

workers POWER

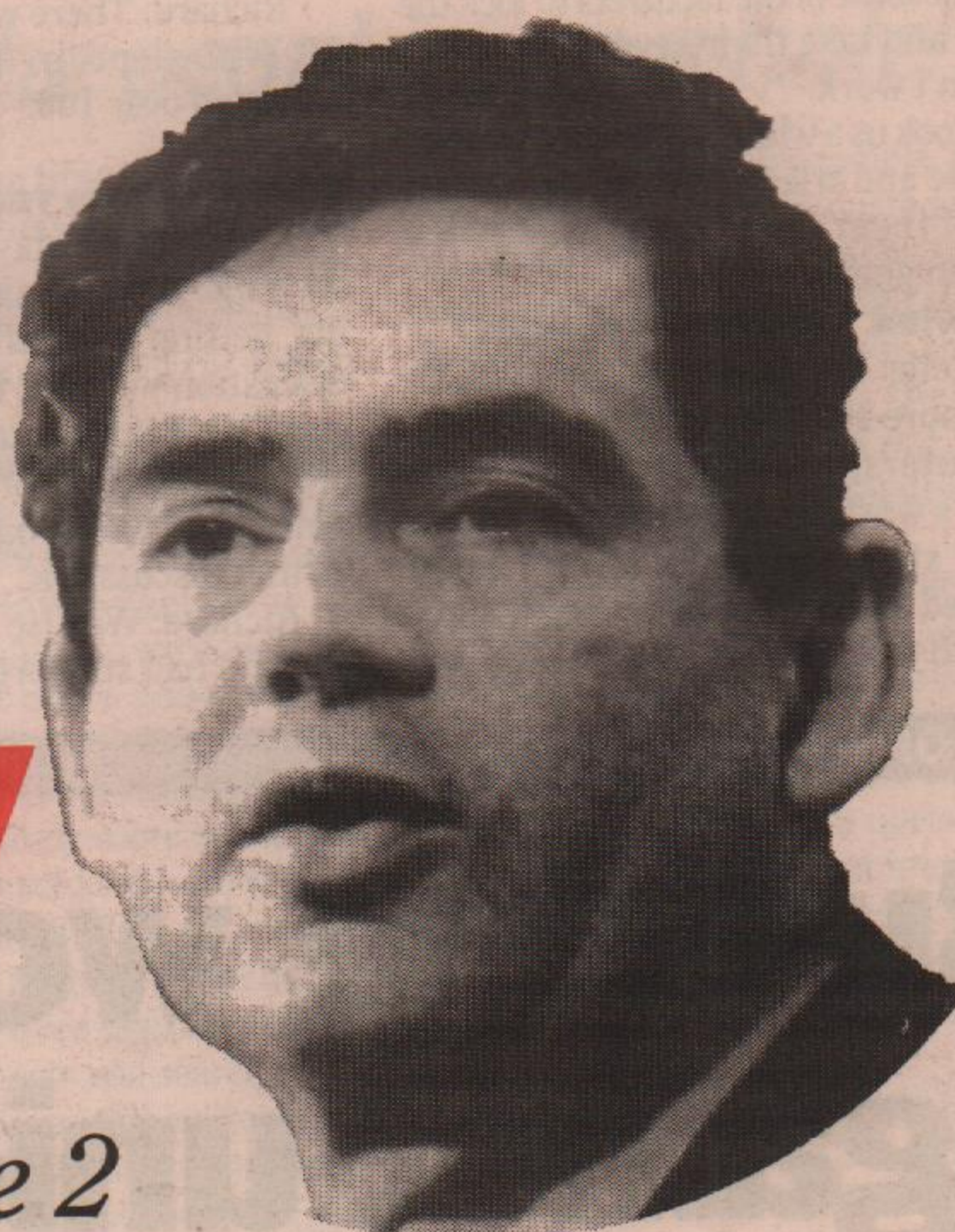
As New Labour attacks the Welfare State, we say

Tax the rich!

make them pay

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LAWRENCE INQUIRY

Racist police, racist justice

FIVE RACIST KILLERS still walk free on the streets of south-east London nearly six years after they murdered Stephen Lawrence. The reason? The sheer incompetence and "institutional racism" of the Metropolitan Police.

The phrase is not ours, but Sir William Macpherson's. A retired High Court judge with impeccable establishment credentials, Macpherson authored a 700-page report, based on the inquiry into Stephen's death.

It catalogues the details of the cold-blooded killing and the wilfully botched police investigation. The report reveals the callous treatment meted out by officers to Stephen's family and friends, compounding their grief and fuelling their sense of injustice.

But Macpherson also gave the police a get-out clause, suggesting that officers' racist actions were somehow "unwitting". Police Commissioner Paul Condon and Home Secretary Jack Straw have seized on this to deflect blame from the force. But the facts exposed by the Lawrence inquiry speak far more powerfully than Macpherson's conclusions.

These show that Stephen Lawrence and other victims of racist killers have also been victims of a police force that is systematically racist. There is nothing unwitting about police racism. It is a conscious policy of an organisation that stands in the first line of defence for a British state that remains racist to its core. And black people die as a result.

Look at the facts.

● The police let Stephen die.

PCs Bethel and Gleason refused to assist Stephen as he lay bleeding to death. Bethel had First Aid training, yet a medical kit remained locked in their vehicle. Helen Avery, a 14-year-old passer-by, seeing no attempt to stem the flow of blood from Stephen's chest, offered assistance. The police declined her offer. As Doreen Lawrence said, "They didn't want to dirty their hands with a black man's blood."

● The police harassed the victims.

Stephen's friend Duwayne Brooks witnessed the murder and gave Bethel, Gleason and Inspector Groves descriptions of the assailants. But the cops asked if Duwayne was armed, implying he had started a fight. Bethel's excuse for ignoring Duwayne's evidence? "He

hated my guts."

In May 1993 Duwayne was arrested for criminal damage and violent assault at an anti-fascist march in Welling. Despite the judge advising the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to drop the case, the CPS – who had dropped the prosecution against Stephen's murderers – persisted. The judge accused the CPS of abusing the process of the court.

In 1996 during the family's private prosecution, the police assigned "Officer XX" – a drinking buddy of Clifford Norris, father of one of the accused and a notorious gangland leader – to guard Duwayne.

● The police let the killers go.

The police now admit that they had enough information to arrest the killers in the first 24 hours. They did not.

Time and again the police "lost" crucial papers: descriptions of the killers, house-to-house search records, crime scene and interview notes. The cops failed to follow up key witnesses, including "James Grant", who named the Acount brothers as the murderers within 24 hours of the killing. Instead, evidence handed in by Doreen Lawrence was screwed up in front of her, and Duwayne Brooks' identifications discredited.

The Macpherson report makes a damning indictment, yet lets the Met off the hook. Still no officers have been disciplined. We say:

■ Sack Paul Condon!
■ Sack all police officers and CPS officials guilty of racist discrimination or abuse, corruption or collusion!
Now turn to page three

IN BRIEF

New Labour ministers and council leaders have repeatedly claimed that the new Best Value regime for local authorities is not a cloak for further cuts in jobs and services. On 24 February Labour-controlled Camden Council's Leisure Committee voted to close three branch libraries. At the same time the Social Services Committee agreed to snatch £3 an hour from the wages and benefits paid to homecare workers employed by the Social Services Department. How were these decisions justified? By the application of Best Value criteria!

Reverend Jerry Falwell has given the world a new gay icon. The purple-coated, handbag-toting teletubby, Tinky Winky, has been exposed by the founder of the self-styled "Moral Majority" as part of a sinister conspiracy by radicals in the media to undermine Anglo-American family values. The clincher for Falwell was Tinky Winky's triangle-shaped antenna. So who will the right-wing, bible basher out next? Perhaps Tinkerbell was the first lipstick lesbian.

Since March 1995 the relatives of Turkish and Kurdish people who have "disappeared" at the hands of the Turkish state have staged sit-down protests every Saturday outside the gates of an Istanbul school. The demonstrators, mainly women, have become known as the "Saturday Mothers". Starting last August the police have subjected them to increasingly brutal attacks, blocking the vigils, detaining protesters and savagely beating elderly women and young children. Two events in London this month will highlight support for their struggle. A Trafalgar Square rally on Saturday 6 March at 4.00pm coincides with International Women's Day, while Haringey Trades Union Council (TUC) has called a march the following Saturday. Assemble 1.00pm at Turnpike Lane tube. For further details contact Haringey TUC on 0181 442 0090.

LIBYA - STOP PRESS

Blair and Clinton have given Libya 30 days to hand over the Lockerbie bombing suspects, or else! This ultimatum, which goes against what the Lockerbie families want, has nothing to do with justice. It is yet another example of the sickening Clinton and Blair routine of threatening semi-colonial countries. If they attack Libya all socialists and democrats should demonstrate outside Downing Street the evening of any bombing.

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COLLEGES

Students successful in fight against cuts

Over 100 students at the University of East London (UEL) won a startling victory last month. After years of cut-backs, Arts and Design students said enough is enough and occupied Greengate House in Plaistow. Six days later, college management conceded to all the students' demands!

In stark contrast to the National Union of Students' (NUS) official leadership, the fighting example of the UEL students shows that direct action can win. Workers Power spoke to four of the students involved, Fred, Steve, Estelle and Richard.

WP: How did the occupation begin?

Fred: It started on the afternoon of Thursday 11 February. First of all we tried to get all the staff and security out of the building. We wanted to stay in and continue working. Management had got some of the lecturers to lock the doors and take their keys, so students couldn't work.

It took us a while. The lecturers stood outside and tried to get union advice. One of them came in and asked what our demands were.

WP: What were your demands?

Estelle: Better photographic facilities, more studio space and access to computers, printers - about eleven grand's worth of equipment we need. Some staff contracts hadn't been renewed and they were getting technicians to take classes. Also, because we

are moving to the new Docklands campus, we were going to be allocated less space and they weren't willing to carry out essential repairs to the Greengate site in the meantime. We wanted more space allocated to us at the Docklands, and part-time contracts to be turned into full-time ones.

Richard: We had about 20 demands in all. Like, we wanted them to dissolve an assessment which was going towards our final marks - it was a crap assessment. Some of our demands are still not resolved, but they gave in on the important ones: more staff, better contracts and £11,500 of equipment.

WP: How many students were involved?

Steve: On the first day, about 40 of us were there. Because a lot of the students are part-time, people hadn't heard about it. It got bigger.

Richard: There was a core of about 10, who slept in. But the meetings attracted over 100.

WP: What was your strategy?

Fred: On Friday we divided into sections: banner-making, leaflet writing, getting in touch with the press. A delegation was sent to talk to management on Friday afternoon. They got promises on three of our demands and were told to come back on Tuesday for further discussions.

Richard: We also got some lecturers who had supported our last occu-

ation in May [when UEL students took over the main block for 16 days to fight £2.4 million cuts] to talk to the staff. As a result, the lecturers and technicians came into the occupation. Students who were concerned about their studies could then join in more confidently. We were solid right across the board. We also decorated Greengate House: one banner read, "Solidarity with the Underground strike".

Estelle: On the Tuesday we decided to march to the meeting. By the end about 150 were on the demo - which was illegal. A striking nurse from UCLH and an RMT member, Steve Hedley, spoke.

Steve: When we got there they wanted the delegates to go in but we demanded management come out! They came out with a memo giving us all our demands, but reserving the right to act as they did.

WP: Were new people involved?

Fred: There were still people from the May occupation but there were also new people on these courses. It was not as widespread as May.

WP: Have you got any follow up planned to build on the success?

Richard: We're going to call a big meeting in Barking [the main site].

Fred: The Autonomous UEL - which we set up last May - will always be there. It's just a case of waiting for the Docklands. So it depends what conditions will

be like, whether there will be enough facilities, enough space.

Richard: I'm also standing for President of the union. The NUS is run by the Labour Party and they're not willing to fight the government over tuition fees. All the demos they've called have been forced from below. The money is there, but we have to fight for it.

OCCUPATION AT GOLDSMITH'S

Students at Goldsmith's College, south-east London, went into occupation on 26 February, after the authorities expelled eight students for non-payment of tuition fees.

The non-payment campaign was effective at the college so the management imposed first a 50 per cent and then a 75 per cent surcharge on the students refusing to pay. But this failed to break the campaign so the expulsions were ordered.

Like Oxford, this is a clear example of how unjust Labour's new pay-to-study system is. It is an attack on the right to education itself.

As we go to press the occupation at Goldsmith's admin centre at New Cross is in full swing. All students should support it.

UNIONS

Building worker wins victory against union bureaucracy

BRIAN HIGGINS, a long-time thorn in the side of both construction industry bosses and union bureaucrats, has scored a victory in his bitter battle with UCATT (the builders' union) full-time official, Dominic Hehir.

In 1996 Hehir had scurried to the bosses' courts, accusing Brian of libel in connection with letters and articles he had written attacking Hehir's record around the sacking by Southwark Council of shop steward John Jones. Hehir not only refused to back unofficial action by Jones' workmates in Southwark, but refused to represent him at a subsequent industrial tribunal.

Though he enjoyed the benefit of the legal expertise of the "left-wing" solicitor Louise Christian, Hehir has now made a humiliating climbdown - withdrawing his High Court lawsuit.

As Brian notes in a letter to Workers Power this is not just a personal victory but a blow "for free speech and workers' democracy". He goes on to thank us for "sterling political support given to the campaign mounted in my defence and that of the principles at stake."

We welcome this victory for a rank and file militant over a bureaucrat.

The militant Building Worker Group of construc-

tion industry activists, founded by Brian, has recently joined forces with two other rank and file initiatives in the building trades. Activists around the successful Jubilee Line Extension strike of November 1998 and the Joint Sites Committee, which produces the bulletin, *Builders' Crack*, are now meeting regularly in central London to forge rank and file links across unions.

The new organisation, "Builders United", meets at 7.00pm on the second Thursday of each month at the Cock Tavern in Phoenix Road, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Euston and King's Cross). We urge all construction industry militants in London to attend.

