

## EDUCATION

By Vusi Makabane

ANGER at Tory attacks on education is gathering pace. From the inner cities to the shire counties, teachers and parents are in revolt against the government's education plans. The havoc wreaked by the Tories is plain for all to see – crumbling schools, overcrowded classrooms and overworked, underpaid teachers. A clear action programme to direct the fightback is urgently required.

Thousands of teachers' jobs are being cut. By August next year it is forecast that 14,000 teaching posts will have been axed. One in five schools are cutting jobs this year, and this figure is set to rise to one in three next year.

More and more teachers are being offered temporary contracts which can be used to pre-select posts for redundancy, and, at the same time, avoid having to make redundancy payments. Education authorities can therefore hire and fire with impunity, and victimise 'troublesome' staff by not renewing their contracts. This is the fate of a growing number of teachers, mostly union activists, who are speaking out against deteriorating conditions in the classroom.

The inevitable consequence of teacher job losses is an increase in class sizes. Already over a quarter of all primary children nationally, more than 1.1 million, are taught in classes over 30. Nearly 100,000 of these are taught in classes over 35. Overcrowded classes do not constitute the only factor increasing teachers' workload and preventing individual children from getting quality teaching time. The cuts are continuing to reduce the provision of in-class assistance for teachers, and to savage budgets for books and equipment. Cuts of in-class support staff also have ominous racist overtones. Despite widespread opposition, the government continues to attack Section 11 funding, which is to provide teachers for children whose first language is not English.

Given the situation in classrooms around the country, everyone knows that the government's claim that growing class sizes will not affect children's education is nonsense, and that it results in an inevitable decline in standards and opportunities.

It is not surprising that teachers are angry and are demanding action. Conferences of the major

# Make the Tories pay

it clear that he accepts Tory policy on opting out, private schools, the national curriculum and standard assessment tests.

In the teaching unions there must be an all-out campaign to remove their existing leaderships, which are actively trying to sabotage the struggles of the membership. They have shown quite clearly that their main concern is to do the Tories' bidding. The scurrilous conduct of NUT bureaucrats led by Doug McAvoy, inviting governors to discipline teachers involved in protests, must be condemned in the strongest terms.

The first step in this direction must be a resounding 'yes' vote in the NUT ballot for a national one-day strike against increasing class sizes and against education underfunding. NUT members must campaign for the other teaching unions to participate.

But given the scale of the education crisis it is clear that a one-day strike is inadequate. It must become the springboard for wider action, which can link up with all those in the public sector – especially health workers – who are fighting cuts, closures, privatisation and the wage freeze. To fight against the union bureaucrats, action must be co-ordinated by accountable rank-and-file strike committees established at school and union branch level.

The phenomenal growth of Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) shows the extent of the opposition to Tory education policy. Local FACE campaigns can provide the basis for a fighting unity between teachers, parents and students.

But the call by FACE leader Bob Jelly to make the campaign apolitical is a step backwards. It is impossible to separate the Tories' attacks on education from their attacks on the health service, the unions, and what remains of the public sector. It is essential that teacher activists ensure that FACE is democratic and accountable, and is geared towards action. The role of local campaigns must be to mobilise support for industrial action, defend teachers who are victimised, and fight the cuts imposed at local level.

The fightback in education must be linked to an all-round political and industrial struggle to drive the Tories from office and demand that Labour abandons SATs and opt-outs, abolishes private education and establishes a fully-funded comprehensive system.



Part of the huge demonstration through central London on March 25 against education cuts organised by FACE

teaching unions – the National Union of Teachers, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers – have passed resolutions to explore taking action. The chorus of attacks on teachers, led by Ma-

yor and his Education Secretary Gillian Shephard, must be rejected with contempt.

It is also necessary to step up the fight against the Labour leadership which is mimicking the Tories. It is outrageous that Tony Blair and his education spokesper-

son David Blunkett have joined in the witch-hunt of teachers. Blunkett's threat to sack teachers at 'failing' schools is a clear indication that the Labour leadership wants to put the blame for falling educational standards on teachers' shoulders. And Blair has made

## EDITORIAL

## The road to peace and reconciliation?

NINE MONTHS into the IRA ceasefire, many Loyalists believe that the drift towards a united Ireland is underway. Back in February, Peter Robinson of the Democratic Unionist Party described the British and Irish governments' Joint Framework Document as an 'eviction notice for Ulster to leave the United Kingdom'. If he's right, then isn't Sinn Féin's strategy working?

The Republican movement has staked a lot on the peace process. There is nothing wrong in principle with calling a ceasefire. The military campaign was going nowhere and had claimed the lives of many of the movement's best cadres. The ceasefire carries physical risks, of course. The Loyalist paramilitaries are still armed and the six counties are awash with weapons held by the RUC and RIR. And, despite swapping helmets for berets, the British Army still patrols the streets.

Just as serious are the political risks. Republicanism's attempt at a political alternative to armed struggle is the construction of a 'pan-nationalist alliance' consisting of Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Fianna Fáil. However, the petty-bourgeois SDLP has a 25-year history of collaboration with the British, while Fianna Fáil, a hotbed of clerical reaction, has spent the last ten years imposing austerity programmes on southern Irish workers.

What does the Framework Document actually say? The Irish government proposes ending the Republic's formal claim to the six counties, by scrapping Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution. A new Northern Ireland Assembly is envisaged – presumably a sanitised version of the old Stormont parliament without some of its more obvious sectarianism and gerrymandering. Elections will be by proportional representation which will also be reflected in assembly committees.

Representatives from this assembly and from the Irish parliament will constitute a cross-border body with the power to 'discharge or oversee' policy in areas such as tourism, culture and heritage, agriculture, and the mutual recognition of teaching qualifications, with the agreement of the political parties of Northern Ireland. There is a promise that 'civil, political, social and cultural rights' will be protected. However, the real sting in the tail, so far as the Nationalists are concerned, is the declaration, masquerading as the 'principle of self-determination', that a united Ireland can only come about with the 'agreement and consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland'. Stripped of the pretty phrases, the Framework Document is just another restatement of the Loyalist veto.

This is not a lot to show for a quarter of a century of struggle. Adams and McGuinness need to demonstrate to their supporters that their strategy is bringing results; hence the importance attached to relations with Washington. So far, war-weariness among Republican supporters has caused the majority of them to give the leadership the benefit of the doubt. However, it is becoming clear that Republicanism has replaced the combination of military stalemate and reformist politics with simply reformist politics in the poisonous embrace of the SDLP and Fianna Fáil.

Once the new assembly is established, Sinn Féin will no doubt use it as a forum to argue the case for a united Ireland. There can be no objection in principle to sitting in parliaments. But the irony of entering this particular parliament will not be lost on the Republican rank and file. For years, Nationalists and civil rights activists fought for the abolition of its predecessor, which was finally wound up in 1972. It both embodied and legitimised the Northern Ireland statelet. The new assembly, despite the trimmings, will do the same job.

So why all the fuss from Loyalists? Part of it reflects the old sectarianism; they hate any involvement, or indeed any contact, with the Irish Republic or Nationalists, and they don't trust the British. Increasingly, however, the Loyalist leaders are worried about their base, and their speeches are aimed at retaining it.

Official Unionism is being pulled in contradictory directions. Some of its middle class supporters do not see a problem with greater integration with the south if it helps them make money. On the other hand, others supported an unprecedented challenge to party leader James Molyneux earlier this year, on the grounds that he had been outmanoeuvred by the British government and had thereby 'weakened the Union'.

The Paisleyite DUP is also worried. A part of its working class base, even if it remains staunchly opposed to a united Ireland, prefers peace to war, and is getting tired of Paisley's brand of sectarian ranting. Among hard-line Loyalists, Paisley has long had a reputation as the grand old Duke of York – strong on rhetoric, but always pulling back from confrontation.

Two small Loyalist parties, the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party, linked to the UDA and the UVF respectively, are trying to make a pitch for disaffected Unionist workers. They portray themselves as hard-line Loyalists, but with a more constructive and realistic attitude to talks, and concerned about issues such as unemployment and spending cuts.

Loyalism as a whole is in a bind. It sees the peace process as undermining the Union, but realises that acceptance is necessary if investment is to be attracted from the United States and the European Union. This it hopes will patch up the economic decay, which might otherwise further alienate the working class base of Loyalism.

In spite of everything they have surrendered, Republicans can expect virtually nothing in return. Despite the scenario conjured up by Loyalist demagogues, this is a failed strategy, which will not lead to a united Ireland. Reviving the military campaign is equally a non-starter. The fight for a united Ireland must go on, but it cannot be led by the reformist-nationalist Sinn Féin. What is needed is a revolutionary leadership of the working class, armed with an anti-capitalist programme which can attract the most class conscious Protestants away from Loyalism and which can unite the anti-capitalist struggles in both parts of Ireland. No lasting workers' unity will be possible if it does not involve implacable opposition to sectarianism, the partition of Ireland and the British presence which brought it about.

