. A vote for Ken is a vote against such a potentially devastating policy.

Matthew Willgress, National Policy Forum Youth Representative (Eastern Region)



Dear Comrades,

I read in your journal earlier this year a very interesting article about the Monet exhibition in London. I was thinking about what your author was saying when I paid a visit to

the National Gallery last week to see the special exhibition on Renaissance Florence. Much to my surprise it turns out that as long as 500 years ago the ruling class were using art to promote themselves just as companies today sponsor events to gain publicity and perceived glory. Indeed I suspect some companies could learn a trick or two from the goings on of the Medici family. It's funny how you can see the conflict of the classes in everything if you only look.

Best wishes on your very useful journal and good luck in the new century.

Donna Tello (via e-mail)

**Got any news you want to tell us? What's going on in your school, college or workplace? Do you have any questions about Socialist Appeal?**

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**Through our pages you can appeal for support for your struggle from the labour and trade union movement around the country and internationally, and publicise the events you're involved in. The daily papers don't tell us what really goes on at work, or in school, workers and young people everywhere need to be given that information by you.**

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# 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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# Make it a bumper Xmas!



So there goes another millennium! A thousand years of greed, poverty, warfare, class oppression and general mayhem. Nothing to be proud about there. Reactionaries will no doubt look back and put all this down to good old human nature. We put it down to class society. 150 years ago Marx and Engels described the long march of history as one of uninterrupted and irreconcilable conflict between the classes, between the ruled and the rulers, those who make the wealth and those who profit from it, the many and the few. Of course, the last thousand years has also produced much that we can be proud of—in science, the arts and human achievements.

But all this serves to show is the potential which exists for the human race if it were to be freed from the confines of capitalism. We saw a glimmer of the future with the Russian revolution, where people were able to take control of their own destinies for the first time. That light was snuffed out by the dead weight of Stalinism. Our aim is to make the new century one in which that light shines once more, this time for all the peoples of the world.

However, our resources are still weak. But with your help we can, as the song says, overcome. Everything we have achieved

over the last eight years of publishing Socialist Appeal has been down to the support of our readers. First we had to establish the necessary resources to start the magazine, which was originally printed by commercial printers. Then when we purchased the Olivetti copier we were with your support able to improve the quality of our publication. We needed special appeals to upgrade our computers and purchase additional equipment such as a scanner. Finally last year we were able to purchase our own printing machine and A3 collator so that for the first time we could produce Socialist Appeal in house and to a professional standard (we hope). We also now had the means to produce other documents, leaflets and posters. Again this was only possible with your support. But the fight has not ended...

Why not mark the new millennium by making a special donation. We have launched a festive season drive to try and raise £4000 by the new year. This cash is urgently needed to upgrade and replace essential resources. The excellent donation of over £150 from Glasgow readers and