MACPHERSON REPORT

Tories' fake outrage about witness safety

LESS THAN a day after the publication of the Macpherson report Jack Straw suspended the distribution of its second volume. This book of appendices includes evidence that the police managed not to lose during the course of the original investigation into Stephen Lawrence's murder and the subsequent probe by the Kent constabulary.

The media professed shock that the appendices featured four pages of computer logs with the names and addresses of individuals from the Eltham area

who had supplied evidence against Stephen's killers. Front-page stories appeared of witnesses being placed under police guard and of a family fleeing Eltham in fear of a revenge attack.

The Tories denounced the apparent incompetence of the Home Office and were baying in the Commons for Jack Straw's resignation. Straw, meanwhile, had conveniently taken off for a long weekend in the south of France, leaving his black deputy, Paul Boateng, to

soak up the criticism from the Tories. Boateng dutifully pointed the finger of blame at the Macpherson panel, saying that it had not been the Home Office's responsibility to censor any of the report.

Macpherson has played along with this line. In fact, however, the names and addresses of the witnesses published in the appendices were already known to Stephen's killers. They had known much of the information long before last year's Lawrence inquiry. How? A

police sergeant told suspect Gary Dobson when he was first questioned on 7 May 1993.

The storm over the publication of these names and addresses is a media-manufactured tempest. The Tories have eagerly seized on it not out of concern for anyone's safety but in order to shift attention away from the damning substance of the Macpherson report. For years they refused the Lawrences' request for a public inquiry and they are still busily covering up for police racism.

Jeremy Dewar asks what will change after the Lawrence inquiry

Can the racist police force be reformed?

THE LAWRENCE inquiry and the Macpherson report do represent a defining moment in British government policy on race relations.

With remarkable hypocrisy, even the Tories joined the chorus of hand-wringers apologising for past abuses and pledging future reforms. William Hague told Parliament: "We must commit ourselves to building a nation in which every citizen, regardless of colour and creed, is treated with justice and respect."

This came from the leader of a party which, in government, had outlawed any serious examination of black people's historical role in the school curriculum. The Tories presided over a massive rise in unemployment among blacks and the intensified criminalisation of black youth. The Tory years also saw a sharp rise in the number of black children permanently excluded from schools. The Thatcherite grandee Norman Tebbit demanded black and Asian Britons had to cheer for England's cricket team before they could claim any rights here.

And of course Michael Howard blocked any independent inquiry into the Stephen Lawrence killing because the Tories wanted to cover up the Met's brazen racism in this case as in so many others.

The Labour government, with significant sections of the British ruling class in agreement, wants to re-define British identity to include the majority of the African-Caribbean and Asian communities already in the UK.

But before anti-racists start rejoicing, the limit of the intended reforms is apparent in Hague's use of the word "citizen". For while Jack Straw was claiming his eyes had been opened to "what it is like to be black or Asian in Britain today", his Home Office civil servants were busily drafting the racist Asylum and Immigration Bill.

This legislation strips all refugees of any benefit rights and threatens their forcible dispersal to segregated hostel accommodation around the country. It eliminates the right of appeal against refusal of asylum and seeks to put thou-

sands on the fast track to deportation. The same newspapers which applaud the "dignified" campaign of Neville and Doreen Lawrence run vicious scare stories about "bogus" asylum-seekers taking the British tax-payer for a ride.

The British establishment has found that the rigid and systematic exclusion of the six to seven per cent of the population who are black or Asian is dysfunctional for capitalism. They are saying: "Some of these people are ours - but no more ethnic minorities!" Romas fleeing persecution in the Czech Republic, Kosovars and Africans from the war-torn regions of their continent will not be included in Straw's new definition of British.

But will the Macpherson report actually herald a new relationship between the British police and the existing black communities?

After repeatedly denying the charge that his force was "institutionally racist" the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Paul Condon, has suddenly seized on Macpherson's definition of "institutional racism" amounting to "discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping". John Newring, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), has used this to shift the blame for police racism:

"The report has emphasised that the issue of racism is one for society as a whole and other agencies such as housing and education. Police forces have 200,000 staff, all with roots in a wider society that is itself often racist."

Both Jack Straw and Paul Boateng, the Government's only black minister, have also deployed the Macpherson definition of institutional racism to deflect criticism from Condon and reject calls for his sacking. In particular, they seize on the word "unwitting". After all, they argue, how can officers be held responsible when they were ignorant of their racist practices and their consequences?

In this view the police merely reflect the flawed society they serve. This willfully ignores the specific, powerful role the police play at the very heart of

a repressive apparatus. The police are not passive recipients of racist values; they act on them in their daily jobs, often with the utmost brutality.

Wayne Douglas, Ibrahim Sey and Shije Lapite were all "unlawfully killed" in police custody, yet no officer has faced criminal charges or even suspension from the force. Who else in society can walk away from murder?

More than 10 per cent of black Britons have been stopped and searched

with the downtrodden. Racism, of course, forms a key part of that culture. But it also embodies institutional sexism, homophobia and, fundamentally, fear and loathing of an effectively organised working class.

The case of Stephen Lawrence gained huge significance primarily because of his parents' courage and tenacity.

But to the white middle class Stephen's case could be embraced

Revolutionary socialists warn in advance that the police cannot be made accountable to the people as a whole

by the police - five times the national average. Michael Menson was set alight by racists, but the police labelled his death a suicide. Ricky Reel was murdered, but police claimed his death was an accident.

As Doreen Lawrence said: "What I see is that black people are still dying on the streets and in the back of police vans. To me institutional racism is so ingrained and it is hard to see how it will be eradicated out of the police force."

The police defence of their conduct speaks volumes. They say that since there are disproportionately more black people among those excluded from school, the unemployed and the poor - the police's everyday targets - then blacks are bound to be over-represented in the figures for arrests and searches.

Under capitalism, the police keep order. That order is one of huge inequalities, where the power and wealth of a tiny minority is protected against the vast majority. When, inevitably, the exploited and oppressed fight back, they confront an increasingly well-armed police force, steeped in a culture that immunises them from any empathy

safely in a way that, for example, Wayne Douglas' death in police custody could not. They saw Stephen as the son of a "respectable" family with aspirations of upward mobility for their son through the education system. As the BBC's Charles Wheeler pointed out, white "middle England" could identify with the Lawrences' plight.

That's why the *Daily Mail* accepted Stephen as "one of us" and why the Lawrence inquiry provided the impetus to pursue a series of reforms. Just as the US ruling class in the 1960s used the aftermath of major black uprisings in the inner cities to set about integrating a section of the black community, so the British ruling class are using the case of Stephen Lawrence to achieve a similar objective.

The truth is, however, that Stephen died, as Doreen and Neville never tire of explaining, because he was black. And justice has been denied to him because he was black. In other words, the issue is not their "respectability" but British society's racism. The reforms proposed cannot get rid of this.

Under capitalism it is inevitable that

most black and Asian youth will still be dumped in the worst-funded and worst-resourced schools, because they live in deprived areas. Black youth will still be harassed by the police.

New Labour are trying to reform the police and redefine racism because of the widespread distrust of the police and alienation of the black and Asian population - whose younger generations were born in Britain and expect equal rights. Many blacks and white anti-racists will be sceptical of the Government's motives and sincerity, but will be willing to give the reform programme a go.

But recent US experience illustrates that Blair and Straw are pursuing contradictory policies. Both men champion notions of "zero tolerance" policing alongside vastly increased numbers of black and Asian police. Recruitment of African-American and Latino officers has risen dramatically in most US police departments, but zero tolerance, as pioneered in New York City under Rudolph Guiliani's administration, has given the cops a license to kill. The most recent example came in early February as four New York officers gunned down a 22-year-old, African-born street trader. They shot the unarmed man at least 19 times. At present, they face no charges and remain on duty.

Revolutionary socialists do not ignore the fight for reforms, but we warn in advance that the police cannot be made accountable to the people as a whole. Their purpose is to defend the wealth, power and privileges of the ruling class against those they exploit and oppress. By fighting for reforms, we aim to weaken the police's ability to carry out that function.

The sacking of Paul Condon, racist cops and the murderers in their ranks weakens the police; that is why we demand these as immediate measures. But institutional racism cannot be eradicated by reforms. We must smash the institutions of a state that is racist to the core along with the capitalist system that relies on racism as one of its weapons against the working class.

MAIN REFORMS OF THE MACPHERSON REPORT

The Macpherson report proposes a number of reforms, largely backed by the Government. In the words of Doreen Lawrence, the report "has only scratched the surface and has not gone to the heart of the problem". Below we outline some of Macpherson's main recommendations and the immediate reforms we should be fighting for:

● **Double jeopardy** - the report recommends the lifting of the current bar on a person being tried twice for the same offence. As Michael Mansfield and Imran Khan, the Lawrences' lawyers, have pointed out, this could be abused to hound unpopular (or even popular) people until the state "gets the right result". It is far more likely to be used against black and working class campaigners - like Winston Silcott, for instance - than against racists. The five racist murderers should and could have been retried, except that the unelected and unaccountable judge in the failed private prosecution, refused to dismiss the trial, preferring to direct the jury to find them not guilty. We demand the election and immediate recallability of all judges.

● **Use of racist language in private** - the attempt to make this a criminal offence would create a whole new category of victimless crimes and sanction

widespread bugging of homes. We oppose both because they would be used against people considered a threat to the establishment. Remember that the first person to be tried under the Race Relations Act was a black rights campaigner, Michael X. We demand an end to police bugging. The state has no right to regulate private lives, unless there is independent evidence that someone is being abused.

● **Extension of the Race Relations Act to cover the police and public sector** - significantly, this is not intended to apply to that most racist of all institutions - the army. We demand it covers the armed forces too. But the Act is no panacea. The onus is on the victim to prove that discrimination was based on race and nothing else. It also does not oblige the employer to sack racists or re-employ victims. In the place of unelected and unaccountable appointees at the Commission for Racial Equality, we must seize on the Act's best provisions to implement anti-racist hiring and firing policies, controlled by the workers themselves.

● **Police monitoring of Stop and Search** - as the Lawrence case proved, the police simply destroy their records to cover their tracks. Stop and search is a

power that will still be applied in a racist way. We demand its abolition. In fact, the report does not recommend taking away any coercive powers, despite Part 2 of the Inquiry compiling evidence of police murders. We demand the disarming of the police - no more CS spray, no more long-handled batons - and the outlawing of the use of and training in unarmed combat techniques.

● **Monitoring of the police by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary (HMIC)** - the HMIC is answerable to the Home Office, which backed the police throughout the Lawrence case. Even worse is the recommendation that ACPO draw up a Good Practice Guide for officers - to this day ACPO, the body used to co-ordinate the brutal police war against Britain's striking miners during the strike of 1984/85, challenges the charge of racism! Black, Asian and working class communities under attack cannot trust the police, nor effectively monitor them. We demand the right to organised self-defence. There were at least three racist murders in two years in the Eltham area. These could only have been prevented by self-defence squads directly accountable to the local black community.

UCLH

Fighting PFI and the bureaucracy

HUNDREDS OF ancillary and domestic workers, as well as a number of nurses, at University College London Hospital (UCLH) took strike action between 15 and 21 February. It was the most militant action yet against New Labour's extension of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) into the NHS.

The week featured lively mass meetings, bucket collections in central London, countless visits to workplaces and a spirited demonstration past the Bloomsbury flat of Health Secretary Frank Dobson, who is also the local MP.

At the final mass meeting, on 19 February, the workers voted unanimously to come out on indefinite strike from a date yet to be named. While the action was technically in pursuit of guarantees from UCLH Trust management that their jobs would remain on NHS wage rates, terms and conditions after the transfer of their employment to a private boss, every striker knows that the real fight is against the principle of backdoor privatisation itself.

The stakes are very high for all sides in the PFI deal to construct a new UCLH with a sharply reduced number of beds. Two multinational construction giants, AMEC and Balfour Beatty, are the key players in the PFI consortium that stands to make anything from £600 million to £1 billion through the construction of the new hospital, combined with the power to manage the site and its workforce.

The Government will guarantee private sector bosses hefty profits for the next 25 to 30 years. If PFI policies carry on in the NHS, state schools and elsewhere in what remains of the public sector, working class taxpayers will be forking out huge subsidies to some of Britain's biggest corporations well into the next century. For New Labour, PFI is also a chance to indulge in creative accountancy, appearing to increase expenditure on health and education while not adding to the Public Spending Borrowing Requirement.