## After the Clause Four defeat . . .

Tony Blair and his cronies have now succeeded in getting their 'updated' statement of Labour's aims and values accepted as the new Clause Four. Where does this leave the labour left? **Mark Boon** investigates

THE CAMPAIGN to defend Clause Four has been quite encouraging. The politics may not be as radical as in the past, but at least a whole layer of left activists has been re-mobilised. Blair's attack on Clause Four has provided the left with a new focus after years in decline. Unfortunately, Blair was still able to construct a strong enough set of alliances in time for the special conference.

There are two false conclusions to be drawn from the result. One is the ultra-left and sectarian 'We told you so, wash your hands of the Labour movement, it's all a sell-out'. The other response is the opportunist one: 'The Labour Party is dead, let's talk to some left bureaucrats and form a new one'. Both these solutions avoid any serious commitment to working class struggle. The real issue is to turn the Clause Four campaign outwards into a fighting Labour left that is capable of mobilising workers in struggle, defending jobs and services, and opposing cuts and privatisations.

There has been much misunderstanding of Blair's project and the many hazards it faces. For a start, Blair's vision of 'social justice' and 'solidarity' within a free market economy is quite different from that of traditional right-wing Labour leaders of the past. (Even Roy Hattersley had a few qualms!) Blair is not simply trying to move Labourism further to the right. He is attacking the basis of Labourism itself.

Blair's core support comes not from traditional Labourites, but from the smart, middle class party hacks who are contemptuous of Labour's past and its continued links with the working class. Blair's project is to wage war on socialism and to thoroughly distance the party from the organised working class. Socialism is to be replaced with social-ism – an appeal to reactionary communitarian values and the free market. He wants to change the whole class character of the party.

But unfortunately for Blair, he still requires the support of the Labour bureaucrats. This has been secured for the time being, but there is a price to pay. These bureaucrats are not fully committed to Blair's attacks on Labourism. Unions like the T&GWU and the GMB have already voiced their concern over issues like full employment and trade union rights. This contradiction will become sharper once a Labour government gets elected.

Clause Four is important but it never defined the Labour Party. The class character of the Labour Party comes not from a vague clause in its constitution, but from its relationship to the labour movement. It is a bourgeois workers' party because it has bourgeois politics and a working class base. If Blair is going to change the class character of the Labour Party he will have to do a lot more than change Clause Four. He will have to break the party organisationally from the working class, by destroying the link with the unions, and re-orientate it towards a section of the pro-Europe bourgeoisie.

It is ironic, then, that to get rid of Clause Four, Blair still had to depend on the votes of the union bosses. The special conference was timed so that rank-and-file trade union members hadn't had a chance to democratically decide the issue. The unions continue to play a central role in the Labour

## ORGANISE THE LEFT!

Party. Severance from them would be a long drawn-out process incurred at great financial and electoral cost. It would be an operation aimed at the ideological heart of the Labour Party, one from which the party would probably not recover.

Blair will continue to attack the Labour Party's links with the working class on the promise of winning the next election. However, when the party is elected, large divisions could open up. Workers' expectations will be raised and the effects of this will be felt inside the Labour Party through the union link. Bureaucrats will come under increasing pressure from the rank and file. Blair's set of alliances with the labour bureaucrats could well be blown apart.

We believe that socialists should be involved in the struggle inside the Labour Party. Blair's attack on Clause Four and his contempt for working people has angered many. Now is the time to organise the Labour left into a fighting force. This means being prepared to bloc with all those willing to struggle against the right wing. The sentimental pitfalls which the Clause Four campaign fell into must be avoided in the future. What is at stake is not the Labour Party's 'soul' but the concrete interests of workers. We have consistently argued that the defence of Clause Four was not an end in itself. What is needed is to defend workers' rights in practice. We are

against Labour Party routinism and uncritical alliances with bureaucrats of either the left or the right.

We support the campaign for 'socialist policies' which has come out of the Clause Four campaign. However, we have some serious reservations. It is one thing to campaign against the repeal of Clause Four; it is another to argue for a watered-down minimum programme for the next Labour government. Both *Socialist Organiser* and *Labour Briefing* put far too much emphasis on the defence of existing Labour Party policy. Such a position only serves to create illusions in 'Labour-leftism', and parallels the party's shift to the right.

We believe that the decisive struggles are more likely to occur within the unions as workers step up their demands on the bureaucracy. This was the major factor behind the anti-Blair vote of unions like the T&GWU and Unison. But while it is entirely in order to strike alliances with sections of the bureaucracy opposed to Blair, the key issue remains mobilising the rank and file. The future of the Labour left depends upon the actual struggles of the working class rather than 'convincing' people of a minimum set of policy demands. We must take the struggles of union activists into the Labour Party and exploit the contradictions that are about to open up. Here lies the major struggle of the next few years.



Brown and Blair: looking forward to 'realising their true potential' in government

## New clause recognises dominance of market

THE NEW Clause Four makes Labour's commitment to capitalism quite clear: 'we work for: a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation'. There is no mention of full employment or the redistribution of wealth, without which much of the clause is reduced to waffle.

Common ownership has gone. It has not even been replaced with common control, but rather with common endeavour. Needless to say, this is not the common endeavour of the working class, but of the ruling class and the Labour leadership. And the point of this common endeavour is self-interest – the clause calls for the 'realisation of our true potential', which is, in fact, a recognition of existing inequalities.

'Community' and 'nation' are stressed. Community is Blair's favourite buzzword, and is associated with new-moralism and communitarianism. It gets rid of the notion of class by assuming that as part of a 'community' we all have the same interests. Part Three speaks of the 'defence and security of the British people'. This is Blair's commitment to British imperialism.

The clause calls only for equality of opportunity, not equality itself. It has nothing to say about the struggles of the specially oppressed, the unemployed or pensioners. Yet all these issues were brought up by the modernisers when they wanted to illustrate the 'workerism' of the old Clause Four.

Finally we have a solemn appeal for 'solidarity, tolerance and respect'. In the context of the rest of the new clause, we should take this to mean solidarity with the bosses, tolerance of the market, and respect for the law!

# JOB'S NOT JSA!

## By a CPSA member

ANOTHER brutal attack on the unemployed is being prepared by the Tories through the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) which will replace existing Unemployment Benefit and Income Support.

At present Unemployment Benefit is non-means tested and lasts for 12 months, but JSA is to be means tested after only six months, and will automatically put those under 25 on a lower level of benefit. JSA will be linked to harsh 'availability for work' interviews in which claimants will be forced to sign a 'Jobseeker's Agreement' committing them to take any work offered, however low paid.

Furthermore, the benefit can be withdrawn without warning if it is considered that the claimant is not chasing enough jobs, whether they exist or not. Each person's agreement is likely to specify a minimum number of job applications to be made each week. The 'appearance' of claimants

will also be taken into account when considering their entitlement to benefit. The Tories' own figures estimate that the introduction of JSA will mean 90,000 claimants will lose their entitlement to benefit altogether, 50,000 others will be pushed on to means-tested benefits, and 150,000 will be removed from the unemployment register.

Meanwhile, on April 13 the Tories introduced Incapacity Benefit as a replacement for Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit. Large numbers of sick workers will now be disqualified from claiming this new benefit by harsh new medical tests, and the Tories estimate that in this way they can rob £1.5 billion from those most in need.

While the JSA is primarily designed to attack the unemployed and cut welfare spending, it also represents a massive attack on workers within the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service, with as many as 20,000 jobs in danger of being lost. CPSA, the union that represents these

low-paid workers, is controlled by the far right 'Moderate' grouping which has done nothing to protect its members other than issue a few token leaflets.

The only way for civil service workers to succeed in the struggle to defend jobs and benefits is to build a strong rank-and-file opposition to the right wing. Within the CPSA, the Militant-led Broad Left should support Socialist Caucus in its call for an open conference of the left forces within the union, as a first step towards creating a united rank-and-file organisation that will be able to link up with the unemployed in a joint struggle. The incoming section executives in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service – both with majority Broad Left leaderships – must carry out conference policy for a joint BA/ES conference, with or without the NEC's permission.

The Tories have been forced to delay the introduction of JSA by six months – to October 1996 – because of problems with the computer sys-

tem. This makes it all the more important that CPSA members organise to implement the policy passed at conference to boycott all JSA preparatory work.

In fighting Tory attacks on the unemployed we demand:

- The right to work – jobs and decent living conditions for all.
- Opposition to JSA and all other welfare cuts – benefits to be restored to their 1979 value.
- Voluntary training schemes and apprenticeships under trade union control and rates of pay.
- Free access to education for all, at any age.
- TUC support for the formation of a national unemployed workers' movement.
- Nationalisation, under workers' control, of all businesses facing closure.
- A minimum wage at a level to be decided by the trade unions.
- Tories out – for a Labour government that must be forced to implement the above demands.