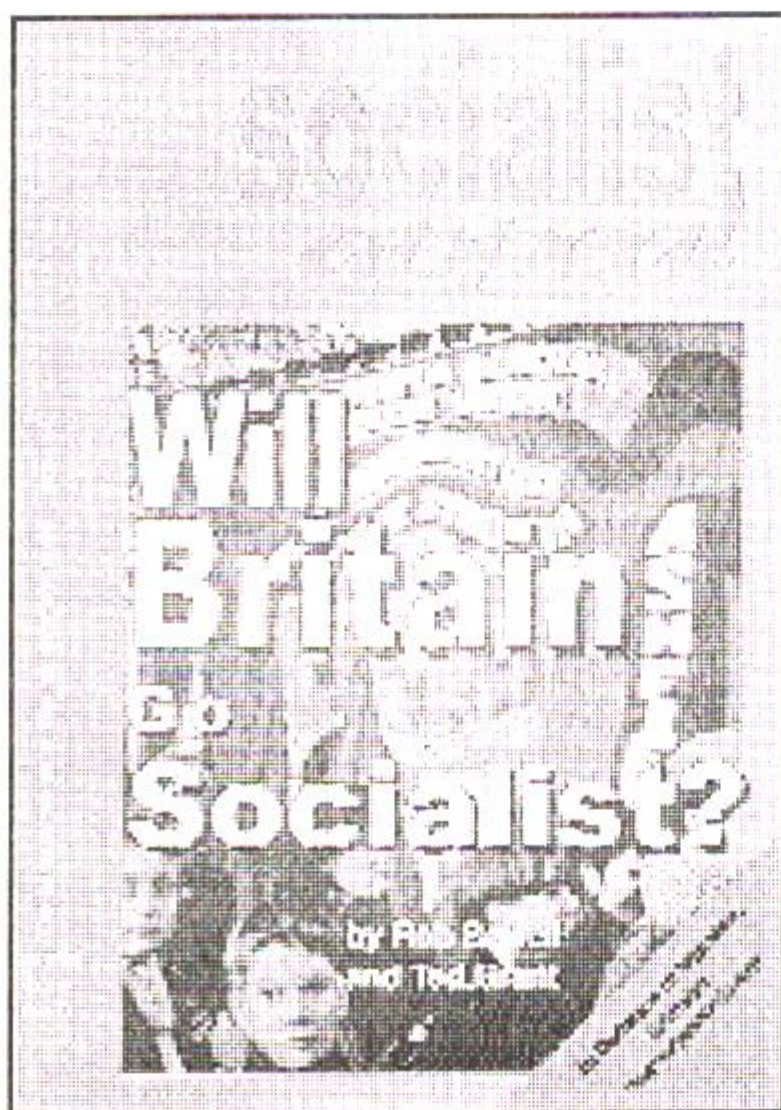
the splendid collection of over £1100 (with some IOUs still to come) at the Industrial conference has got things off to a flying start. Other donations received this month include £10 (Steve Summers, Stoke), £20 (George McCartney, Cambs), £7.45 (PTC activist), £5 (Rick Grogan), £10 (Soton reader), £10 (D Cummings, Midlands) and a number of others. Thanks to one and all. Who can add to this?

Please send what you can to *Socialist Appeal*, PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ (Cheques/POs made payable to Socialist Appeal).

**Merry Xmas and a Bolshevik new year to all our readers.**

Steve Jones

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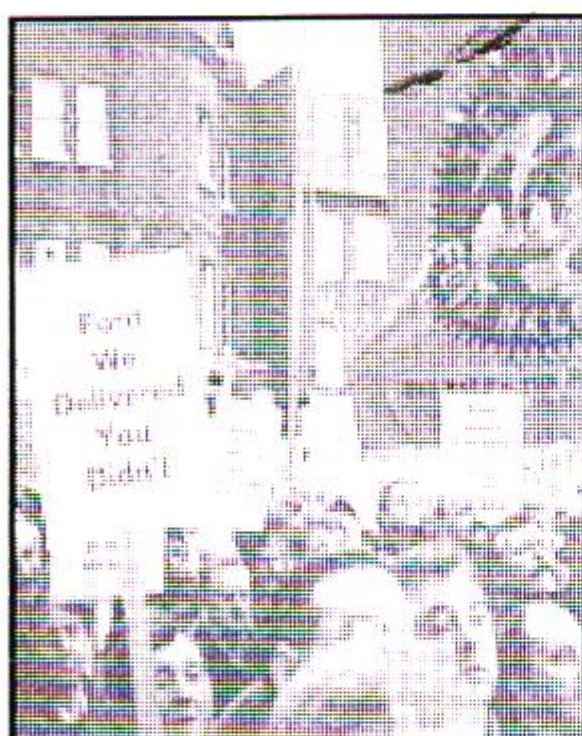
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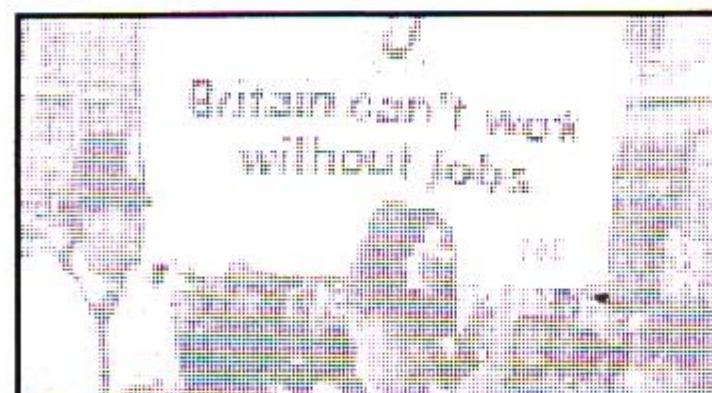
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