The Government is more than willing to sacrifice the jobs and conditions of some of the worst-paid workers in the NHS in the process. Officially, the week-

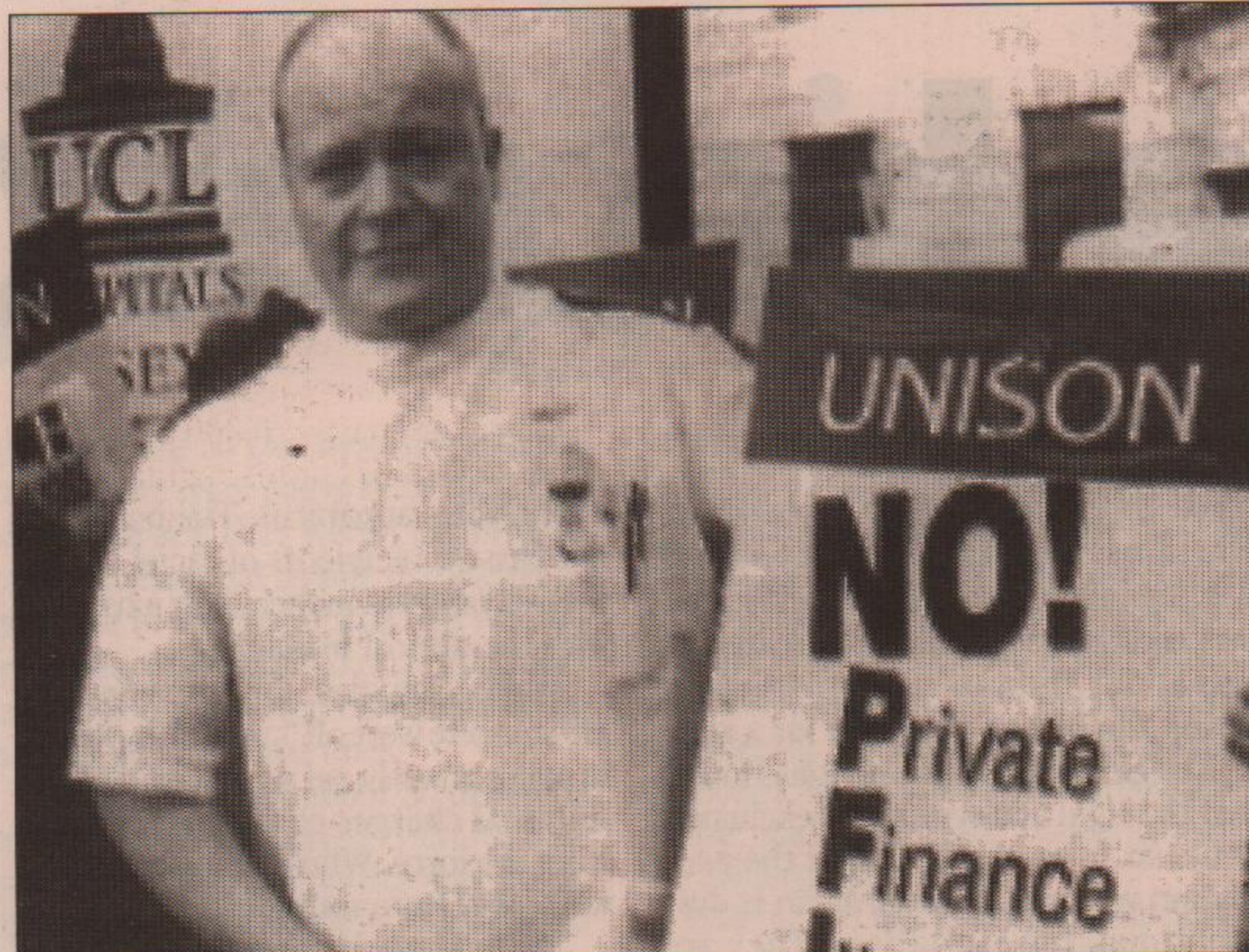
long action at UCLH had the backing of the strikers' union, Unison. Full-time official Godfrey Eastwood declared himself "happy and proud" to be associated with the strike at a London rally. His words rang hollow, however, in the light of other developments last month.

In reality, the hospital workers have waged their fight in the teeth of opposition from General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe and his supporters on the union's national executive. Unison's national and regional officials have looked far more committed to waging a witch-hunt against democratically elected branch officers, who are also members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), than to fighting PFI.

The dominant wing in the Unison bureaucracy has been determined to make the country's largest union safe for New Labour as it carries on implementing ever more Tory policies. To do this has meant waging a protracted war against the organised left across the union, whether in the form of the SWP or the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU). Bickerstaffe has taken personal responsibility for a disciplinary investigation against UCLH branch officers, Candy Udwin and Dave Carr, over the wording of a leaflet.

Bickerstaffe has repeatedly attacked PFI from Unison and TUC platforms, but the union leadership provided ample evidence of their hostility to the UCLH strikers on several occasions in February. The top table at the Unison women's conference in Harrogate immediately pulled the microphone on a young speaker who dared to utter the four letters "UCLH" in her speech, without offering a word of explanation. Branches under investigation for their support of the lobby of the 1998 Labour Party Conference, initiated by the UCLH branch, received letters urging them not to invite UCLH strikers to attend their branch meetings.

During the week of the strike an unelected full-time official, Chris Humphries, threatened to walk out of (and so invalidate) the Greater London region's annual general meeting if delegates decided to discuss motions relat-



UCLH picket

ing to UCLH. Unfortunately, the majority of delegates crumpled in the face of his bully-boy tactics.

The following day Unison officials chose to call the Metropolitan Police rather than meet with a small delegation of strikers from an official dispute who had been participating in a peaceful lobby outside a meeting of the National Executive Committee (NEC) at the union's Mabledon Place headquarters.

The events of mid-February spell out two key lessons we need to learn if an indefinite UCLH strike is to win:

- the dispute at UCLH needs to spread across the union to other PFI threatened hospitals and schools. Winning will be very difficult if the strike remains isolated;

- victory will be achieved in spite of Unison's bureaucracy because that bureaucracy will sabotage an indefinite strike.

For all the strengths of the week-long action that drew in new sections of the workforce, especially porters, who had previously been lukewarm supporters of strikes at the hospitals, too few nurses were involved.

UCLH bosses were stretched, but

were clearly prepared for dealing with action by ancillary and domestic staff. The use of agency labour across a range of occupations in the NHS Trust has partly undermined the effectiveness of strike action in a sector where there is little tradition of effective picketing. Even so, there was abundant moral and financial support from other trade unionists throughout London and elsewhere as well as from the general public.

This must be built on following the workers' courageous decision to pursue an indefinite strike. But the strikers must not rest on their laurels. As well as ensuring that more workers are brought out next time and that picketing is more effective, the industrial action must be tied to a strategy that fundamentally challenges the cowardly Unison bureaucracy. This will inevitably mean open defiance of bureaucratic intimidation.

The union nationally should have already organised a special delegate conference against PFI, empowered to take effective decisions on how to fight back. Instead the leadership have squandered valuable time doing nothing.

While the demand for an official Uni-

son event should be pressed, the first step will be for the UCLH branch to renew its own call for a conference of Unison members from across the country to rally opposition to PFI and other forms of privatisation in the NHS. The branch withdrew its original proposal for such a conference, scheduled for late January, when the national executive proscribed the event at Bickerstaffe's urging. This proposed conference must now be called by UCLH.

It must be open and democratic, with accountable delegates from workplaces and branches under threat. It must be a working conference, not a rally or a talking shop, hammering out a strategy for opposing PFI schemes nationally. The SWP will clearly have a crucial role in building a conference of this type, but it must not be the property of any tendency. Instead, it must become the rallying focus for all those committed to a serious fightback against PFI.

The rest of the left, in particular the CFDU, should throw its weight behind the call and aid a speaking tour by UCLH members to build for it and to build support for a UCLH strike. CFDU supporters who remained strangely reticent during the February strike, such as Roger Bannister, Jean Thorpe and Helen Jenner, should be issuing public statements in support of the action and denouncing the attack by Bickerstaffe and the executive majority on Candy Udwin and Dave Carr.

A conference of this kind would have the responsibility for laying the basis of a national campaign that would include demonstrations and, crucially, co-ordinated ballots and strikes across NHS Trusts, regional health authorities and, ultimately, the NHS as a whole (as well as seeking to draw in PFI threatened schools). It could also turn the pressure on against Bickerstaffe and his supporters on the national executive and - better still - mark the beginning of a real challenge from below to a bureaucracy that is determined to shield Tony Blair, Frank Dobson and the rest from the mounting anger and frustration of the members who pay for Bickerstaffe's salary and perks.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Build workers' unity from below

IN MID-FEBRUARY members of the rail union, the RMT, on the London Underground staged a two-day strike as tube bosses continue to carry through the transfer of maintenance and ticketing jobs to the private sector.

The action followed a second overwhelming vote in favour of strikes to defend jobs, pay and pensions. These are all under threat from the partial privatisation of the tube network by New Labour's "union man" turned privateer, John Prescott.

The strike was solid on some lines, especially the Piccadilly and Northern. More than 30 stations were closed at the height of the action. However, the Metropolitan and Jubilee lines ran a virtually normal service.

This problem exists because of the divisions between the RMT and the other rail union, ASLEF.

During the previous two-day action in July 1998, drivers belonging to ASLEF received instructions from the union's then general secretary, Lew Adams, to cross RMT picket lines.

Adams has since left office after his defeat by Socialist Labour Party member Dave Rix, but Rix failed to instruct his members on the Underground to honour the RMT picket lines. ASLEF remains in negotiations with tube management about the details of part-privatisation.

To his credit an ASLEF branch secretary on the Northern line bolstered the strike with his call not to cross RMT picket lines. Many ASLEF drivers did not go in, highlighting the potential for building unity from below. This must be developed.

So far, no date has been set for further action by the RMT executive. In the meantime, however, RMT militants must fight to ensure more effective picketing, mass meetings of strikers to take over the running of the dispute and a campaign to persuade ASLEF members that this is their fight too.

Unity in action is the key to shutting down the entire network and forcing Prescott and the Underground bosses to withdraw their privatisation plans.

RMT ELECTION

WORKERS POWER urges RMT members to vote for Grog Tucker in the current ballot for general secretary. Tucker, currently branch secretary at Waterloo station, is mounting a challenge to Jimmy Knapp, who has been leader since 1983.

Knapp's term in office has witnessed the privatisation of the British Rail network and a sharp decline in the union's membership and Knapp himself has spent most of his time dodging a fight with the rail bosses.

The bosses' media has taken a sudden interest in the outcome of this election openly red-baiting Tucker, who has been a longstanding supporter of the far left Socialist Outlook and who was expelled from the

Labour Party in the early 1990s.

Tucker's response to this has been lamentable. He has glossed over his socialist politics, evaded clearly stating whether or not he supports revolutionary socialism and insisted that his candidature is merely based on being a better servant of the members' interests than Knapp.

While this latter point is true - which is why militants should vote for him - it is no way to fight back against a witch-hunt or win support for revolutionary socialist policies. It makes the left look as though they have got something to hide when in fact, revolutionaries alone are the best servants of the members' interests because of our uncompromising class

struggle policies, not in spite of them - a fact we can and should hammer home.

Tucker threw away a golden opportunity to do just this. In interviews on Radio 4 and BBC 2's Newsnight he declared that his socialism was not the issue in the election. This is cowardice and it will only encourage the witch-hunters. Socialists need to win leadership of the unions by fighting openly as socialists.

A vote for Tucker against Knapp must be linked to a fight by organised militants for the root and branch democratisation of the union and a programme for the overthrow of the bosses' system that is making life increasingly miserable for both railworkers and passengers.

The single gateway to hell

LABOUR'S WELFARE Reform and Pensions Bill is aimed against some of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. The principle of universality is dead and buried – in its place New Labour is aping US-style policies with their emphasis on means testing and "the deserving poor".

The latest buzz phrase is "the single work-focused gateway". What this means is: intimidation of claimants, regardless of ill health or disability so that they accept a job, no matter how low the pay or how bad the conditions.

For the first time all people of working age must attend and actively participate in a work-focused interview before they are entitled to benefits. The only exceptions will be Disability Living Allowance claimants, the terminally ill and people who are severely "mentally handicapped".

Everyone else will be targeted for assessment by a personal adviser within three days of making a claim. They will be required to discuss how they will become independent of the benefit system, with advice on job-hunting skills, education and training.

If you fail to attend three interviews your claim will not be processed. If you are already claiming, interviews will be at least once every five years, but are likely to be every three months for young people and about every three years for disabled people. Miss three interviews and your benefits will be docked.

The frequency of the interviews and other important regulations will be at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Social Security, Alistair Darling, rather than specified in the legislation. This means that major changes can be made arbitrarily by one person without even the token safeguard of parliamentary debate.

Alistair Darling has so far knocked seven billion off the government's welfare bill for the coming three years. One cabinet minister said:

"He has achieved more in six months than his predecessor did in 18. No one has quite noticed the scale of what he is doing."

Lone parents, the unemployed and disabled people certainly have. "There is no unconditional right to benefit", Darling warned recently, "the single gateway will provide a regime far tougher than people thought."

The bill also covers New Labour's plans for stakeholder pensions, pension splitting on divorce and bereavement benefits, but the real focus is on slashing the billions spent on benefits for people who are sick or disabled. New Labour may not believe that disability results from the sins of a previous life, but is no less determined to punish people with disabilities in this life.

Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), currently paid to people disabled from an early age and who therefore have not worked enough to be eligible for contributory pensions, is to be "reformed" with an increase of around £25 a week for new claimants aged 16-19. But if you are 20 or over when you become disabled you will no longer be able to claim SDA and if you haven't worked much (because you have only just left full-time education, or were bringing up children or you were simply low-paid) you won't have paid enough contributions to claim Incapacity Benefit (IB) either. Instead, you will be forced to claim means-tested benefits on lower rates.

This change will discriminate against young disabled people and women, who currently make up 61 per cent of SDA claimants. Generally, disabled people will probably have paid below average National Insurance due to periods of ill health and the reality of discrimination that makes it harder for them to get a job in the first place.

Those disabled people reliant on IB will have another nasty shock – the bill proposes changes to tighten the contribution rules and to reduce benefit for those with personal or occupational pensions. The government has long wanted to attack IB as the numbers claiming it have trebled to 1.75 million over the past 20 years.

New Labour claim there is large-scale abuse of the system, that IB acts as an "enhanced early retirement subsidy" and flood the media with tales of IB "fraudsters". Yet repeated checks have consistently revealed that there is hardly any abuse of this system.

The new proposals will require IB claimants to have actually paid a minimum amount of contributions in one of the last two tax years. Disability campaigners estimate 170,000 people will be forced off IB by this regulation. IB will also be reduced if you receive a private or occupational pension, or any pay-out from health insurance exceeding £50. This last measure comes from the same government that wants us to "act responsibly" and buy private policies to ensure we're not destitute when old or disabled. Now they're going to penalise us for it.

Major changes can be made by one person without even the token safeguard of parliamentary debate

In typical New Labour double-speak the hated "all work test" will stay the same but the name will change – it will be called the "personal capacity assessment" to put more emphasis on capacity for work rather than inability. The test of capacity will mean people who can take up some work – not necessarily their previous work – will be compelled to do so. Claimants will be pushed into low-pay, low-skill jobs.