## MilitantWatch

### Liverpool collapse

IN ITS former heartland of Liverpool, Militant Labour got a drubbing in May's local elections. Standing in four wards, its candidates only managed to get an average of seven per cent of the total votes cast. Lesley Mahmood gained only 201 votes compared to 1,912 for her Labour Party rival. In neighbouring Sefton, Militant stood in three rock-solid Labour wards, and although it came second in all of them, this only amounted to nine per cent of the total vote.

Militant membership has collapsed in recent years, and they were nowhere to be seen on this year's relatively large May Day march in Liverpool. Far from being the 'largest organised force on the left' as was claimed just five years ago in the pamphlet *Militant – What We Stand For*, Militant today resembles one of the 'sects on the fringes of the Labour movement' that it was so keen on calling other left groups in the past.

### Loyalist embrace

MEANWHILE in Belfast on May 9, Militant Labour hosted an astounding forum entitled 'Is There a Future for Socialism?'. On the platform was Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party, which *Militant* (May 19) admits is 'the political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force'. To debate with the sectarian killers of the UVF is bad enough, but Peter Hadden for Militant went much further, welcoming the opportunity to debate 'with others who've come to socialism by different routes'. And another Militant speaker invited the PUP to participate in building a workers' party in the Northern Irish sectarian statelet.

What do YRE members think about fraternal discussions with people who have close links with British and European fascists? And what does recent recruit and former *Socialist Outlook* leader Phil Hearse think about dialogue with the death squads? Is Militant Labour becoming a sect on the fringes of the Loyalist movement?

## T&G ELECTIONS

### Vote Morris

MEMBERS of the Transport and General Workers' Union have an opportunity to put a spoke in the wheel of Blair and the modernisers by voting to re-elect Bill Morris as their general secretary. Although this is by no means a clear left-right contest, Morris's opponent, Jack Dromey, is widely seen as the Blairite candidate, and has attacked Morris over the T&G's vote in defence of Clause Four.

Dromey, who is married to Labour Employment spokesperson Harriet Harman, got his foot on the ladder of the union bureaucracy when, as a Communist Party fellow traveller, he played a prominent role in derailing the famous Grunwick strike in 1977 – and he has been moving to the right ever since.

A vote for Morris, however, should not mean a vote of confidence in him. Although he does not see entirely eye to eye with the modernisers, Morris does not have a principled record of opposition to them either, and has failed to adequately defend T&G members in a number of struggles, including the Badgerline dispute.

# All change in Hackney

## By Andrew Mills

A MINOR earthquake hit Hackney on April 30. The day after Blair's victory at the special conference, the entire Blairite leadership of the ruling Labour group was removed. For the last decade, the leaders of Hackney Council were the finest exponents of Kinnoch's 'dented shield' policy, and their removal was the result of the deep frustration that this disastrous policy had caused among the ranks of the local party.

The council leadership, led by John McCafferty, had for months waged a desperate campaign to hold on to power. Issue after issue had piled up – allegations of corruption, the planned closure of Hackney Downs School, the disciplining of lesbian head-teacher Jane Brown of Kingsmead school, cuts in services, confrontation with local trade unions, decisions of the local Labour Party disregarded, and general incompetence. Smear campaigns were mounted against the opposition candidates alongside vigorous canvassing of delegates for its own slate.

One hundred and fifty delegates

attended the Annual Borough Conference and removed ten out of 13 of the sitting leadership's slate by convincing majority votes. In fact, it only held on to these three posts – mayor, group secretary and chair of housing – because they were unopposed. Former chief whip Chris Bryant was thrown out of the conference for unruly behaviour. The decisions of the conference were formerly ratified by local government committee delegates and by the Labour group. Outside the meeting, about 100 people demonstrated against cuts in services and the closure of Hackney Downs School.

The new leadership is not a clearly left one. It includes a spectrum from the soft right, such as the new leader Nick Tallentire who wants a 'different style', to more leftist candidates. What unites it is its claim to want a 'partnership' with the trade unions, more 'openness' in the running of the council and more accountability in carrying out local Labour Party deci-

sions, which were previously flouted.

The limited nature of the victory became clear when Tallentire announced a few days after the conference that most existing policy would be maintained. This can only lead to greater discontent among those who fought to remove the old leadership and hoped that cuts in services would be reversed.

Socialists in Hackney must not drop their guard, and must continue to fight against any anti-working class measures that the council carries out. That being said, the election of the new leadership was a blow to the right wing, which failed to convince rank-and-file members to support its reactionary policies.

This episode shows that it is possible to fight the right wing inside 'New Labour'. Much of Blair's support rests on the unproven assumption that he is the key to a Labour election victory. But what Hackney shows is that Blairism translated into practical policies – cuts, closures and anti-trade unionism – is far harder to sell.

## BADGERLINE BUS DISPUTE

### Sympathy action now!

OVER 100 bus drivers are still fighting the Badgerline company in Chelmsford. They were sacked after going on strike for one day in November in protest against longer working hours. The dispute is widely seen as a test case for union busting throughout the bus industry.

The main response of the Transport and General Workers' Union, to which the drivers belong, has been to organise a free bus service and mount two demonstrations. Chelmsford Trades Council has played a central role in mobilising support for the sacked workers. Workers News asked its secretary, Roger Welch, how he saw the future of the dispute.

'It's important that all the energies are not put into the free bus service, although it's a good tactic to maintain the profile of the strike locally. The key is sympathy action throughout Badgerline, and the wider bus industry. That requires delegations of sacked drivers continuing to visit bus garages, urging support and putting pressure on the T&G to back sympathy action, irrespective of the law.'

'The line of the T&G leadership has been to give moral and financial support and one-off rallying speeches, but there's been no attempt by officials to argue for sympathy action.'

'Building support for the strike across the country in the trade union movement has only happened through speaking tours that sacked workers have organised themselves, with the assistance of some trades councils.'

● Send messages of support and donations to Roger Welch, Chelmsford TUC, 87 Mildmay Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0DR. Tel: 01245 263727.

THE GOVERNMENT's decision to replace the annual May Day holiday with VE Day the following week led Scottish post office workers to launch a one-day strike on May 1.

It went ahead with 100 per cent support from postal workers, admin grades, cleaners and catering staff. However, when they returned to work the following day they were met with management's insistence that the backlog of mail be cleared in one shift. Management stated their intention to discipline the shop stewards and anyone else they felt had 'engineered' the strike. The workforce immediately walked out, only this time on indefinite strike.

Management then applied to the courts for an interim interdict against the Communications Workers' Union (CWU), banning it from supporting the strike. The interdict was

## By Pat Doyle

granted, leading the London leadership of the CWU to issue an instruction to its Scottish shop stewards to call off the strike. The strikers in turn told the leadership in no uncertain terms what they could do with their instruction. They voted to continue the action and demanded that management withdraw their threat against the shop stewards, and that they open discussions on how the backlog of mail could be cleared.

Sections of the capitalist press adopted their usual high moral tone, openly attacking the strikers for their 'disgraceful behaviour', and demanding that they return to work immediately. Despite this, there was widespread public support for the strikers. This was shown by the number of

letters to the papers complaining of the press coverage.

After three days, post office management caved in and agreed to all the strikers' demands, withdrawing their threat of victimisation. This has been an object lesson for central government, the Scottish Office, post office management, and the leadership of the CWU. Scottish workers hold their traditions dear and will not be dictated to by London, whether it be a Westminster government or a trade union leadership.

Come VE day, central London may have been packed with flag-waving patriots, but in Scotland there was only commemoration and remembrance of those who died in both wars. Aside from being blitzed by nauseating BBC coverage of the events in London, VE day in Scotland passed almost unnoticed.

# Hands off May Day, say Scottish postal workers

# INSURGENT MEXICO

## The limits of guerrilla war

By Yossi Rad and Philip Marchant

UNTIL LAST year, US big business liked Mexico a lot. It certainly wasn't for its revolutionary traditions – the names of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, and the memory of the years 1910-1919, seemed safely buried.

Following the 1982 debt crisis, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government set about opening Mexico up to foreign investment and developing its export industries. Hundreds of state-owned enterprises were privatised, the financial sector deregulated and a huge boost given to the *maquiladoras* – the free trade zone plants along the US border and around Mexico City. Then in 1993, Mexico joined Canada and the United States in the world's largest trading bloc. Under the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the PRI government and the PRI-controlled Mexican Federation of Labour (CTM) have provided US corporations with an abundant supply of cheap labour, and opened Mexico up to even greater imperialist exploitation than before.

But the heroic uprising in Chiapas of the Maya people in January 1994, led by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), and the dramatic collapse of the peso last December, have put Mexico's claim to be the

most successful of the 'emergent' markets into question.

The Zapatistas' guerrilla war against the Mexican ruling class is bad news for business stability. The big corporations have been given an unpleasant reminder of the overthrow of the Cuban dictator, Batista, at the hands of another rebel army in 1959. A memo from a Chase Manhattan Bank adviser warned the PRI: 'The government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and security policy.'

The government's failure to put down the rebellion in Chiapas combined with an annual trade deficit approaching \$27 billion was the background to the economic crisis which erupted at the end of last year. An attempt by President Ernesto Zedillo to introduce a controlled devaluation of the peso to curb imports and reduce the deficit turned into a rout. In the space of a couple of weeks, the peso dropped like a stone from 3.5 to the dollar to 5.9, precipitating a panic in Washington and a knock-on effect throughout much of Latin America.

Zedillo introduced an emergency package of fiscal and austerity measures in January, which included punitively high interest rates, sweeping cuts in government spending and an effective freeze on public-sector wages. Putting the case for a substantial loan to Mexico, the US Treasury warned that 'a protracted economic

crisis in Mexico would decrease US exports, increase illegal immigration to the US and, potentially, spread to other emerging markets'. By February, President Clinton had managed to secure credits worth \$50 billion to prevent Mexico from defaulting on its debt repayments. As collateral for the loan, the PRI has pledged the income from the Mexican oil industry to the US Federal Reserve, and given it a veto over monetary policy.

On February 9, the army, along with vigilantes and security guards working for local landowners, unleashed a reign of terror in Chiapas in an attempt to locate EZLN leader Subcomandante Marcos. A communiqué from Marcos identified the reason for the army's renewed onslaught: 'The Zapatista uprising caused an increase in the price of Mexican Indian blood. Yesterday they were worth less than a domestic chicken; today their death is the condition for the most ignominious loan in the history of the world.'

Additional austerity measures were announced in March as the peso continued its descent: fuel prices went up by 35 per cent and VAT from ten to 15 per cent, and there were further cuts in public spending. Between December and March public transport fares rose by 100 per cent, while the purchasing power of wages fell by 56 per cent. The economy is expected to shrink by between two and three per cent this year as hundreds of small



businesses close. Thousands of workers have already lost their jobs, and unemployment is set to rise by up to 1.2 million by the end of the year.

The Chiapas rebellion has proved to be an inspiration to workers and peasants throughout the world. On February 11, around 75,000 marched in Mexico City against the army crackdown, many of them chanting 'We are all Marcos!', and on March 8 150,000 took part in the largest protest against the government since the currency crisis erupted. But this should not blind us to the limitations of peasant-based guerrilla warfare.

Marcos's semi-Stalinist politics and his peasant base predispose his movement towards compromise with the PRI regime. Within weeks of the initial uprising on January 1, 1994, the Zapatistas announced a ceasefire. In August 1994, the EZLN helped organise the popular frontist National Democratic Convention in Chiapas to cement its relations with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's bourgeois opposition party, the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD), and called for a vote for him in the presidential elections of August 21. Marcos describes Cárdenas as 'the indisputable representative of the Mexican forces of democracy', and has suggested the formation of a 'National Liberation Movement' composed of the EZLN, the PRD and even the right-wing National Action Party (PAN).

Since then, the combination of symbolic, limited armed actions, calls for electoral reform, land reform, regional autonomy and a transitional government, and negotiations with the regime has made Marcos's trajectory even clearer. This is the two-stage theory in action, with the oppressed peasants playing second fiddle to the 'democratic' wing of the bourgeoisie, which busily extorts every last peso from workers. It cannot win even the most basic social demands of the masses. In the wake of the devaluation crisis, the EZLN went so far as to express its 'national solidarity' with the PRI regime!

Between 1945 and 1975, guerrilla armies won victories in Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam. With the partial exception of Cuba, these armies based themselves upon the peasantry. These revolutions were victories for the working class and defeats for imperialism. They brought social gains, including education, medical care and full employment. At the same time, they led to repressive regimes, in which the state apparatus was used by privileged bureaucrats to put down any attempt by workers to exercise power directly through workers' democracy.

These Stalinist-nationalist bureaucrats isolated workers' struggles in other countries, in pursuit of peaceful co-existence with imperialism. Their parasitic interests collided more and more with the socialised forces of production, to the point where, in most of these countries, they began to organise the restoration of capitalism, and with it the destruction of the majority of the social gains made by workers and the oppressed.

The idea that Mao, Tito and Ho

Chi Minh were the key revolutionary strategists of the modern world is now so bankrupt that it has led to the collapse of almost every movement built in their image. Today, few would deny that Tito's heirs have destroyed what remained of the Yugoslav revolution, or that the Chinese and Vietnamese Stalinists are well down the same road.

It has also exposed those Trotskyists who believed that every break from the Kremlin was automatically a move in the direction of revolutionary Marxism. Many leftists still have illusions in the Cuban bureaucracy, based partly upon Castro's support for guerrilla struggles in the 1960s. But it is not only the US embargo which is strangling the Cuban revolution. The policy of the Castroites in opening Cuba up to joint ventures with European corporations, in presiding over growing inequality between the 'haves' with dollars and the 'have-nots' without them, and in their long-term suppression of workers' democracy is ultimately just as dangerous. What the Cuban working class urgently needs is its own independent trade unions and a revolutionary workers' party to lead the struggle to remove the bureaucrats and take political power.

Revolutionaries do not reject peasant guerrilla warfare; they seek to integrate it into an overall strategy for socialist revolution. It cannot substitute for the mass mobilisation of urban workers; however, as a subordinate tactic, it can be linked to their struggle.

Socialists in Mexico must not only fight to build working class leadership in the cities, but to establish a fighting alliance with the insurgent peasantry. They must support the Zapatistas against the Mexican army, and do everything possible to influence rank-and-file soldiers to turn their guns on their officers, rather than oppress the peasants of Chiapas.

A united front must be built which includes workers and the urban poor in their factories and communities, the small independent trade unions, workers in the official trade unions, and those sections of workers and the left who mistakenly see the bourgeois opposition of Cárdenas's PRD as an alternative.

However, this does not mean giving any political support to Cárdenas, as both wings of the United Secretariat in Mexico have done in the past. It is necessary to build a mass fighting workers' party in opposition to the PRD, based upon the independent unions, and to fight for the official trade unions to break with the PRI.

- Defend the Zapatistas!
- Land to the peasants!
- Down with NAFTA!
- Cut the working week, with no loss of pay!
- Equal wages for Mexican, American and Canadian workers!
- For independent trade unions!
- For a mass workers' party based on independent unions!
- For a fighting alliance of workers and peasants!
- For a workers' and peasants' government!

## Military crackdown in Bolivia



About 150 people joined a picket of the Bolivian Embassy in London on April 26 organised by the Bolivian Union Solidarity Committee (BUSC). A week earlier the Bolivian government had declared a state of siege and arrested hundreds of trade union and peasant activists during a general strike. Although the strike has ended, left-wing leaders of the teachers' union remain in prison and the campaign continues. Raise the issue in your trade union, Labour Party or other organisation. Affiliate to the BUSC, c/o BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX.

# Greek left attempts unity in action

In Greece, the revolutionary left is split into a number of small groups, mirroring the fragmentation of the self-proclaimed 'Fourth Internationals'. **K. Nicolaou** spoke to *Workers News* about recent attempts to overcome this disunity

OVER TWO years ago some Trotskyist organisations and many 'independent' Trotskyists took part in discussions on the possibility of uniting in action the various groups, and even perhaps of bringing them together under the same banner. After genuine democratic discussions we agreed a constitution to form the Pantelis Pouliopoulos Society (PPS).

Pantelis Pouliopoulos was the first Secretary of the Greek Communist Party, from 1924-26. He was expelled by the Stalinists in 1927 and founded an opposition group in solidarity with Trotsky's International Left Opposition. He later became a leading member of the Fourth International in Greece. A lawyer who spoke many languages, and the main theoretical opponent of Stalinism, he left behind many books, articles and polemics. He was captured during the Metaxas dictatorship in 1938, and executed together with 117 other militants, in-

cluding leading Trotskyists, in Kourmovo by Italian fascists in 1943. He spoke to the firing squad in their own language on the nature of the imperialist war and the soldiers refused to fire, whereupon the officer was forced to carry out the execution himself – shooting him in the head. The world revolutionary movement lost one of its greatest fighters, for Greek revolutionaries a man who stood very close to Trotsky.