To justify these changes ministers claim that one million disabled people want to work but "the system writes them off to a life of benefits". Yes, there are real barriers to work for disabled people because of discrimination, the lack of accessible workplaces and public transport, and not least the lack of decent jobs paying living wages. Forcing people off benefit does absolutely nothing to address these issues.

The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill marks a further shift in New Labour policy. According to Blair it marks the "end to a something-for-nothing welfare state". Disabled people, like lone parents and the unemployed, are to be divided into those who can jump through all the hoops and therefore deserve help and those who can't. What will happen to those who can't? The state will wash its hands of them.

More compulsion and more means testing is around the corner unless we fight back. The Disability Alliance and other groups of disabled people have staged creative protests against such attacks, but it will require the strength of the organised working class to fight off this latest attack on the welfare state.

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workers POWER

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COMMENT

The man who would be mayor

In February the campaign for "Ken Livingstone's right to stand" was launched at a big London rally. Livingstone wants to be Labour's candidate for London mayor. Over a thousand people crowded into Central Hall Westminster to support him, forcing the organisers to move to the main hall.

The meeting itself was clearly designed for the media rather than the audience. When the speakers were not being chased up and down the hall by film crews, they were out of the hall giving interviews. Livingstone spoke early, timed no doubt for the nine o'clock news, and had disappeared by the time members of the audience were invited to "ask him questions".

He left it to others to explain the ongoing machinations designed to thwart the Greater London Labour Party's expressed wishes. The proposals it passed overwhelmingly would allow members with sufficient nominations from constituency parties to get on the short list automatically. Livingstone knows he currently has no chance of being allowed onto the short list to be voted for by all London party members. He has to build up enough support to make it too costly politically for the Blairites to bureaucratically exclude him.

What he said was predictable. He sketched his policies: support for the tube workers who rightly were opposed to the type of privatisation "which cut wages and jobs", but no clear statement that he was against all PFI initiatives. He called for a programme of improved public transport, more buses and properly enforced bus lanes – bring back guards on the Underground and conductors on the buses, to make them safer, especially for women. There should be more cleaners so that people were not put off by "smelly trains". The virtual immunity from the sack for racist police officers should be removed.

It was municipal "gas and water" reformist socialism with a 1990s spin. It sounded radical, inspiring cheers and ovations, only because of the stark contrast with the Blairites' repackaged conservatism, competing to be ever more "responsible" and "business friendly".

Livingstone is a classic careerist politician, and a slippery one at that. He makes different speeches to different audiences. To tube workers and radical Londoners, he talks left; but at Church House, where he recently delivered a speech for "Vision for London", sponsored by BT, Sainsburys, Marks and Spencer's etc. he adopted a very different approach to London transport.

"Given that central government won't provide any more money, there's a lot to be said for approaching the major City corporations and asking them if they would get involved in funding particular projects."

This sounds remarkably like John Prescott's PFI, so it is little wonder that he can promise Tony Blair in an open letter that, "there is simply no question whatever of my seeking to use the mayorship as a platform to wage political warfare against this Government".

Ken Livingstone is not to be trusted. He is a "fake left" and revolutionaries should openly criticise his vacillations and capitulations. But he is also a lightning rod for the opposition to Blairism as the large turn-out for his first rally shows. The thousands of Labour Party members, the hundreds of thousands of workers who support him against Blair's attempt to bureaucratically exclude him, believe he represents something different. Without stifling our criticisms of him, we support "Ken Livingstone's right to stand", and demand that he does stand against Labour if Blair bars him.

Such a struggle offers revolutionary socialists real opportunities. We should fight to tie Livingstone down to precise policies and commitments, through trade union meetings and delegate-based conferences. If we're successful and if he dodges the fight, then we will have built the basis to put up real class struggle candidates against Blair's stooges for the mayor and Greater London Authority councillors.

Housing benefit strike

SHEFFIELD'S HOUSING benefits workers launched an all-out strike on 1 March against the City Council's plans to privatise the service. Three strike days in mid-February followed an 85 per cent vote for action. The Labour Council has threatened Unison members with immediate privatisation in retaliation.

The housing benefits dispute has dragged on for months, with the Council spending £400,000 on "explorations of outsourcing" – putting the service out to tender because of its ongoing budget crisis.

The Council plans to hand over the service to the multinational CSL, which

already has an appalling track record running housing benefits in Southwark – claimants have even been threatened with eviction because of CSL's backlog of unprocessed claims!

Unison members are furious at the Council's manoeuvres that are guaranteed to mean further attacks on pay and conditions, and a deteriorating service for Sheffield's poorest people as CSL slashes the service to boost its profit.

The City Council is currently pretending to conduct a three-month review of the CSL deal. This deadline, however, neatly takes the decision past the crucial May council elections where the Labour

group will be under threat from the Liberal Democrats.

The privatisation could generate long-term fallout in the Sheffield Labour Party with many members finding this latest betrayal too much to stomach – even local Labour MP Bill Michie has attended protest meetings.

Unison members must prepare for a serious fight. Ultimately, this means spreading the strike throughout the Council. That would really make the Labour group think twice.

Messages of support and donations to: Unison, Arundel Gate Court, 175 Arundel Gate, Sheffield S1 2LQ. Fax 0114 276 6412

Workers Power criticised the Euro-election programme of the United Socialists (now Socialist Alliance, comprising the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, Alliance for Workers Liberty and Independent Labour Network) in our January issue. Martin Thomas, of the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), rejected our criticism. We print his comments, and our reply, below.

Revolutionaries and elections

Martin Thomas

In election campaigns, addressing ourselves to the whole voting population, we have to make a choice about which few ideas we put to the front. If we shirk the choice and pad out our campaign with more leftist wording, we will in reality communicate less, not more.

Your criticism (WP 229) of the Euro-election platform jointly agreed by us (Workers Liberty), the SWP, the Socialist Party, and the Independent Labour Network, and others, implicitly accepts much of this argument. You denounce the platform as "useless" because not "revolutionary", but make no complaint about the absence of the word "revolution". Instead, you target perceived inadequacies of the platform on the issues of nationalisation, racism and militarism.

You're not entirely wrong on those, I think, but your conclusion (the platform is "useless") is off the wall. The SWP, the SP and us argued at some length for a formula like "workers' control" to go with public ownership of industry and finance, before finally conceding to the ILN's preference for "democratic control".

The ILN's preference was shaped, as I understand it, not by any specially enthusiastic devotion to the parliamentary road to socialism, but rather by a phobia of what they perceive as Trotskyist jargon. To blur an important idea because the simplest, clearest words to express it have been misused

as jargon by this or that sect seems wrong to me. But the converse approach, of supposing that the platform is turned from "revolutionary" to "useless" by the absence of the best words, is also wrong.

That our platform, overall, advocates, in counterposition to all established politics, control by the majority over social wealth, is surely pretty clear, even if it would be a bit clearer with the word "workers" in place of "democratic".

We cannot, as Trotsky put it, shout louder than our own throats; nor can we explain longer than the listening-time of our audiences. The platform opposes "racist immigration controls" rather than all such controls? But doesn't that mean, here and now, that it opposes all the existing or immediately-foreseeable immigration laws, and brands them as racist? It calls only for reduced military spending, not for a people's militia and full dismantlement of the British army? But to demand that less be spent on the military machine is not to approve the residue, any more than to promote a wage demand cutting profits is to endorse the profits that remain.

You have a choice: to get involved in the left alliance while retaining, as we all do, the right to produce your own material which puts your own "slant" on it; or to stay outside, back New Labour, and console yourselves with putting "revolutionary demands" on the "mass organisations" which in fact have no grip at all except for self-consolation.

Workers Power reply

The Socialist Alliance programme has been crafted to placate the ILN's puny reformist forces. We have so-called revolutionaries conceding on crucial revolutionary demands like workers' control in order to keep the ILN on board.

This method is entirely wrong. Unity in action with reformists is essential. But in an election, "addressing ourselves to the whole voting population", the blending of programmes with reformists only creates confusion. Voters want to know how socialists would run society.

Reformists have one answer - make it a bit nicer. Revolutionaries have a different one - overthrow it and build socialism. To confuse the two makes a programme useless both as a guide to working class action and even as a statement of intent.

The way to convince people that the revolutionary answer is superior is not to put reformist sticky tape over our mouths. Revolutionaries can pose our alternative by fighting for demands that bridge the gap between today's struggles and the fight for working class power - transitional, revolutionary demands.

Workers' control versus democratic control, for example, is not a dispute over jargon with the ILN. Workers' control poses concretely the need for workers - not society at large - to exercise their veto over the capitalist class in production. The fight to control the speed and rate of production immediately

faces hundreds of thousands. It is also a means of organising workers to run society according to their own needs and priorities. It is a revolutionary demand.

Democratic control could mean control by parliament or local councils, or bodies accountable to these institutions. It does not, however, mean workers' control. Thomas' verbal gymnastics cannot change this.

Thomas suggests our particular criticisms are "not entirely wrong". Only to add, it is necessary to put forward a "few ideas".

This, apparently, excuses the programme's call for a reduced arms bill. Yet this reformist slogan begs many questions. Should these reductions include the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland, Bosnia and, potentially, Kosova, now? In a European election many voters will want a straight answer. Different wings of the alliance can say quite different things on the basis of the programme. A revolutionary answer - not a penny or person for the defence of this system - has the advantages of both clarity and correctness.

What is the problem with clarity, comrade Thomas?

We certainly want to win over reformists but to a revolutionary alternative. An election campaign can help only if we fight for a revolutionary platform. The so-called revolutionaries said they largely agreed with Workers Power's text for an election address,

but rejected it because the alliance had agreed not to fight the election on a revolutionary basis!

Despite this rebuff, we submitted a series of proposals to transform the passive electoral alliance into a candidacy of struggle.

We called for open support of London strikers at UCLH and on the Underground, for tours of workplaces and union branches debating with Labour and the convening of a delegate-based conference of workers' organisations to build the campaign.

Our proposals were rejected. The alliance didn't currently have the "implantation" in the working class to implement them - nor will it ever if it remains a backroom talking shop.

Self-consolation, indeed self-delusion, is "revolutionaries" standing candidates against Labour on a left reformist programme because you have no strategy for fighting Blair in the mass organisations and flinch at a fight for a revolutionary programme. Your consolation comes from disguising a tiny percentage of the vote as a victory for "socialism". Meanwhile, you will not have advanced the fight for a revolutionary alternative one jot.

Like Marx, we disdain to conceal our views. Our voice is weaker today than we would like. But it will become ever stronger through fighting to win workers to a revolutionary banner in elections, in strikes, in anti-racist campaigns and in every mobilisation of the working class against its enemies.

The AWL, intoxicated by the heady spirit of unity, devoted an entire journal to the question. They then invited us to submit a short article on the subject for their March issue. We accepted, only to receive a letter telling us that they didn't like what we had to say on unity so wouldn't be printing it. We print it here in full.

SOCIALISTS SHOULD fight for the broadest possible united action inside the working class - against tube privatisation, against PFI in the hospitals, against education action zones, against the anti-trade union laws.

The question of achieving political unity - "uniting the revolutionary left, or large parts of it" as Sean Matgamna puts it - is more difficult. All too often calls for unity are empty and cynical phrases designed to lull the unwary into thinking that the group who utters them is the only truly non-sectarian one. Workers Liberty falls into this category.

Workers Power, and the international tendency to which we belong, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI), are in favour of lasting revolutionary unity. This can only be built around agreement on a revolutionary programme, tested in action, both in Britain and internationally. This method has succeeded in uniting various tendencies from different political traditions and has built the LRCI in eight countries.

Workers Liberty, which in contrast to the LRCI has adopted a purely British, national-centred approach to party building, regards the question of agreement on programme as secondary. A simple willingness to get together and get on seems to be its prescription for healing divisions.

The programme put forward (p 12 of *Workers Liberty* 52) is a rehash of the programme of Tony Benn and the Labour left, not a programme for rev-

Unity manoeuvres versus revolutionary regroupment

olution and working class power. It is not a serious basis for revolutionary unity since it leaves most key questions unanswered.

Your prototype for left unity, the Socialist Alliance, formed to stand in the European elections in London, is built on a similar basis. Far from being an "unprecedented agreement" between socialists, its unity is a sham, its platform tailored to its most right-wing elements - the Independent Labour Network. In the actual class struggle in London the "Alliance" is invisible.

During the vital hospital strike at UCLH in February the Socialist Alliance said nothing and did nothing. So much for "unprecedented agreement"!

The SWP led the strike, but never referred to this alliance they are in. Of the other major players in the alliance, the Socialist Party ignored the strike because it was led by the SWP. The AWL paid it scant attention.

This isn't forging revolutionary unity; it is sectarian business-as-usual under the cover of unity.

At the meeting to support Ken Livingstone's right to stand for Mayor, a Socialist Alliance leaflet appeared. But

it said nothing about Livingstone! This is not surprising: the SWP supports Livingstone, Workers Liberty can't stand him!

If political disunity already exists on such questions, how do you expect to contain differences on Ireland and Israel? What revolutionary would unite with the AWL given its refusal to support the republican struggle against British imperialism, its defence of the "democratic rights" of the loyalist thugs and their sectarian statelet and its support for Blair's reactionary "peace" settlement? How are you going to fuse with people like Tony Cliff, whom you call "anti-Semites" because, unlike you, they refuse to accept the Zionist state of Israel, which is based on the oppression, murder and torture of Palestinian freedom fighters?

What are we to make of Martin Thomas' latest love-fest with Rob Hoveman of the SWP ("Diary of a socialist delegate" - *WL* 53) while the same issue advertises the AWL pamphlet, "Why the SWP beats up its socialist critics"?

The summary of your experience of seeking unity since the 1970s is a travesty of the truth. Workers Power fused

with Workers Fight in 1975 shortly after our expulsion from the SWP. The fusion failed within a year. You say WP's "political differences with the majority were minuscule, and their democratic guarantees extensive". In the year of the fusion important differences became apparent: on Ireland, on the nature of the period, on the need for a re-elaborated Transitional Programme, on the majority's increasingly opportunist approach to Labour Party work.