The PPS has held many successful public events, beginning with a 250-strong meeting in the Athens Polytechnic to commemorate the Trotskyists murdered by capitalists, Nazis and Stalinists. We elected an executive committee of 21, and to date we have carried out about 30 highly successful activities. On many occasions the PPS has been the main Trotskyist presence – for example, on last November's anniversary of the Polytechnic uprising of 1973, where our banner led a march to the police headquarters calling for the release of a dozen youth, and earlier this year on a demonstration to the Turkish Embassy in Athens with the Kurds, protesting at the brutality of the Turkish army in Istanbul. At other times we have organised and participated with others, as on the recent protest against the brutal treatment of Albanian workers in Greece.

In these two years we have held open discussions on many subjects –

the nature of the states in eastern Europe after the collapse of Stalinism, where the working class movement is going, the war in the Balkans, etc – and have produced a pamphlet of the opinions of individual members and groups. We have an ongoing programme of these kinds of discussions. This is a first time since the 1946 unification of the three main Trotskyist organisations in Greece that there has been such close collaboration. Naturally this has sent ripples through the Trotskyist organisations. Although some of them have come and gone for various reasons, the membership of the PPS has continued to increase.

The different groups have the right to sell their own materials and take part in the weekly open meetings of the executive committee where theoretical and practical questions about the future of the PPS are discussed.

After the junta fell in 1974 thousands of youth were drawn to Trotskyist organisations, especially those affiliated to the Mandel and Healy tendencies. Today, after all the splits, these organisations have been reduced to small groups ranging in size from half a dozen to a couple of dozen. We think that the PPS is a step towards the revolutionary Trotskyist future in Greece.

On this year's May Day demonstration, the PPS mobilised a strong contingent with many red flags and a



The Pouliopoulos Society banner on the May Day demonstration in Athens

main banner bearing the slogans 'No to capitalism and Stalinism – For workers' democracy and socialism' and 'No to the Europe of imperialism – For the united socialist states of the Balkans'.

Our leaflet explained the international class character of May 1, and carried the following slogans:

- For the united front of workers, peasants, youth and small shopkeepers against capitalism and the abolition of all taxes against them!
- Free education, health, transport and housing!
- Reopen all closed industries, with public sector utilities like water, elec-

tricity, telecoms, shipyards, etc, under the democratic control of the workers! Jobs for all, full rights for 'foreign' workers, and an increase in basic wages and pensions!

- Smash the capitalist state and its police murderers of youth and old people! Down with the media liars!
- Withdraw from the IMF, GATT, the Common Agricultural Policy, NATO, and the UN! Withdraw from the imperialist European Union of unemployment and poverty!
- For a red socialist Balkans! Against war and capitalism!
- Long live the world socialist revolution! Workers of all countries unite!

## Uprising in South Tehran

By Iranian Revolutionary Socialists

FOLLOWING previous demonstrations of the Iranian oil workers and those in other industries during the past two years, a revolt of the workers of South Tehran took place on April 4, 1995. The inhabitants of the shanty town Islam Shahr who number 500,000 – mainly young industrial workers working in Karaj Industries – objected to the lack of drinking water and high public transportation costs. Such shanty towns have been constructed by poor workers without government permission, and consequently have no basic amenities. Drinking water is offered for sale at 4,000 rials. (The minimum wage according to government statistics is 5,330 rials per month!)

As a result, a major demonstration occurred spontaneously, in which these basic demands soon grew to include demanding the downfall of the Islamic Republic regime. After a few hours there was a major confrontation between the demonstrators and the armed forces. Buildings, including police and petrol stations, were set on fire. As soon as the armed forces lost control, anti-riot forces in helicopters were sent from the capital. Demonstrators were indiscriminately shot at from the air, killing up to 50 people and injuring many more. Three hundred and fifty youths were arrested and taken to unknown destinations. By now, they will undoubtedly have been tortured or executed. Since the uprising the shanty town has been under a military state of siege.

The revolt in Islam Shahr indicates the following:

1. That although this confrontation was the continuation of previous uprisings, it was qualitatively different. Whereas previous demonstrations

were organised spontaneously by the urban poor miles away from the capital, this major uprising was organised by young industrial workers only a few miles from the centre of Tehran, and could soon spread to other industrial towns nearby.

2. That the manner in which the regime suppressed this demonstration indicates their overriding fear of the power represented by such mass movements. The regime knows only too well (particularly in the light of previous upsurges) that any small resistance by any sector of workers could endanger its continued existence. President Rafsanjani has recently announced that 'We will not repeat the Shah's mistakes' – meaning that the regime will use methods over and above those employed by SAVAK (the Shah's secret police) to retain power.

3. That the economic crisis has deepened the discontent and dissatisfaction of many layers of people in Iran. When thousands of workers and urban poor are prepared to die for the simple demand of drinking water, this clearly shows the depth of economic hardship. Iran faces runaway inflation and large-scale unemployment. The regime has been forced to ask for huge loans from the IMF without being able to repay them. In addition, internal political conflict and chaos has placed the government in a position where it cannot respond to any of the specific problems facing Iranian society.

4. In spite of continuous factional fighting between 'hardliners' and 'moderates', both factions always unite and show their determination to suppress workers and defend the interests of the capitalist class.

April 5, 1995

By Lizzy Ali

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL is a black political prisoner on death row in Pennsylvania, United States, framed in 1982 for killing a police officer. Now aged 41, he is a well-known journalist, known as the 'Voice of the Voiceless', and a former member of the Black Panther Party, who has been a political activist from the age of 13.

Jamal was arrested in December 1981, after attempting to intervene to stop his brother being beaten up by the police. Jamal attempted to come to his brother's assistance, and received a near-fatal bullet in the stomach. Police officer Daniel Faulkner died from gunshot wounds – which four witnesses state were fired by another man. While seriously wounded and in hospital, Jamal was beaten and kicked by police, rammed into a pole, dumped on the floor and then beaten again. Jamal, who was charged with murder, has always maintained his innocence.

Jamal and his supporters maintain he is the victim of a racist frame-up, the main motivation of which appears to have been Jamal's support for the Philadelphia MOVE commune, which was subjected to a vicious siege by 600 armed police in 1978, and bombed with the support of Mayor Wilson Goode in 1985, leaving 11 dead.

Time is running out for Jamal. He still manages to get his message across America by speaking out on behalf of the poor and the oppressed black masses through regular newspaper columns. He has recently published a book called *Live From Death Row*. But Clinton's new Crime Bill applies the death penalty to 60 further federal offences, effectively making it the law of the land in almost every state of the USA. In January, Republican governor Tom Ridge took office in Pennsylvania on a pro-death penalty platform, and began signing death sentences in February. Over 170 men and women on death row in Pennsylvania now face execution, among them Mumia Abu-Jamal.

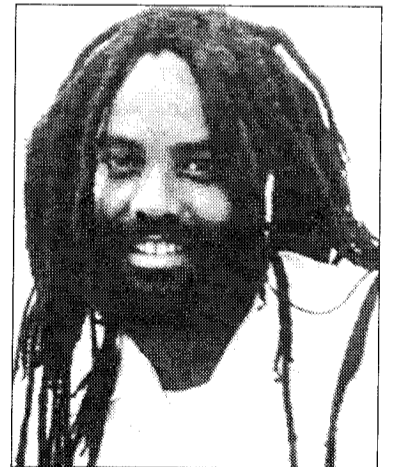
Jamal never had the chance of a fair trial. The trial judge obstructed his defence; the jury was packed with prejudiced whites; and in his summing up, the prosecutor told the jury

STOP RACIST LYNCH LAW

## Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!

that because Jamal had supported the Panthers and MOVE, and had allegedly said 12 years earlier that 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun', this 'proved' he was a cop killer. Jamal was not allowed to represent himself or pick his own attorney. His court-appointed lawyer, who was subsequently debarred, was unprepared for the trial and repeatedly asked to be relieved.

Over 40,000 people and organisations around the world have supported Jamal's fight against the racist death penalty. They include Robert and Michael Meeropol (the children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg), entertainers Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte, 44 British MPs, former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, the CGT in France, the German journalists' union IG Medien, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the NUJ and the FBU in Britain.



● Messages of support and donations can be sent to: Partisan Defence Committee, BCM Box 4986, London WC1N 3XX. Telephone: 0171-485 1396. Cheques should be made out to the PDC and marked 'Jamal Legal Defence' on the back.

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# The Oscar Wilde Trial and *Die Neue Zeit*

By John Lauritsen and David Thorstad

This year marks the centenary of the trial and public humiliation of Oscar Wilde, which culminated in his being sentenced to two years' hard labour on May 27, 1895. Although Wilde is chiefly remembered as a society wit and for his comic masterpieces *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, he was also sympathetic to socialism and an acquaintance of some of the founders of the Marxist movement in Britain.

His trial for the crime of being gay led to the desertion of almost all his rich friends. Among the few to emerge with any credit from the furore was the German socialist Eduard Bernstein, who defended Wilde in the pages of the SPD's journal *Die Neue Zeit*. The fact that it was Bernstein - soon to become the arch revisionist of the SPD - rather than the orthodox Marxists who headed the party who took up Wilde's defence is interesting. It parallels the response of socialists in France to the Dreyfus trial, where it was Jean Jaurès, rather than the left led by Jules Guesde, who took up the struggle against anti-semitism.

Below we reprint an extract dealing with the Oscar Wilde trial from John Lauritsen and David Thorstad's book *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*, first published in 1974. Hopefully this path-breaking book will be republished in the near future.

OSCAR WILDE was at the height of his success when he was arrested in April 1895. He was charged with homosexual offences under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which dealt with 'gross indecencies' committed either in public or private. This followed the collapse of Wilde's prosecution of the Marquess of Queensberry (the father of his young over) for criminal libel, in which Queensberry had successfully pleaded justification for calling Wilde a 'sodomite' by bringing forward evidence, mostly from male prostitutes, that Wilde was indeed a 'sodomite'.

The case was one of the most sensational in English history. The British press was unanimous in its condemnation of Wilde, rousing public opinion to a frenzy of vilification against him. He was called 'the most depraved man in the world', and worse things. Pamphlets attacking him were hawked in the streets of London.

An atmosphere of deepest reaction ensued for homosexuals. To the hysterical populace, sodomy was portrayed as an evil so fearful, so loathsome, that surely there could not exist more than a few men in London capable of it; yet at the same time, sodomy was felt to be so powerfully contagious that if the vice were not repressed with the utmost severity, the entire youth of the city would become infected.

Wilde's defence in his trial was necessarily an attempt to prove he had not committed the homosexual acts he was charged with, and that he had no inclination to commit such acts. The time was hardly ripe to claim the right to practice homosexual love. Nevertheless, Wilde was moved during cross-examination to defend 'the love that dare not speak its name', a phrase from a poem the prosecution attempted to link to Wilde. Following the exchange from the trial:

*Prosecutor:* Is it not clear that the love described related to natural and unnatural love?

*Wilde:* No.

*Prosecutor:* What is the love that are not speak its name?

*Wilde:* 'The Love that dare not speak its name' in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you will find in the sonnets of

Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'Love that dare not speak its name', and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.

This speech caused a loud burst of applause to erupt from the gallery of the courtroom. The judge, Mr Justice Charles, was forced to declare, 'If there is the slightest manifestation of feeling I shall have the Court cleared. There must be complete silence observed.' The jury was unable to agree on a verdict. Wilde's speech was said to have left an unforgettable impression on all who heard it, and it may have moved at least one juror to hold out against a conviction.

On his retrial, Wilde was faced with a far more vindictive prosecutor, the Solicitor-General himself, Sir Frank Lockwood, and with a bigoted and unfair judge, Mr Justice Wills. The judge's 'charge to the jury' was hardly impartial, his opening statements being: 'Gentlemen of the jury, this case is a most difficult one, and my task very severe. I would rather try the most shocking murder case that has ever fallen to my lot to try than be engaged in a case of this description,' and he referred to the 'horrible nature of the charges involved'.

Wilde was found guilty. Mr Justice Wills went immediately to sentencing, over the objection of Wilde's lawyer. He did so in a speech reflecting the tenor of the times:

*Mr Justice Wills:* Oscar Wilde and Alfred Taylor [Wilde's co-defendant], the crime of which you have been convicted is so bad that one has to put stern restraint upon one's self to prevent one's self from describing; in

language which I would rather not use, the sentiments which must rise to the breast of every man of honour who has heard the details of these two terrible trials. That the jury have arrived at a correct verdict in this case I cannot persuade myself to entertain the shadow of a doubt; and I hope, at all events, that those who sometimes imagine that a judge is half-hearted in the cause of decency and morality because he takes care no prejudice shall enter into the case, may see that that is consistent at least with the utmost sense of indignation at the horrible charges brought home to both of you.

It is no use for me to address you. People who can do these things must be dead to all sense of shame, and one cannot hope to produce any effect upon them. It is the worst case I have ever tried. That you, Taylor, kept a kind of male brothel it is impossible to doubt. And that you, Wilde, have been the centre of a circle of extensive corruption of the most hideous kind among young men, it is equally impossible to doubt.

I shall, under such circumstances, be expected to pass the severest sentence that the law allows. In my judgement it is totally inadequate for such a case as this. The sentence is that each of you be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for two years.

[Some cries of 'Oh! Oh!' and 'Shame' were heard in Court.]

*Oscar Wilde:* And I? May I say nothing, my lord?

[His lordship made no reply beyond a wave of the hand to the warders, who hurried the prisoners out of sight.]

In 1896, George Bernard Shaw attempted to get a petition going calling for the mitigation or termination of the sentence Wilde was then serving. The effort failed; Shaw was unable to get any people of note to co-sponsor the petition other than a fellow Fabian socialist and a history professor at Oxford, and he was afraid that without more representative sponsorship, the petition would get nowhere.

A number of French citizens initiated a petition to the Queen of England to pardon Wilde, but Queen Victoria issued no pardon. The French press, by and large, while not abusing Wilde, treated the whole thing in an ironical and sarcastic tone. Only a few writers raised their voices in defence of Wilde.

Wilde was bankrupt and ruined. He died three years after release from prison. The Scientific Humanitarian Committee's Yearbook of 1901 contained a biography by Numa Praetorius (Eugen Wilhelm); Magnus Hirschfeld described Wilde as 'a martyr to his individuality'.

The Wilde case vividly brought home the reality of oppression to homosexuals, and it may have kindled gay anger and provided a spark for an activist homosexual rights movement. In addition to the considerable international repercussions of the case, direct contact occurred in 1896, when Wilde was in prison, between his most trusted friend, Robert Ross, and Hirschfeld, who was soon to go on to found the Scientific Humanitarian Committee.

In the popular mind, Oscar Wilde is still seen as a stereotyped fop, dilettante, and poseur. But Wilde was a social critic with a radical sensibility. He wrote a long essay, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, in which he envisioned the opportunities social-

ism would present for the advancement of human culture. It was not orthodox Marxist socialism by any means, but the ruling classes did not find it any more endearing on this account. According to Wilde's friend and biographer, Robert Sherard, millions of copies of the pamphlet were sold in Central and Eastern Europe; it gained a reputation among the oppressed and exploited classes under the despotisms in Russia, Germany, and Austria; and large pirated editions were sold by revolutionary groups in America.

He was the only literary figure in London willing to sign a petition on behalf of the Haymarket martyrs. Bernard Shaw describes this in a letter to Frank Harris, a mutual friend of his and Wilde's:

'What first established a friendly feeling in me was, unexpectedly enough, the affair of the Chicago anarchists. . . . I tried to get some literary men in London, all heroic rebels and sceptics on paper, to sign a memorial asking for the reprieve of these unfortunate men. The only signature I got was Oscar's. It was a completely disinterested act on his part; and it secured by distinguished consideration for him for the rest of his life.'

Many of Wilde's works, even his fashionable plays, contained passages of radical social criticism. His work



following release from prison, the poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and several letters to newspapers, were protests against the injustices of the British prison system. In the climactic stanzas of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde's protest against the prison system is extended to an indictment of the entire social system:

I know not whether Laws be right,  
Or whether Laws be wrong;  
All that we know who lie in gaol  
Is that the wall is strong;  
And that each day is like a year,  
A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law  
That men have made for Man,  
Since first Man took his brother's life,  
And the sad world began,  
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff  
With a most evil fan.

This too I know - and wise it were  
If each could know the same -  
That every prison that men build  
Is built with bricks of shame,  
And bound with bars lest Christ  
Should see . . . . .  
How men their brothers maim.

In Germany, in *Die Neue Zeit*, the most prestigious journal of the Second International, Eduard Bernstein defended Oscar Wilde. In the long, two-part article written in April-May 1895, Bernstein presented a far-ranging materialist critique of the irrationality and hypocrisy of society's sexual morality, the legal contradictions and injustices, the obligation of the socialist movement to provide leadership on sexual questions from a scientific perspective.

He wrote, 'Although the subject of sex life might seem of low priority for the economic and political struggle of the Social Democracy, this nevertheless does not mean it is not obligatory to find a standard also for judging this side of social life, a standard based on a scientific approach and knowledge rather than on more or less arbitrary moral concepts. Today the party is strong enough to exert an influence on the character of statutory law, and through its speakers and its press it enjoys an influence upon public opinion that extends beyond the circle of its own supporters. As a result, it must take a certain responsibility for what happens these days. Therefore, an attempt will be made in what follows to open up the way to such a scientific approach to the problem.'

Bernstein argued that the word 'unnatural', as applied legally and in common parlance to homosexual acts, was inappropriate. Strictly speaking, nothing one did in the course of a day was 'natural', including carrying on 'intercourse' through the written word. He proposed instead saying 'not the norm', emphasizing the materialist basic that 'moral attitudes are historical phenomena'. Judgements on what acts are 'natural' or 'unnatural' really reflect a society's stage of development rather than any genuine state of nature.