Possibly these differences could have been resolved within a genuinely democratically centralist organisation. But the old Workers Fight leadership - Martin Thomas, Sean Matgamna, etc. - could not tolerate opposition. Character assassination, charges of "cliquism" and, finally, organisational measures replaced political debate. Our democratic guarantees were so extensive, that the entire Workers Power side of the fused leadership was suspended unconstitutionally, an act that destroyed the fusion at a stroke.

This is not sour grapes. There is a pattern.

Your fusion with the Workers Socialist League in the early 1980s ended in

another rancorous split. This too was over a political difference: you refused to support Argentina when it was attacked by British imperialism over the Malvinas (Falklands); Alan Thornett's group took an anti-imperialist position. With Labour Left Briefing another political question, Ireland, blew apart the organisation. Ironically, while you were proclaiming unity in your recent journal, Socialist Outlook attacked you for undemocratically hijacking the Welfare State Network and seizing control of its paper!

Organisational unity without grammatical agreement is useless. The organisations created will soon split. This hinders the fight for a revolutionary party. Without real democratic centralism, a mechanism which safeguards both minorities and majorities, differences cannot be resolved. Workers Liberty has abandoned both these pre-requisites for unity for many years. As such, its unity calls remain hollow. Worse, the record shows that they are more to do with manoeuvres, splitting and winning new recruits, than with attempting to "unite the left".

marxism THE BASICS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

The transition to communism

“Socialism is a good idea but we could never get there” is an argument that every socialist has faced. *Workers Power* outlines how the transition is grounded in the everyday conditions of capitalism

KARL MARX was not the first to condemn capitalism for the poverty and inequality that it creates, neither was he the first to fight for a society in which poverty and inequality would be eradicated. But he was the first to realise that capitalism itself would create the forces capable of overthrowing it.

Before Marx, utopian socialists, such as Fourier and Owen, believed that an alternative society could be built within capitalism. They drew up plans for societies in which neither exploitation nor oppression were needed to maintain economic production. Once these model communities were established they would rapidly prove to be superior to what already existed.

That was where the problems started. Fourier hoped to win financial backing from a wealthy patron, and declared that he would be available every day to discuss the details. Alas, as he waited, the years passed. He grew older as capitalism grew stronger. Totally dedicated to the very end, nonetheless, he built nothing. Owen, himself a very wealthy man, invested his fortune in buying territory in America for his town of New Harmony, but was defrauded by his business partner and had to return home with nothing accomplished.

Marx realised that societies do not develop as a result of clever plans or individual dedication. Adam Smith described capitalism after it had developed out of feudal society. The capitalist system did not develop because Adam Smith set out a vision of what it might be like. Socialism, understood as a society in which the economy was socially owned and output was shared equally, would not be created, fully developed, separate from existing capitalist society. Instead, in historic terms, there would be a period during which capitalist society would be transformed into socialist society, a “transitional” period.

The struggle for a more just and genuinely human society, therefore, could not turn its back on the actually existing capitalist society. Just as a worker can only work with the tools and raw materials that are available, humanity in general could only create a new society with the “raw materials” provided by society's past development.

What were these “raw materials”? At first sight there appeared to be two:

- the physical apparatus of production or, “means of production” – machinery, factories, railways etc.
- the people who made up society.

Whoever was going to change society would themselves be a product of existing society. Tomorrow's society would be built by today's people using, initially, today's technology.

One of Marx's most brilliant insights was his realisation that there was, in fact, a third factor in society that had to be taken into account. In order to use the technology of production, “people” had become organised in a very definite way. A small number, the capitalists, owned and controlled the “means of production” while a vastly greater number, the working class, actually operated them. The workers had no real choice in the matter because their only means of survival was the wage they could earn from the capitalists. Marx called this third element the “relations of production”.

Although not as immediately obvious, it was the third element, the relations of production, that was the most important in terms of changing society. Even in Marx's day, technical progress had made it possible to produce enough for everybody to have a decent standard of living. Poverty was a result of social relations, the unequal shares in the output, not the limitations of technology. It was precisely the living conditions of the working class, coupled with its centrality within production, that would create the social force, the revolutionary working class, that could transform society into socialism.

IN BRIEF

■ **Capitalism creates the force, the working class, which is itself able to overthrow capitalism and build socialism.**

■ **The struggle for a fairer and really equal human society, has to begin with the actually existing capitalist society. There will be a transitional period between the old and the new society.**

■ **In the transition to a new society the capitalist state has to be smashed and a new form of state, a workers' state, must be established.**

■ **When the transition is completed society will no longer need a political force, a state of any sort, to organise production and distribution.**

The same social relations also meant that the capitalists had every reason to keep things as they were. And they had very effective means of preventing change. The whole organisation of society protected them. They had the best living conditions, the best education, each generation was trained to take over control and, in addition, the law protected their wealth and was backed up by the more physical means of defence: policemen, soldiers, prisons – in a word, the state.

Marx's political strategy, therefore, had to begin from this understanding of society; the means of production for a better society already existed, the working class needed that better society but the capitalists, protected by the state, were determined to prevent any change. His first attempt to develop a way of overthrowing this minority was presented in the Communist Manifesto of 1848.

In the Manifesto, Marx not only delivered a devastating attack on capitalism but set out the measures that a working class government, brought to power by a democratic revolution, would need to take to begin the transition to socialism. These included the abolition of private ownership of land, a progressive tax to drain away the wealth of the capitalists, the centralisation of credit in a national bank, state ownership of transport and communications, planned extension of production to meet need and free state education for all children.

In one sense, Marx's predictions were brilliantly confirmed within months. Revolutions shook Europe later in 1848. But the course of events revealed a flaw in this first communist programme. Even where democratic rights were won, as in France, they were not enough to overthrow capitalism. Out on the streets, the working class was confronted by the armed might of the state. Soldiers and policemen, disciplined and controlled by officers from the richer classes, enforced laws backed up by their officers' relatives in the judiciary. They massacred the workers of Paris and were given medals to commemorate it.

Marx, himself imprisoned during the German revolution, and Engels, who fought in the defeated revolutionary army, later drew a forthright conclusion. Given the human material that made up the state, with its millions of links to the ruling class, there was no possibility that a democratic government could overthrow the bourgeoisie by an “Act of Parliament”. The rest of the state machine would simply refuse to carry out orders and would overthrow the elected government.

At first, that was as far as Marx went. Determined not to make the mistake of the utopians by dreaming up personal recipes for the future, he did not return to the question until the class struggle gave him new evidence. In 1871, after France had been defeated by Prussia, the French government agreed to dismantle the defences of Paris. However, the majority of Parisians opposed this, mobilised to stop the guns being moved and forced the government itself to flee.

For three months, Paris had no government, no state apparatus, in the ordinary sense of the word. For the first time, working class men and women took charge of a modern capital city. They created their own system of “government”, a radical democracy, the “Paris Commune” in which delegates were elected by universal suffrage from each city district.

The delegates had responsibility for the defence of the city, distributing what food was available and formulating the laws by which the city would now live. They met in public and their decisions were enforced by the people themselves – when they declared the eight hour day and a minimum wage they did not need a judicial commission to work out how to introduce it.

Well aware of how popular representatives could become corrupted by power, the Commune decreed that no official would receive more than a worker's wage and

that all delegates were immediately recallable by their electors. Real accountability, not the empty democracy which allows an MP, once elected, to ignore the electors for the next five years!

Marx saw in the Paris Commune more than just an episodic adventure in democracy. He realised that it had revealed the key to the problem of how forces created by capitalist society could, through revolutionary struggle, transform themselves into the first stage of the new society.

The existing state had to be smashed, that he already knew, but Paris showed how a new form of social organisation, the commune, could carry out those functions of state power that would still be necessary during the transition, such as defence, reconstruction and economic organisation, without forming a new oppressive apparatus standing above the people. More than that, because the population as a whole now had responsibility for “government”, individuals were themselves transformed. Attitudes and assumptions that had been formed under capitalist rule were left behind. It was not yet socialism, but the road to socialism – the transition period – had been opened.

Marx developed his conclusions further in the mid-1870s by sketching out what he thought could be said with some certainty about this transitional period. In the aftermath of revolution, the economic system would be whatever had been created by capitalism. Marx assumed that the first task of the new commune state would be to get the economy working again. All who could would be required to work and, since the commune would have confiscated the wealth of the bourgeoisie, society would make rapid strides towards economic equality.

However, although utilising existing industrial capacity on a rationally planned basis would be a huge step forward, society would still be marked by its origins in capitalism. Inequality would be reduced but the actual scale of production would still be limited. In the longer run, it would be necessary for society to transform that as well. Regional and national inequalities had to be overcome. Reversing the dramatic underdevelopment of vast areas of the globe would require planned re-allocation of resources and the creation of a genuinely democratic division of labour within a global economy.

Marx, therefore, further refined the concept of a “transition society” and introduced the idea that the development of communist society would take place in two phases. In the first stage, “socialism” as he called it, the commune state was still necessary both to defeat all attempts at counter-revolution and to reconstruct the international economic system on an egalitarian and planned basis.

This, Marx called, the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Dictatorship is frequently counterposed to democracy. Yet for Marx the concept of dictatorship was necessary and justified. Indeed, it was a very democratic dictatorship. Democratic, that is, for the vast majority, the working class; dictatorial over the bosses who would try to sabotage progress and crush the new regime through counter-revolution.

How long this transition would take was not predictable but Marx pointed out that the more successful the commune was the less necessary it would become. Once the bourgeoisie had been eliminated as a class, for example, there would be no need for military organisation or defence expenditure. In the longer term, the transition would be completed when society no longer needed a political force, a state of any sort, in order to organise production and distribution. Administration would still be necessary but in an egalitarian society this would not involve the subordination of one part of the population by another, it would no longer be “political”. This would be communist society.

REGROUPMENT

A major step towards revolutionary unity

For the last six months, the Socialist Workers Organisation (SOP) of the Czech Republic and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) have been in discussion and engaged in practical collaboration. As a result, both groups have come to recognise there has been a convergence of programme and perspective. Therefore, it has been agreed that fusion is both possible and urgent. We print here a joint statement setting out areas of agreement, and the next stages of discussion and common work.

THE ORIGINS of the SOP and of the British and Irish sections of the LRCI lie in a struggle against the centrist and sectarian policy of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO). In particular, the SOP emerged as a faction inside the Czech ISO group during the first half of 1998 before forming the SOP in June.

The struggle against centrism enabled both organisations to understand the danger and bankruptcy of opportunism and economism, characteristic of the Cliffites but also the other centrist tendencies (e.g. Committee for a Workers International, CWI, United Secretariat of the Fourth International, USFI, Lambertists).

Intervention into the class struggle demands that Marxists try to link the current fight of the workers and the youth with transitional demands, such as the sliding scale of wages and hours and the establishment of workers' control.

In the course of such struggles Marxists fight to build and strengthen the democratic base organisations of the workers and the youth – in factory committees, school committees, rank and file bodies inside the trade unions, for example. This is the only way for the working class, through their own experience, to break with the reformist bureaucracy.

Contrary to this approach, the centrists and ultra-lefts adapt themselves slavishly to the existing slogans of the official leadership while making abstract propaganda for socialism as the basis for joining their group.

The united front

In the course of this adaptation centrism is forced to distort the Marxist application of the united front tactic. The revolutionary approach, as codified originally by the Comintern at its Fourth Congress in 1922, involves, on the one hand, promoting joint struggles with the broadest layers of workers and youth and dragging their leaders into the fray; on the other hand, it demands the sharpest criticism of these leaders and a refusal to confine the struggle to the limits they seek to impose on it.

This applies equally to the reformist bureaucracy in the unions, the social democratic and Stalinist parties as well as to the smaller centrist groups. Ultimately, the aim of the tactic is to expose the treachery of reformist leaders, transform the trade unions into revolutionary instruments and break up their parties.

The united front embraces the tactic of a critical vote for reformist mass parties at elections. This must include a sharp criticism of the timidity of reformist policy, a warning of the inevitability of reformist parties, when in office, retreating even from this, and the presentation of a revolutionary alternative.



Socialistická Avantgarda: Paper of the Socialist Workers Organisation of the Czech Republic

All united fronts have their limits, however, and it is also necessary to know when to break them off: when the reformist and centrist leaders fail to mobilise their forces for action; or when they only verbally commit themselves to the united front so as to enhance their left reputation. While we always strive to build a bridge to the actual consciousness of the workers and youth we will always openly spell out the objective tasks of the struggle, the necessary next steps to win it, and warn the workers against dependency on bureaucratic traitors and misleading centrists.

It is the hallmark of right centrism to insist on strategic united fronts with the reformist and centrist leaders irrespective of the concrete conditions of the class struggle, to remain embedded inside the "mass" reformist parties, or to persevere with common campaigns at all costs even if this requires silence, subservience and massaging the truth.

These rightist errors regarding the united front are intimately connected to a false view of the revolutionary party. The party is not simply the sum of the ongoing united fronts, a meeting ground for class struggle activists, or an organisation for joining together the spontaneous struggles of the working class, while leaving the form and content of these struggles largely untouched by the party.

Revolutionary class consciousness cannot emerge spontaneously simply by the experience of limited struggles. The revolutionary party embodies the lessons of the class struggle – past and present – and lays out the needs of the class and the route to power. It codifies this in a revolutionary programme

which is not merely a statement of aims but a manual of action to be fought for in all working class organisations.

A common approach

The discussions between the LRCI and the SOP about a joint revolutionary intervention into the May 1999 Euromarch also revealed a common approach to a burning issue of the contemporary class struggle. In our joint leaflet, distributed at a preparatory Euromarch demonstration in Vienna on 12 December 1998, we campaigned against the reformist, "people's frontist" character of the initiative which eventually brought in elements of open bourgeois parties (e.g. Tories at a Euromarch demonstration in Cardiff) but also involved petit-bourgeois forces like liberal journalists and Greens.