Bernstein took up and refuted the popular notion that an increase in homosexuality accompanied so-called periods of decadence, arguing that the ancient Greeks and other peoples had freely allowed and practised homosexual love in the periods of their greatest vitality.

Bernstein warned against accepting sickness theories put forward by Krafft-Ebing and the majority of the psychiatrists of that day. He stressed that psychiatrists have difficulty judging an individual case of same-sex love on truly medical rather than on moralizing grounds. He wrote: 'In any case, it is a certainty that [male homosexuality] is by no means always a sign of a

depraved disposition, decrepitude, bestial pleasure-seeking and the like. Anyone who comes out with such [psychiatric] epithets takes the standpoint of the most reactionary penal laws.'

Throughout Bernstein's article runs the insistence that sexual mores be seen in historical perspective, illuminated by anthropology and ethnology, rather than in absolute, idealist terms. He observed, '... previously the Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians and various Asiatic peoples cultivated homosexual gratification.' Reserving judgement on how this first came about, he continued: '... we must be satisfied with the statement that same-sex intercourse is so old and so widespread that there is no stage of human culture we could say with certainty were free from this phenomenon.'

Bernstein's defence of Oscar Wilde and his exposition of the historical-materialist position on homosexuality in *Die Neue Zeit* was nothing short of remarkable at the time; it must stand as one of the best and most advanced expositions on the subject of homosexuality to come out of the socialist movement.

# A Yeltsinite reassesses Lenin

## Lenin: Life and Legacy

By Dmitri Volkogonov  
Harper Collins 1994; £25

### Reviewed by Ellis Hillman

HERE WE have yet another biography of Lenin, but with a difference. It has been written in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism and the Soviet Union, thus having the advantage of access to archives which were unavailable to earlier writers such as Boris Souvarine, Leon Trotsky and Isaac Deutscher.

Volkogonov, a close associate of Boris Yeltsin, uses the same method that he used in his previous study, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*. He has assembled a mass of articles, letters and documents, both published and only recently discovered, to support a preconceived thesis: that 'Lenin's regime designed and set in motion the machinery of the Stalinist terror of the 1930s and 1940s and remained an

inspiration to all subsequent Soviet leaders to the very end', to quote the blurb on the cover. 'Unconstrained by the demands of political orthodoxy', Volkogonov is 'free to assess Lenin's life and legacy', we are told. This position is by no means original. Long ago, the Mensheviks claimed that Leninism prepared the early period of Stalin's consolidation of power - only they did so more 'convincingly'.

In a passionate introduction, the biographer writes that 'the Russian revolutionaries, including Lenin, rightly exposed the age-old evils of human existence, the exploitation, inequality, lack of freedom. But having acquired the opportunity to abolish these evils [in a backward, isolated country!], the Leninists established a new, barely disguised form of exploitation to be carried out by the state [state capitalism?]. Instead of social and ethnic inequality came bureaucratic inequality . . . The Leninist version of Marxism was made flesh in this vast country, becoming something like a secular religion in the process' (p.xxxi).

Volkogonov sides with 'the founders of the Russian Marxist movement', including Vera Zasulich and George Plekhanov. The latter wrote 'prophetically' in October 1917 that 'the revolution is the greatest historic disaster, it will provoke a civil war which in the end will force it to retreat from the conquests of February 1917' (ibid).

In his attempt to create a new myth about Lenin as the ideologue of the monolithic party and state, Volkogonov conveniently overlooks *The State and Revolution*, which Lenin published in the heat of the unfolding revolution. In it, Lenin, far from 'prescribing' a one-party, monolithic state, advocated the rapid withering away of the state. More importantly, far from trying to create a totalitarian state, the first Soviet government consisted of a coalition of Bolsheviks and Left SRs.

The regime of Lenin's party was the exact opposite to that of the Stalin's party, with free debate being encouraged, and with the right for factions to form and circulate their bulletins. Lenin's reaction to even the sharpest criticism from within his own ranks, even when it reached almost 'outright treachery' (as with Zinoviev and Kamenev's 'sabotage' of the October rising itself) was not to drive such comrades out of the Bolshevik Party, but rather to integrate them into the Soviet government. Thus, Lev Kamenev became the first president of the Soviet Republic, and Gregory Zinoviev, the president of the Communist International.

In his attempt to find the source of Stalin's terror in Lenin's 'system', Volkogonov links the 'violence' and 'coercion' of the Soviet system with nineteenth century terrorism, the terrorist mood of the 1905 revolution, the Red Terror, the murder of the royal

family, concentration camps, Siberian exile and the Cheka's firing squads.

What Volkogonov fails to explain is why Stalin found it necessary to first deify Lenin (in fact mummify him), and then systematically destroy all of Lenin's colleagues and comrades. Why didn't Stalin absorb Lenin's old guard into the system, which according to Volkogonov was identical in all essentials to Lenin's? Why did Stalin resort to the annihilation of the Leninist old guard as well as the Left Opposition, if in essence, there was no difference between Leninism and Stalinism?

Of course Lenin was not a god. He made a number of important errors - for example, the banning of factions at the tenth party congress, although it was seen at the time as a temporary measure. The conversion of Lenin into a proto-devil for Stalin's fully developed devil is no more historical than the elevation of Lenin into a god with Stalin as his 'chosen disciple'.

Lenin was increasingly aware of the threat to the health of the party from Stalin's firm grip on the general secretaryship. It is difficult to see why Lenin should have fought his last

great battle against Stalin, if he perceived him as his true successor.

Volkogonov regards himself as a former captive of 'the Marxist way of thinking', who once believed that 'had Lenin only lived a little longer, he would have steered the proletarian ship of state onto a proper course' (p.477). Volkogonov clearly sides with the gamut of reactionary 'democratic forces', including Kerensky, the Mensheviks, the Kadets and the SRs, who supported the continuation of the slaughter of the First World War, and the blocking of the road to the October rising after the first February revolution; the 'democratic' White Guards on the opposite side of the civil war; and Yeltsin, who 'democratically' crushed the Russian parliament and ordered the military assault on Chechnya.

It is indeed a pity that the opportunities provided by the biographer's access to the Lenin archives has produced not a balanced assessment of the life and legacy of Lenin 'complete with warts', but rather a biography where the facts are selected to produce a slanted and distorted picture of one of the most important figures of the twentieth century.



Bolshevik demonstration in Petrograd, 1917

## Democracy SWP style

### Democracy and the SWP

Documents by the British and German IS Groups  
Assassin Press 1994; £2.50

### Reviewed by Jim Dye

THIS REVEALING little pamphlet contains some penetrating insights into the degenerated internal regime of the SWP that come as no surprise to those of us who have been through that particular sect.

The IS Group was recently formed by a handful of ex-SWP members who claim to stand in the IS/SWP tradition. Thus, with some difficulty, these comrades seek to separate the ideology of the SWP from its practice.

How a degenerated sect in which the leadership 'are preventing the SWP from developing a cadre who can think and act for themselves' (p.3), and where party conferences are 'not exercises in democracy but rallies where the leadership hector the faithful into higher levels of activity' (ibid), can have produced any theories in common with revolutionary Marxism is not made clear.

Alongside two documents from the British comrades and a small extract from Rosa Luxemburg's 1904 article 'Organisational Questions of Social Democracy' is an interesting document from a German group which split from the SAG (the German IS group) last year. Among telling comments of a 'bureaucratically degenerated, stagnating organisation' (p.5) that is totally dependant on the SWP which it meekly submits itself to, we

find that the German SWP co-thinkers demanded 'assimilation from the immigrants in Germany' (p.10) and discriminated against Turkish comrades in particular by insisting on the sole use of the German language. And just like the SWP and their sectarian ANL front organisation, the German IS group too runs 'tiny antifascist alliances consisting solely of SAG comrades, and treating them like a satellite organisation' (p.10).

The main IS Group article describes the bureaucratic regime of the SWP where, for example, 'district committees are appointed rather than elected' (p.13) and expulsion takes the place of genuine debate. This goes together with sectarianism, such as the abstentionist stance during the struggle against the Poll Tax or in the undemocratic operation of the ANL, and the continual atmosphere of crisis where hyper-activity is the replacement for a sober analysis of the balance of class forces. As the comrades point out, this is not unlike the WRP experience of the past.

It is no wonder that the authors conclude by saying that 'the SWP is incapable of building and maintaining a cadre; and that, therefore, it is incapable of leading the revolution its members are fighting for'. This much we would agree with. But whilst the comrades have made a positive step by attempting a separate organisational perspective they have much to do in discovering just how theoretically flawed the whole 'IS tradition' is. Our pages are open to an honest and fraternal debate on these and other matters.

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The WIL is the British section of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. Together with comrades in South Africa, Belgium, Germany, Canada and Sri Lanka, we fight to rebuild Trotsky's Fourth International. We are for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a worldwide federation of workers' states, based on workers' democracy and planned economy. Only by workers taking power can the unemployment, poverty, starvation and war bred by capitalism be ended.

In Britain, it is necessary for revolutionaries to fight within the mass organisations of the labour movement, as well as participate in the struggles of all those oppressed by capitalism. We aim to build rank-and-file opposition to the trade union and Labour bureaucrats who stand in the way of any serious struggle to defeat the Tories. Only in this way will a genuine revolutionary party, rather than a sect, be built.

We support all struggles against imperialism, without endorsing the politics of any nationalist leaderships. In wars waged by imperialist powers such as Britain against oppressed countries, and in inter-imperialist wars, we are for the defeat of our own ruling class.

In the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which are no longer deformed/degenerated workers' states, we are for the defence of those gains of the working class that still exist. The remaining deformed workers' states in Cuba and Asia must be defended against imperialism, and the Stalinist bureaucracies overthrown before they too open the door to capitalist restoration.

For more information about the Workers International League and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, write to:  
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## Why are the Tories in such a crisis?

By any yardstick, John Major heads the most unpopular government in living memory. Will the Tory meltdown continue, or will Labour snatch defeat from the jaws of victory yet again? **Philip Marchant** and **Richard Price** examine the evidence

IT IS an apparent paradox that, while the local elections both in Scotland, and in England and Wales, have reduced the Tories to a tiny rump in local government, and opinion polls have consistently put Tory support at an all-time low, the level of working class resistance is also very low.

In almost any other period, opposition to Tory governments found its natural expression in widespread industrial action. This was particularly true during the Heath government of 1970-74 and the first years of Thatcher. The present situation sees Labour, on present trends, set to win a landslide at the next general election, while strike statistics continue at their weakest level for a century.

Of course, if you believe the Socialist Workers Party, even if the revolution isn't quite around the corner, it is nonetheless the best situation for decades to fight for socialism, and mass resentment is 'bubbling under', waiting to explode at any moment. The rightward swing of the labour movement – itself a product of the low level of class struggle – is in fact a positive advantage. The SWP can say

'We told you so', and carry on building 'the socialist alternative'. If the SWP had any industrial muscle to back up its rhetoric there might be some merit to its posturing. As it is, this nonsense is a barrier to any young people drawn around it to understanding what period we are passing through.

So if it isn't workers' action which is causing the Tories to implode, what is it? The Tories themselves have an explanation. They claim that it is simply that the 'feel good' factor hasn't yet returned, despite the slow upturn of the economy out of recession. The electorate hasn't yet understood the correctness of Tory policy. Once it percolates through, Tory fortunes will be restored. Mind you, Chancellor Kenneth Clarke let the cat out of the bag when he admitted that it might take until the end of the decade for it to come back!

Truth lies somewhere between the SWP and Clarke. The raw data of economic statistics appear to back up Tory claims. Exports are up, unemployment is down, inflation remains low, and in general the economy is

growing at a faster rate than most other imperialist countries. But British capitalism is broken-backed, its industrial base decimated during the 1980s, and the relative advantage of the so-called 'export-led recovery' can only be a short-lived affair.

It is the result of temporarily high returns on speculative capital overseas, combined with low consumer 'demand' at home, and its success has depended ultimately on deepening the exploitation of the working class – and extending this to sections of the middle class who previously supported the Tories. The lowering of the social costs of production through deregulation, the privatisation of major public utilities, and a three-year wage freeze in the public sector, have freed up a certain amount of capital.

But, at the same time, this 'recovery' has been bought at enormous political cost to the Tories. It is not so much that the electorate doesn't 'understand' – it is more that it does! Temporary contracts, casualisation and part-time working have created an unprecedented atmosphere of insecurity. Successive interest rate hikes combined with falling house prices have turned the home-ownership gold mine of the 1980s into a ghost town. Now with the pound falling against its competitors, and the prospect of rising inflation, small wonder that Clarke and the Bank of England are pulling in opposite directions. A rise in interest rates, while desirable to the City of London, would represent a further political shot in the foot for the government, at a time when it is



desperate to conjure up some package of tax and interest cuts in the run-up to the next election.

The root of the political problem facing the ruling class is that in order to make British capitalism competitive, it has to go much further than it originally thought in removing the past gains of the working class – gains which have also underpinned the standard of living of most of the middle class as well. Given the spineless leadership of the TUC, it was relatively easy to bring in the anti-union laws; but attacking state education and public transport, and closing hospitals and nursing homes for the elderly is another matter.

It is under these conditions that the sleaze factor acquires such force. The same government which preaches family values and belt-tightening is shown up as a bunch of hypocrites with their snouts in the trough, handing out perks to their mates. Taxation for the mass of wage and salary earners; share options for the super-rich.

The result is that the support the Tories built up after 1979 among skilled workers and the 'respectable' middle class has been deeply eroded. But voting for Tony Blair's 'New Labour' no longer requires the same degree of ideological soul-searching it once did, and the radicalisation of middle England, although it is highly damaging to the Tories, remains of fairly modest proportions.

In the working class, the main trade union battles of recent years have been long, drawn-out defensive struggles, many of which have ended in defeat. This, combined with job insecurity and the absence of any fighting lead from the TUC, has created a mood of scepticism about industrial struggle, and swung the pendulum decisively – for the time being – towards reformist political action. Blair's only assets are that he is not John Major, and that he has successfully projected himself as the only guarantor of a Labour victory.

As if this loss of support weren't enough, the endless problem of Britain's relationship with Europe constantly intervenes to prevent a face-saving Tory regroupment. The question of 'Europe' is an objective di-

lemma facing the British ruling class. Far from being 'at the heart of Europe', as Major blithely maintains, Britain is on its periphery – a second-rate political force, with an increasingly third-rate economy.

The steady drift down the European economic league table relative to Germany and France has created a strong base for the Euro-sceptics led by Portillo among the Tory rank and file. And while both industrialists and bankers have become more reconciled to European integration, there remain fundamental problems as to how British capitalism, with its far-flung interests in Asia, Africa and the Americas, relates to the two other major trading blocs of North America and the Far East.

All of which has forced Major to appease first one and then the other of the diverging wings of the party. Currently the line is to cautiously support economic integration short of a common currency, but to resist further political integration. Major may be an electoral liability, but no other potential Tory leader appears capable of continuing the balancing act. A change of leadership is widely seen as crucial to Tory fortunes. The only snag is that the medicine may prove more dangerous than the disease.

A Labour victory at the moment looks a racing certainty. But if favourites always came in the bookies would be long since out of business. The Tories will desperately look for cuts in taxes and interest rates in the next one to two years, while Blair will continue to fudge his way through, promising next to nothing. And come the general election, the Tories' new theme – which has a strangely 'Marxist' ring to it! – that it is a choice between those who really believe in the market economy and those who have only been converted recently, will have some real weight with Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells.

During the signalworkers' strikes last year, the miners' demonstrations in 1992, and the Poll Tax rebellion in 1990, millions glimpsed the galvanising effects of a dose of class struggle. The one hope for the Tories is that Blair and the trade union bureaucrats continue to stifle workers' resistance.

### FIRST CONGRESS OF THE LENINIST-TROTSKYIST TENDENCY

IN APRIL, the LTT held its first international congress since its formation in 1991. It was attended by members of the tendency from six countries, with observers present from two more.

The congress marked a period of slow but steady progress internationally. In January 1993, the LTT fused with Comrades for a Workers Government (South Africa). The Leninist-Trotskyist Group (Canada) joined the tendency in November 1994, and at the congress the Workers Voice group (Sri Lanka) became the LTT's first section in Asia, following a period of discussion and collaboration since 1992. Congress also welcomed the establishment of Comrades for a Workers Government (Jamaica), which is a group of young militants who are working towards closer ties with the LTT with the aim of building a section.

The main work of the congress lay in deepening a number of the tendency's programmatic positions, many of which have been the subject of ongoing discussions in recent years, and in strengthening its organisational structure.

Among the main items for discussion were documents on the united front, the anti-imperialist united front, the class nature of the ex-Soviet Union, the impact of 'globalisation' on southern Africa, the crisis of petty-bourgeois nationalism, and the political situation in Sri Lanka, Jamaica and the Middle East. Two public forums were held in the course of the congress on women's oppression and on Jamaica.

The new edition of the LTT's theoretical journal, *In Defence of Marxism*, contains one of the documents from the congress entitled 'The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism' – an issue which continues to sharply divide the 'Trotskyist' left. It is hoped to publish further congress documents in the future.

Congress took note of the crisis gripping many of the international groupings which lay claim to Trotskyism, and undertook to continue to fight for the perspective of regrouping genuinely revolutionary forces.

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