The SOP and the LRCI reject the leadership's propaganda for a "people's Europe" or "a different Europe which is social, ecological, feminist and democratic". Instead we fight for a Europe of the workers, a socialist United States of Europe. More widely, within the campaign and among its activists and adherents there has been the active reinforcement and inculcation of all manner of petit-bourgeois illusions in bourgeois democracy and cross-class alliances, and the "need" to maintain the latter. In this, the centrists have acted in concert with the leading Stalinists involved in the campaign, such as the Italian Rifondazione Comunista (RC). In turn, the price paid by the campaign leaders for getting the support of RC's leaders is to maintain silence about RC's support for several austerity budgets in the Italian parliament.

Finally, we also refuse to take sides in the conflict between the anti-EU and the pro-EU sections of the bourgeoisie. Cliffites vote against the adoption of the euro, leaving them as "left" defenders of the national currencies. Cliffites vote against entry into the EU and hence sow illusions in the democracy and accountability of the individual capitalist nation-states. Workers should not support the bosses' referenda. Instead, we consider both options and camps as equally reactionary and would call upon workers to spoil their ballots.

Alongside this the urgent task for revolutionaries is to develop and enhance the international co-operation and class struggle of workers and to fight for a workers' Europe.

No revolutionary continuity

The SOP and LRCI have both come to the conclusion that none of the self-proclaimed "Fourth Internationals" or international tendencies can be considered as revolutionary. The revolutionary Fourth International degenerated into centrism in the years 1948-51 before collapsing organisationally after 1953.

While it is possible that individuals or groups trapped within these tendencies can be won to genuine Trotskyism, this can only be the result of an open and conscious break with inherited centrist methods and a sharp fight against existing leading bodies. Any prospect for self-reform by these tendencies under the impact of future developments in the class struggle is a hopeless illusion.

There is no "Trotskyist family" in existence whose members share a fundamental outlook on the world while maintaining certain differences. Rather there is centrism which, originating in the degeneration of a distinctive trend (the Fourth International), covers its mistakes and betrayals with "Trotskyist" verbiage. Centrist and ultra-left parties certainly have many followers who are subjectively revolutionaries and often make many sacrifices, but the vacillating policy of these organisations represents an important and reactionary obstacle on the road to a revolutionary party – nationally and internationally – which must be overcome.

To speed up this process revolutionaries must openly polemicise against centrists and their policies while engaging in discussions and practical collaboration in a comradely way with those leftward moving centrists who are prepared to rethink their policies and ideas. But our aim is clear: to reduce these groups to marginal players in the working class movement.

This can be achieved, in the first place, by working alongside them to intensify the contradictions within them. In the second place, fraternal but firm criticism can assist the genuine revolutionary fighters in these organisations

to see the need, ultimately, to break from their bankrupt organisations. This latter will involve gaining one by one recruits from these organisations and also, as time goes on, whole sections engaged in serious and meaningful factional struggles.

For all these reasons the building of an authentic revolutionary International is an urgent task of the present period. We are revolutionary internationalists who do not delay the formation of a democratic-centralist international communist organisation to a later day. We reject the economic and national-centred arguments of those such as the ISO and the French Lutte Ouvriere who say "one must first have significant roots in the national working class", "better pre-conditions" etc., while in reality they run a bureaucratically controlled hidden "International".

We want to build an international democratic-centralist tendency here and now, alongside national sections on the basis of an agreed programme and methods of practical work. The SOP and LRCI will therefore do everything possible to clarify remaining differences and to clear the path for fusing our forces. This is particularly urgent given the opening of a new phase of world politics in recent years where repeated economic crises and political instability have thrown up enormous class struggles and which together offer tremendous opportunities for growth by revolutionary forces.

The SOP and LRCI will focus their resources to discuss and overcome remaining known differences which include:

- the correct strategy for building a rank and file movement;
- applicability of the workers' party tactic.

In addition, further detailed discussions will take place about:

- the specific character of the various ISO organisations;
- the capitalist transition process in central and eastern Europe where the experience of SOP comrades in the Czech Republic will enrich the methodological and substantive work of the LRCI, and lead to a higher synthesis.

While both sides agree about the already capitalist character of the Czech Republic and other Visegrad countries, the class nature of Russia and the precise details of the action programme needed today require amplification. Also the transformation of Eastern European states into degenerated workers' states by Stalinist forces in the late 1940s will be discussed.

To overcome and clarify these questions the SOP and LRCI commit themselves to intense discussion and collaboration over the coming six months, after which a balance sheet will be drawn leading, hopefully, to a fusion.

Signed: SOP and LRCI
February 1999

Double the misery

THE DEEP crisis in East Asia has thrown millions of workers and peasants into a social abyss. Worst hit, as so often, are women.

The deep contradictions of capitalism in Asia exploded in 1997/8. During the boom years before that the big firms, both the local ones and the imperialist multinationals, turned out high profits. But now the masses are expected to pay for the costs of the crisis.

In South Korea unemployment has almost doubled to 10%, in Thailand it has trebled to 6%. In Indonesia, real wages have fallen by some 15% and now 40% of the population are below the breadline, even according to official figures.

The specific socially oppressed position of women means that they are worse hit by the general collapse of living standards. The rapid industrialisation of the last few decades led to an increased participation of women in the workforce and resulted in the creation of a young and strong female proletariat. However, the integration of women in employment remained much less than in the imperialist states of Western Europe and North America.

Even in the big firms, like the South Korean chaebols, where the whole workforce was relatively well paid, most of the workers were men. Women mainly worked in the smaller, less-unionised plants.

As a result, women had lower wages than their male colleagues. This led to a situation, at least according to official figures, where men remained the main breadwinners, often bringing in three-quarters of the family income.

In today's crisis that has meant that women have been the first to lose their jobs. The argument that they should go first is widely accepted precisely because of this wage differential. In South Korea, for example, male employment fell by some 5.8%, but women's by 12%. This does not show up in the official unemployment figures, but that is because many unemployed women soon give up looking for work and are ignored in the statistics.

In Indonesia the scale of the crisis is even more drastic. Already, many are suffering from malnutrition and in nationally oppressed regions such as West Papua thousands of deaths from starvation are already being reported. Here too, women and children are worst

hit. Especially in the poor rural districts, the father's role as the breadwinner means that he gets what little food is available, while women and children have to take a back seat. The results are severe malnutrition which will have very serious long term consequences, especially for the children.

Systematic oppression also means that it is women who suffer most in many other respects as well. The looming poverty means that parents can no longer afford to send their children to school because of the costs of uniforms and materials. In Indonesia, a uniform typically costs two US dollars - the price of a snack in Western Europe but two days' pay for many Indonesian families.

In this situation, many parents take their daughters out of school first. This results directly from the sexist structure of a society in which men can command higher wages and so girls "don't need an education". In the poorest districts of Indonesia, the number of girls withdrawn from school has doubled in the first six months of the crisis.

There has also been a grim, but not untypical, increase in violence against

women in the family. The International Herald Tribune has reported a rapid increase in male violence against women, against a background of rising social misery both in countries like Indonesia and in the more "developed" South Korea and Japan.

The rapid growth of poverty among the peasants and workers of East Asia is a product of the capitalist crisis. One central element of any fight against the worsening conditions has to be a massive campaign to organise resistance by the trade unions and the peasant organisations.

Mass demonstrations, strikes, the creation of all-inclusive action committees in the towns and villages together with a militant trade union movement: these are the main forms of struggle that are necessary to shift the burden of the capitalist crisis off the backs of the workers and peasants.

These mass organisations and committees must make the fight for the interests of women their own fight. Today, in East Asia, a revolutionary party would intervene with a programme that included the nationalisation of capitalist firms and banks under workers' control and the implementation of a con-

sistent land reform.

At the same time, it is necessary that women's groups and women within the existing mass organisations create their own independent organisations. This highlights the importance of the struggle to democratise the unions as a whole.

The male dominance of the unions and the widespread sexist prejudices (even among many women) mean that without working class women organising themselves in their own committees, both within and outside the mass organisations, the interests of women will be "forgotten".

The central demands should be for a state employment programme against unemployment, for a struggle against all redundancies and "women-first" sackings, for state support for all educational needs, for the provision of state funded childcare and for the creation of local women's groups to defend women from violence in the family.

The fight for these demands and the struggle to build a working class women's movement in East Asia must be linked to the struggle for an international working class revolution to overthrow capitalism itself.

GERMANY

by Martin Suchanek, in Berlin

Union leaders let bosses off the hook

IN THIS year's wage round in the metal and electronic industries in Germany the engineering union, IG Metall, demanded nothing less than 6.5 per cent. The employers' federation, Gesamtmetall, refused to budge from 2.8 per cent.

The union leaders made a show of militancy in order to channel the growing mood of anger among their members. For the bureaucracy the warning strikes in the early stages of negotiations were designed to let off steam and strengthen their credibility as negotiators, not to win their full demands.

The outcome was a settlement which the union presented as a 4.2 per cent rise but which the bosses claimed would only add 3.6 per cent to the wage bill. Compared to an average increase of productivity in engineering of 7 per cent in 1998 and 7.5% in 1997, the wage increase is minimal.

Worse, it will have the effect of lowering targets in other, less combative sectors. IG Metall is the strongest of the unions and if it settles for a low figure others will expect less. This can already be seen in the public sector, where the unions agreed to a wage increase of only 3.1%.

The avoidance of a fight has left the bosses in a position to claw back the wage rise by another round of rationalisation, intensification, weekend shifts and redundancies. The IG Metall leadership decided to "leave out" these vital issues in the bargaining round, instead of linking the struggle for higher wages to demands to safeguard jobs and reduce working hours.

The warning strike demonstrated the willingness of millions of engineering workers to fight. They could have sent



a signal to other sectors of the class and could have put the government under massive pressure by:

- demanding a wage increase of DM 500 for all workers to compensate for past losses.
- fighting for a 32 hour week (the official slogan of IGM) with no loss of pay, an end to overtime work and the creation of new jobs, controlled by the workers and the union
- linking the wage round with demands on the government to implement a programme of public works under control of the working class, to introduce minimum unemployed benefits and pensions of DM 2000 per month and to pay for these measures by taxing the rich.

The bureaucracy did not want to put such pressure on the new government or to go beyond the wage bargaining ritual. As for the bosses, once again they turned to the trade union bureaucracy to control working class

pressure. They are still not strong, confident or politically united enough to take on and defeat "union power" in Germany in the way that Thatcher did in Britain in the 1980s.

For the working class, the negative effects of the settlement will become clear in a more "indirect" way. The employers will erode conditions and jobs at the plant level and these daily attacks will have to become the starting point for building and trying to generalise a fightback.

The bureaucracy's grip on the union will not last forever. The leadership's willingness and ability to control and sell out the workers will be tested by attacks from both government and bosses over the next months and years.

This is why the building of a rank and file movement against all factions of the bureaucracy is urgent. Such a movement must transform and democratise the union and win it to a clear revolutionary programme and militant methods of struggle.

SWEDEN

National bus strike against privatisation

SWEDEN'S PRIVATISED bus services have been brought to a complete standstill by a national drivers' strike. The all-out indefinite strike, which began on 22 February, is in support of demands for pay rises and the re-instatement of rest breaks for drivers.

Bus services in Sweden's cities were provided by local government until the right wing coalition government began privatisation in the 1990s. Since then, pay and conditions have been steadily eroded. Now, the 15,000 drivers who belong to the KAF, the local government workers' union, are determined to regain their rights and conditions.

Sweden still has one of the highest rates of union membership in Europe and public support for the strike has been as solid as the strike itself. Media attempts to find "outraged" passengers have not just fallen flat but back-fired with prime time publicity for statements supporting the drivers.

One unintended effect of privatisation has been to remove the rationale for having two bus workers' unions, one for the private sector, one for the public. The private sector union has, traditionally, been a very tame "busi-

ness-union" but is now being shaken out of its collaboration. The whole branch in Malmo in Southern Sweden has voted to join the more militant KAF and, nationally, the private sector union has been forced to declare a national strike in solidarity with KAF from 5 March.

The spreading of the action to the whole bus network will undoubtedly raise the political importance of the strike for Sweden's new Labour led coalition government. Railworkers

have already decided to refuse to lay on any extra services while the strike lasts. With huge areas of Sweden dependent on road transport, the government's attempt to stand aside will be

increasingly difficult to maintain.

The strike opens the way not only to the creation of one single union but to a national campaign to return all privatised services to the public sector, with no compensation and under workers' control. This demand for a reversal of the coalition's policies should be raised by the whole labour movement, including the two "workers' parties" the Social Democrats and the Left Party (former Communist Party).

The strike opens the way not only to the creation of one single union but to a national campaign to return all privatised services to the public sector

KURDISTAN

Release Ocalan

The arrest of Abdullah Ocalan has exposed western backing for Turkey's continued repression of the Kurds

ONE MORE calamity has hit the long suffering Kurdish people. Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), was abducted last month in Kenya by the combined efforts of the CIA, Israeli Mossad agents, and various European governments who refused him asylum.

He was drugged, beaten and, probably, tortured. His lawyers were refused access to him. Ocalan now faces a summary trial and execution. The workers' movement in Europe must act now to prevent the murder of Ocalan and help the Kurds to win their freedom.

In cities across Europe Kurdish exiles erupted in angry and militant demonstrations. Consumed by anger and grief some set fire to themselves. In Berlin three were brutally gunned down by Israeli embassy guards. The Kurds, as ever, are willing to die to free their divided and cruelly oppressed nation.

The USA, Britain and the other imperialist democracies are willing to see the Kurds repressed by Turkey, an imperialist ally. This NATO member is not to be found in the list of countries ritually stigmatised by Blair and Clinton for their lack of human rights. Despite the scale of repression and torture meted out by the Turkish government and military it is given a relatively clean bill of democratic health by Washington and London.

Turkey's request to join the European Union (EU) has been denied, so far, with references to its human rights record. However, the real reason for this is not concern for the democratic rights of the Kurds but racism. The EU bosses fear an influx of Turkish and Kurdish immigrants if Turkey joins the EU. This also explains why full citizenship rights have been denied to many Turks and Kurds who have lived and worked in the EU for decades.



Kurdish sit-down protest outside Greek Embassy, London, February 1999. Photo: Molly Cooper

Now – with Ocalan in a Turkish jail – the EU is calling for a “fair trial” and Kurdish rights. What hypocrisy!

Why were all EU governments, most of them calling themselves socialist, social-democratic or Labour, willing to hand over the main leader of the Kurdish resistance to certain torture and death? Were Russia, Greece, Italy, Germany – who either expelled him or refused to grant him asylum after he was expelled from Syria last autumn – really afraid of the huffing and puffing of Turkish prime minister, Bulent Ecevit? Hardly!

The EU's abandonment of the elementary democratic right of asylum stemmed from its unwillingness to

oppose the United States' desire to maintain Turkey as both a key base for air attacks on Iraq and as a guard dog for the oil multinationals in the Middle East and, potentially, in central Asia too.

The EU imperialist powers (with the exception of Britain) may not entirely approve of this role. They have conflicting interests and different states which they support. But they dare not do anything to obstruct the USA's strategy – especially when they desperately need NATO and US ground troops to impose a settlement in Kosova.

Additionally, if they wish to continue to exclude Turkey from the EU (for economic and racist reasons) then at least it must not be completely alien-

ated by giving Ocalan asylum. Worse, they have unleashed their brutal police squads on the Kurdish demonstrators in Berlin, Rome, Athens, threatened them with deportation to Turkey and banned the PKK and pro-Kurdish demonstrations.

This powerful, if temporary, coalition of EU and US interests doomed Ocalan. His appeals for a fair trial or an international tribunal will fall on deaf ears in Washington, London, Berlin and Paris.

The imperialist democracies have all signed solemn declarations of universal and inalienable human rights which guarantee the right of all nations to self-determination. But they absolutely

refuse to recognise this right for the Kurdish people. The imperialists insist on the sanctity of the borders that their own statesmen drew on the map in 1920 and 1945.

Over the last two decades in particular, the Kurds have suffered mass killings approaching genocide at the hands of three states: Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. As a result of this repression more than half a million Kurds have sought refuge in Western Europe.

This Kurdish Diaspora – despite the treacherous pro-imperialism of the leaders of the European labour movements – has no option but to turn to the rank and file workers and revolutionary movement. A massive campaign of street demonstrations and pickets must demand the halting of the show trial, the freeing of Ocalan and all other Kurdish prisoners of war and the lifting of all repressive measures taken in EU countries against the Kurdish exile community.

European workers must also fight to expose and remove all those in the workers' parties responsible for collusion in the denial of asylum rights to Ocalan, his kidnapping, and the subsequent witch-hunt against Kurdish exiles. The European workers' movement must actively support:

- The immediate and unconditional release of Ocalan and the granting to him of asylum in an EU country of his choice.
- The lifting of all bans and proscriptions on the PKK and other Kurdish political organisations.
- The recognition of the unconditional right of asylum to Kurds fleeing persecution. No deportations to prison, torture and death.
- Block all arms sales to Turkey. For a campaign to impose workers' sanctions against Turkey. All US troops and aircraft out of Turkey. Down with the NATO alliance!

PKK

How to win national liberation

THE KURDS number 26 million people but are mainly divided among four states – Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The Turkish Kurds are the largest component. Some 13 million Kurds comprise 20 per cent of Turkey's population, mainly in the south-east.

They are the largest state-less nation in the world. To keep it that way their national identity has been denied both by the imperialist powers and the Turkish regime. The Kurds have been systematically persecuted by successive Turkish governments, with the aim of forcibly assimilating them into the Turkish nation.

Until the 1990s the Turkish government denied the very existence of the Kurdish people, calling them “mountain Turks”. Until 1990 it was illegal to speak the Kurdish language in public. Today it is still banned from schools and radio stations.

Over the last fifteen years 30,000 people have been killed, 3,000 villages destroyed and vast areas deliberately depopulated by government forces. Kurdish and Turkish journalists who tried to report this repression or even assert cultural rights have been imprisoned, tortured or assassinated by death squads.

The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) was formed 20 years ago in response to this persecution. It launched its first attack against Turkish military targets in 1984. The PKK is distinguished from other Kurdish political parties in Iran and Iraq by its social base, which includes a sizeable number of workers and peasants. The PKK claims to have 10,000 guerrillas and among them thousands of women. Although it has benefited from some Syrian aid, it has effectively relied on the organisational support of the Kurds in Kurdistan, in Turkey and abroad.

The PKK's ability to sustain a campaign of military struggle against the well-armed Turkish army has won it a leading position and popular support in both urban and rural Kurdish areas, as well as in the Kurdish Diaspora. While the Kurdish parties of Iran and Iraq were not able to undermine the oil-based financial and economic power of those states, the PKK has been able to strike at Turkey's economy, particularly the vulnerable tourist industry.

But since the launch of Operation Steel in 1995, when the Turkish army sent 35,000 troops into Kurdish areas, the PKK has been pushed onto the mil-

itary and political defensive. Already in 1992, after the crushing defeat of Iraq by the USA, Ocalan claimed the PKK would settle for limited autonomy within Turkey, under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The PKK became more dependent upon Syria as its forces beat a retreat under the hammer blows of Operation Steel. This has now proven disastrous.

It is obvious that the PKK has been under tremendous pressure from imperialism, from the treacherous agents of imperialism among the Iraqi Kurds, as well as from the Turkish military offensive. But it is also undeniable that the reliance of the PKK on the Baathist regime in Syria, or on Talabani's forces in northern Iraq, has brought the PKK guerrilla campaign to an impasse. When Turkey massed troops on Syria's border last year Damascus cracked and so began Ocalan's torturous journey to the isolated prison in the Sea of Marmara.

The PKK advocates both a Stalinist-type “socialism” and independence for greater Kurdistan, and insists on armed struggle as the way to realise these objectives. The PKK swears by the failed strategy of “revolution by stages”

which in practice means renouncing not only the socialist revolution but also any struggle against the big Kurdish landlords and for land to the poor peasants. Instead it reserved its greatest venom for other left forces in Kurdistan; the PKK has a shameful record of sectarian violence and oppression in the early 1990s.

But there was always an alternative to dependence on Arab regimes and sectarian violence – a mass struggle in the cities and villages across Turkey, and appeals to the Turkish workers to break the shameful silence of most of the Turkish left on the right of the Kurds to self-determination.

In order to curry favour with the EU during accession negotiations, the Turkish government talks about “a Kurdish reality” and promises economic development in south-eastern Turkey; but still will not hear of autonomy or a federal state let alone of their right to self-determination. The Kurdish masses can only escape national oppression if the dictatorships of the surrounding states are smashed. The Kurdish struggle has to be linked to the struggles of Iraqi, Turkish, Syrian and Iranian workers and poor peasants.

If the Kurds' national aspirations are satisfied by real equality and social and political rights within each of the oppressor states then socialists must support this. Should self-determination lead them to seek an autonomous region all workers must assist them in securing this goal.

But should the experience of oppression and the limited and failed autonomy within Iraq in the past lead the Kurdish masses to rally around the demand for a united independent Kurdistan then we would fight for this to take the form of a workers' and peasants' republic. Immediately we support:

- The recognition of the Kurds as a nation and their right to self-determination – up to and including their right to secede from the Turkish state.
- All Turkish troops out of Kurdistan. Halt Turkish invasions on Kurdish areas in Syria, Iraq and Iran. For a workers and peasants' militia!
- Down with the feudal landowners; land reform under workers and peasants' control!
- No to capitalist exploitation! Workers' control in the factories, refineries and building sites.

Peace talks give Serbs green light for offensive against KLA

Kosova carve-up continues as Nato observers look on

THE SERBIAN delegation walked away from the Rambouillet talks with a three week breathing space and went straight back to renew the war against the Kosovar Albanians. For all US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's huffing and puffing, there is little likelihood that a single house will be blown down – at least, not on the Serb side.

Incredibly, the imperialists accepted the explanation that the massing of Serb troops on the Kosovan border was simply, "winter training". But these "exercises" soon became grim reality as Kosovan Liberation Army (KLA) positions in north western Kosova came under fire from tanks and rockets at the end of last month. This was despite NATO threats of air strikes if Serb forces went on the offensive or committed "disproportionate violence" or atrocities against civilians.

The Butcher of Belgrade has done it again – another diplomatic victory for Slobodan Milosevic over US and British imperialism.

It is a pattern we have seen time and again. First in Western Slavonia then in Bosnia, and now the forces of genocide are off the leash again. The latest build up of some 8,000 troops and 200 tanks on the borders of Kosova, will reinforce the 25,000 plus army, paramilitary police and fascist irregulars who are presently terrifying and slaughtering Kosovar villagers north of the capital Pristina, under the very noses of the OSCE observers. Kosovars fear that the Serbs plan to partition the north west of the province, if the talks turn against them, because of its rich mineral deposits and Orthodox monasteries.

The latest Serb attacks are probably the start of a new Spring offensive against the KLA – even before the farcical "peace conference" is reconvened in mid-March. The reason given for the humiliating climbdown by the US and Britain over air strikes against the Serbs if they did not agree to the peace plan at Rambouillet was – wait for it – the intransigence of the Kosovars!

And what did the victims of brutal oppression and pogroms refuse to do? They refused to hand in their weapons and renounce their goal of independence. Obviously, such people are not worth the "ethical sermons" of Albright and Cook. The price the Kosovars

were expected to pay for a NATO intervention was agreement to the disarmament of the KLA and a renunciation of their right to a referendum on the future of Kosova in three years time.

At the last minute, Adem Demaci, a key KLA leader back in Kosova who had refused to even attend the talks, managed to persuade the KLA delegation to pull back from accepting the terms. Demaci was right. Agreement would have been nothing less than the public suicide of the Kosovar liberation struggle. Britain and the US used this as an excuse to back off from their threats to bomb the Serbs.

And what had the Serb's refused at the talks? Precisely the entry of NATO troops. Of course, revolutionaries are also flatly opposed to the entry of NATO troops, but for diametrically opposite reasons. The Serbs are opposed because they fear that NATO might hamper the discrimination, cultural deprivation, police brutality and periodic massacres which constitute Serbian rule in Kosova.

In contrast, we are opposed to their entry because, whatever temporary or partial restraint they might place on the Serbs, their real purpose would be to disarm the KLA and abort the Kosovar national liberation struggle. Once the Kosovars disarmed they would be truly helpless. Even if the Serb army were to leave Kosova, Milosevic would still have a huge standing army able to re-enter at anytime.

For us, in this conflict, NATO imperialism and the Serb forces are equally reactionary; the Serbs with an openly bloody face, while NATO hides behind a hypocritical mask of humanitarianism.

The Serbs' idea of a peace settlement is: no independence for Kosova, not now, not ever! They will hear of no referendum on independence for the Kosovars. How could they when the latter are a 90 per cent majority and Serbs a 10 per cent minority? In fact, they demand a continued Serb military/police occupation and the dismantling of the KLA and are willing to recognise only a quisling regime in Pristina – government at the point of a Kalashnikov.

For all their fine words, the Anglo-American imperialists have no real objection to this – but they do want the presence of 30-40,000 Nato troops.

They realise that without some initial check on the Serbs' genocidal impulses the representatives of the Albanian Kosovars will not be persuaded to disarm. But it is more than possible that, in the next few weeks, Washington and London will be persuaded to trim this presence to the extent that no effective force will stand against the Serbs in the province.

They have already stressed that the NATO troops' first task would be to supervise the disarming of the KLA. Meanwhile, most of the rest of the EU states are lukewarm and Russia is openly hostile to the whole project of Nato intervention. Like the US and Britain, they do not give a damn about the Kosovars – except to stem the "flood" of refugees into the EU.

Demaci and the KLA "hardliners" were completely right to sign nothing in Rambouillet. Demaci's role seems to confirm the reports of major splits in the KLA between those who want to accept the peace deal and those who refuse to consider disarmament. There was, and is, nothing for the Kosovars in Rambouillet. They were wrong to go there in the first place and wrong to call on NATO to intervene. NATO is not a police force in the service of human rights.

For the Kosovar movement, the strategy of trying to bring about the intervention of the "western democracies" – who express shock and outrage at the Serbian massacres – will prove to be self-defeating. The imperialist powers are cynically pursuing their own agenda. They intend to use Milosevic to tie up the small nationalities of former Yugoslavia in landlocked mini-states (like Bosnia), complete the restoration

of capitalism and then, at a later stage, they hope that he (and fascists like his deputy prime minister, Seselj) can be replaced by proper bourgeois politicians.

Milosevic may be a tiresome ally, but they want Serbia as a gendarme to keep order, with Nato member Greece, in the Balkans. For this reason, the British and Americans will not hear of a further dismantling of Yugoslavia – despite the fact that they played a major role in starting the whole bloody process in the late 1980s.

The utterly cynical self-interest of these states can be seen in their attitude to the principle of the self-determination of nations. In the late 1980s,

when they wanted to detach Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia because they were the country's most highly developed and wealthy parts and were targeted for rapid restoration of capitalism, the imperialists recognised their right to self determination. Judged not only on the basis of abstract right but on the

concrete fact of brutal oppression, the Kosovars have not only as good, but even better, claims to national recognition.

If the US and EU governments really cared about democracy and freedom they could have started by recognising the independence of Kosova. As elections, polls and a mass supported guerrilla war all indicate, this is clearly the wish of its population. For good measure, imperialists could have given the Kosovar fighters the money, the weapons and the training they needed to liberate themselves.

But they did not and they will not. And for this reason the Kosovars can only rely on their own strength to win

their liberation. However, they can win allies in this struggle. They have the right and the duty to appeal for support to progressive forces around the world, particularly the international working class and all those fighting against imperialism.

For this very reason the KLA's appeals to, and reliance on, US and British imperialism is a disaster. Those, like the Iraqi people, who have suffered and are suffering the brutal bombing of US and British jets, will scarcely understand why Kosovars are calling for these very forces to attack Serbia. In the Middle East and the Islamic world, people will see the Kosovars as the pliant tools of their own worst enemies. This will be true in Latin America and in Asia where, otherwise, there would be natural sympathy and support for the Kosovars.

However, anyone who does not want to see the triumph of the Kosovars, does not recognise a progressive struggle when they see one. Those leftists, or even Trotskyists like the SWP or the Socialist Party, who take a neutral stance because "both sides are nationalists", or because the KLA have carried out some unjustified killings of Serbian villagers, cannot tell an oppressive from a liberatory struggle. That they should lecture the Kosovars to wait for socialism is an infamous betrayal of the entire Leninist and Trotskyist tradition.

As for the Stalinists of the *Morning Star*, who can scarcely conceal their support for their brother Stalinist, Milosevic, let them do so openly – but there is a price. The price is to deck with flowers the rotting remains of Stalinism as it decomposes into fascism.

Whatever the false tactics of the Kosovar political and military organisations, revolutionaries around the world must give them the maximum material and moral support:

- Victory to the Kosovar national liberation struggle!
- Arms, medical supplies, food with no strings to the Kosovars!
- Lift all restrictions on KLA fundraising and organising in Western Europe!
- Open the borders of the EU to Kosovar refugees!
- No NATO bombing of Serbia! No to NATO forces in Kosova!

The Kosovars can only rely on their own strength to win their liberation.

However, they can win allies in this struggle.

EU AND THE KURDS

German state attacks Kurdish refugees

THE GERMAN state has long sided with the Turkish regime against the Kurdish people. Germany is a massive arms supplier for Turkey. Equipment from the old NVA (the former East German army) was sold en masse to Turkey in the early 1990s for use in the war against the Kurds in Turkey and Northern Iraq.

The PKK was banned in the mid-1990s as a "criminal organisation" (as were a number of Turkish far-left organisations). However, this has not broken the mass support for the PKK among Kurdish immigrants. Among the 600,000 Kurdish immigrants, the organisation has approximately 10,000 members and is able to mobilise up to 100,000 supporters.

When Ocalan was arrested the Kurdish community quickly occupied the Greek embassy and the offices of

workersPOWER

the Social Democratic Party and the Greens, demanding statements condemning the kidnapping.

"This is terror," raged the bourgeois media, and a racist campaign against the Kurds was launched. A day later three Kurdish protesters were shot dead by Israeli guards when a demonstration of 50 people tried to get into Israel's embassy in Berlin. Another 14 were wounded in the hail of automatic gunfire.

More than 200 Kurdish immigrants were arrested during the first days of the protests. In Leipzig, Berlin and some other cities pro-Kurdish demonstrations have been banned. Thousands of police have been mobilised to impose this anti-democratic measure.

Where demonstrations were allowed, they were huge. In Berlin, Stuttgart, Bremen and Hamburg the GAM

(the German section of the LRCI) distributed leaflets and joined protests. We stand for unconditional solidarity with the PKK and the Kurdish people against the German state. We call for the immediate legalisation of the PKK and other Kurdish and Turkish left wing organisations and a workers' inquiry into the Israeli embassy shootings and the involvement of the German police.

We are for the release of all Kurdish prisoners, the dropping of all charges against them and an end to all deportations.

All military aid for Turkey must be stopped now. We fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants and for working class solidarity with the Kurdish liberation struggle.

New Labour's review

The family is frequently the focus for moral panics and political disputes. Recently, William Hague portrayed himself as the real defender of the traditional family, promoting tax incentives for married couples with children. Meanwhile, Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw sings the praises of the "stability" of the married couple with two kids, the style of family to which we should all aspire.

But beyond the apparent cross-party consensus, the family-related policies being pursued by the present Labour government represent an important shift from the previous decades. With its review of the welfare state, argues *Helen Watson*, Labour is revising social policy on the family.

MUCH OF the discussion around the family rests on a basic, but false, assumption: that the family is the natural, immutable way in which human society is organised. The work of early anthropologists, synthesised and given political expression in Friedrich Engels' brilliant work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884, demonstrated that this is simply not true. The family is an historical creation. It is intimately linked to the development of private property within human history and as such is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Prior to the development of private property human society was organised in a variety of other forms. For example, more recent anthropological research confirming the central tenets of Engels' analysis, shows the predominance of hunter-gatherer societies in certain pre-historic periods, where human beings lived together in large, relatively loose groupings with some division of labour amongst male and female but both sexes given equal value in terms of their contribution to the overall welfare of the community.

The second false assumption is that the basic unit of the family has always been a heterosexual couple and their children, with the male parent playing the leading role in the family. Engels, however, clearly showed that the family, since the development of private property, has changed and developed, reflecting the needs of class society. The family in the period of feudalism bears little resemblance to today's nuclear family with 2.4 kids.

Engels argued that the family under capitalism performs a specific role in relation to maintaining the exploitation of the working class and the continuing power of the capitalist class. The role of the family under capitalism is twofold. The family is the means by which new workers are created. The responsibility for providing for children falls predominantly upon the parents. In a very practical way the parents have to provide food and shelter for their own children. Thus the family serves capitalism by ensuring the reproduction of labour. And, since this child-rearing is done in an isolated, individualistic manner, the family institution can also underpin capitalism in an ideological way, by reinforcing the sense of the individual rather than the collective.

In capitalist society, the work that takes place in the family is organised completely differently and separately from the rest of work. The family is a private area, work in it is unpaid, but it remains crucial to the system as a whole.

Yet while the family plays a vital role under capitalism, it is also prone to contradictions and tensions. The role of reproducers of labour can at times clash with the role of the parents, in particular mothers, as workers. At different times during capitalist development the family has been in "crisis". During the industrial revolution and the early years of modern capitalism the rampant search for profits meant that all available workers were used, men, women and children. No time or energy was left for domestic work, and the health of the workforce declined. Reforms were introduced to restrict the exploitation of the working class through limiting work for women and children.

It is this basic tension which lies behind New Labour's policy on the family.

Changes in working patterns for men and women – unemployment, increasing part-time work, demands for greater flexibility – have led to fundamental changes in government policy on the family since the end of the Second World War. They are linked to the creation and decline of the welfare state. New Labour is attempting to protect the family, while tailoring family policy to the current needs of capitalism.

In the period after the Second World War, there was talk of a crisis in the family in the same way as there has been for much of the past 30 years. In the 1940s, there was concern about the disintegration in family life as a result of the war, mass prolonged evacuation of children, and the declining birth rate. A Royal Commission was set

up to address the dangers of falling population. By the time it reported, the country was in the midst of the post-war baby boom. But its recommendations were generally popular with government and complemented those of other "experts".

The policy adopted after the war, and enshrined within the foundations of the welfare state by Beveridge, was to advocate and support women as full time mothers, dependent on male breadwinners. This was promoted through ideology and propaganda, including the famous work of John Bowlby in the 1940s. He argued that maternal deprivation was responsible for delinquency, and that society needed mothers to stay at home to nurture their children. This propaganda went alongside more direct changes in policy: married women were thrown out of work in large numbers when the war ended, and nursery school places were closed by the thousand.

The main policy was the provision of welfare. In his report, Beveridge wrote that women's most important work for the foreseeable future was "to ensure the continuation of the British race". He assumed that a married woman would not work outside the home, whether or not she had children and could be classified as a dependent for administrative purposes, with her benefits payable through her husband's insurance. Any state provision that would help mothers to work was resisted, and an extensive network of "support" for the mother at home was developed. This included financial support through family allowances (later child benefit), and more state-led "intervention" through training of health visitors and social workers to help women be good mothers. Radio and later TV programmes, pamphlets and magazines promoted motherhood and good housekeeping.

Even in the post-war period this policy came into conflict with reality. There was a major shortage of labour after the war and employment of women was one way, alongside promoting immigration from Britain's one-time colonies, of providing much-needed workers. The strength of the ideology about women in the home was an obstacle to this process of recruitment. There was a partial resolution through encouraging women to work up to the birth of the first child and again once the children had left school, but that left a gap of 16 or more years when women would not be available for work.

The direction of family policy is clear in the details of the welfare state provisions of 1948. National Insurance was compulsory "for all classes for all purposes from cradle to grave". Everyone should pay in, and then be entitled to unemployment or sickness benefit. An editorial in *The Times* in 1948 commented on the launch of the welfare state:

"The new services . . . treat the individual as a citizen, not as a 'pauper', an object of charity or a member of a particular social class . . . It was desired . . . to strengthen the bonds of human solidarity in a complex society by making all citizens without exception 'stand on equal terms' in insurance, pooling their risks, and giving every citizen in his weekly contribution stamp a personal reminder of his obligations to his fellows."

The use of "his" is not simply old fashioned. It seems that all citizens from all classes did not include women. Married women were encouraged to opt out of personal national insurance and rely on their husband's contributions, and one in three did, losing all independent entitlement to benefits and pensions. All the woman's national insurance contributions prior to marriage were lost unless she remained in work for at least half of the time between marriage and retirement. Widows with children were given benefits whereas widowers were not. The system assumed, and promoted, dependence of the woman on her husband. At the same time, it was assumed that the man would be able to work and support his family for most of the time, needing benefits for exceptional periods of unemployment or sickness.

In the following 50 years, reality continued to diverge from the principles underpinning the welfare state. Crucially, women's employment increased dramatically, particularly for married

women with children. In 1951, 26 per cent of married women worked; this has risen to 65 per cent. The proportion of all women of working age in employment rose from 36 per cent in 1951 to 67 per cent in 1995. Since 1980, much of this increase has been in part-time work which allows women to balance home and work but brings much needed additional income into the family, retains a degree of independence for women, and provides a flexible workforce.

Two other major changes undermined the Beveridge ideal. First, the dramatic rise in long-term, structural unemployment, particularly for men. In 1997, one in five households had no one in employment. And the time people spend unemployed has increased: in 1996, 67 per cent of people on income support had been claiming for over a year. Second, the way people live has changed, with more people living alone, fewer couples marrying, and an increase in lone parent households.

In 1997, 28 per cent of households were one person households, 25 per cent married couples with dependent children, 28 per cent married couples with no children and 19 per cent were lone parents and children.

The number of children born outside marriage has increased four-fold since 1971. One in five families is now headed by a lone parent, up from 7 per cent from 25 years ago.

Since 1979, the number of first-time marriages has halved, and the number of divorces has trebled. Seventy per cent of women who married for the first time in 1993 had cohabited with their future husband prior to the wedding, compared with 4 per cent in 1966.

Fertility rates have declined in the last 30 years from 2.9 to 1.8 children per family.

Britain has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe – 8.5 pregnancies per 1000 women under 16.

It is clear that a system based on the assumption of a male earner with dependent wife and children is at odds with reality for a large proportion of the population. There have been some changes to benefit entitlement over the decades, largely as a result of pressure for equal rights for women. But from the perspective of the state, there is a problem with a massive growth in spending on welfare benefits, which has increased from around £12 billion (at today's prices) in 1950, to around £98 billion in 1998. Governments, Tory and Labour, are also alarmed at the decline in the "normal" family, and echoing Bowlby, blame this for many social ills.

The response of the Tory government was driven by ideology combined with pragmatic attempts at social reform to reduce state spending. The Tories under Thatcher were committed to reducing the role of the state and reasserting the independence of the individual family. A number of advisers and policy units gave support to Thatcher's project, attacking aspects of the "nanny" state and recommending that families be given more responsibility for looking after their own members.

Ferdinand Mount, one of Thatcher's early advisers, launched this attack in 1983 on an unsuspecting group:

"The Health Visitor, who visits mothers with babies is often sweet and sensitive and genuinely useful . . . but . . . her eye roams the room and the baby for evidence of dirt, neglect, even brutality. This kindly middle-aged body has at her ultimate disposal a Stalinist array of powers."

A Social Affairs Unit report in 1986 argued: "The expansion of the modern state has led to the responsibility of the family for children and young people being subverted by the state itself and by professional bodies of doctors and teachers whose autonomy from, that is irresponsibility to, the family, the state endorses. Further, the web of incentives and penalties set by the tax and benefit system is now firmly loaded against the normal (that is two-parent) family."

Policies were directed towards making the "normal" family unit more private and self-reliant.

sed family values

On childcare, for example, this was seen to be the responsibility of the family, not the state. Husbands and wives should sort it out for themselves. The famous Gillick case, where for a period of time doctors were told they could not provide contraceptives to under-16s without informing the parents, was part of this "family knows best" approach. The role of the state in relation to the family was to intervene where there had been breakdown or abuse. Financial supports were cut through freezing child benefit. The family, usually women, was also expected to care for other dependent relatives.

"Whatever level of public expenditure proves practicable and however it is distributed, the primary sources of support and care for elderly people are informal and voluntary... Care in the community must increasingly mean care by the community." (Parliamentary Paper, 1981).

Benefits to lone parents were a major source of concern to the Tory government. In 1948, the government had paid assistance to 33,000 separated wives and 8,000 unmarried mothers. In 1997, income support went to 982,000 lone parents, about half of whom were never married. In 1948, it had been assumed that unmarried mothers were "less likely to require assistance for any great length of time", because they would go back to work in a month or two. In other words they would put their children up for adoption, and would neither get nor deserve the support given to married or widowed mothers.

The Tories reacted to this massive growth in the number of single mothers with venomous outbursts about the irresponsibility and moral depravity of the women and the men involved. But, practically, they ended up paying out benefits to these families, which they were entitled to until the youngest child was 16. They then introduced the Child Support Act, which allowed the state to claw back some of that money from fathers. They stuck to the underlying principle that the two parent family, even if never married or divorced, should take responsibility for the children.

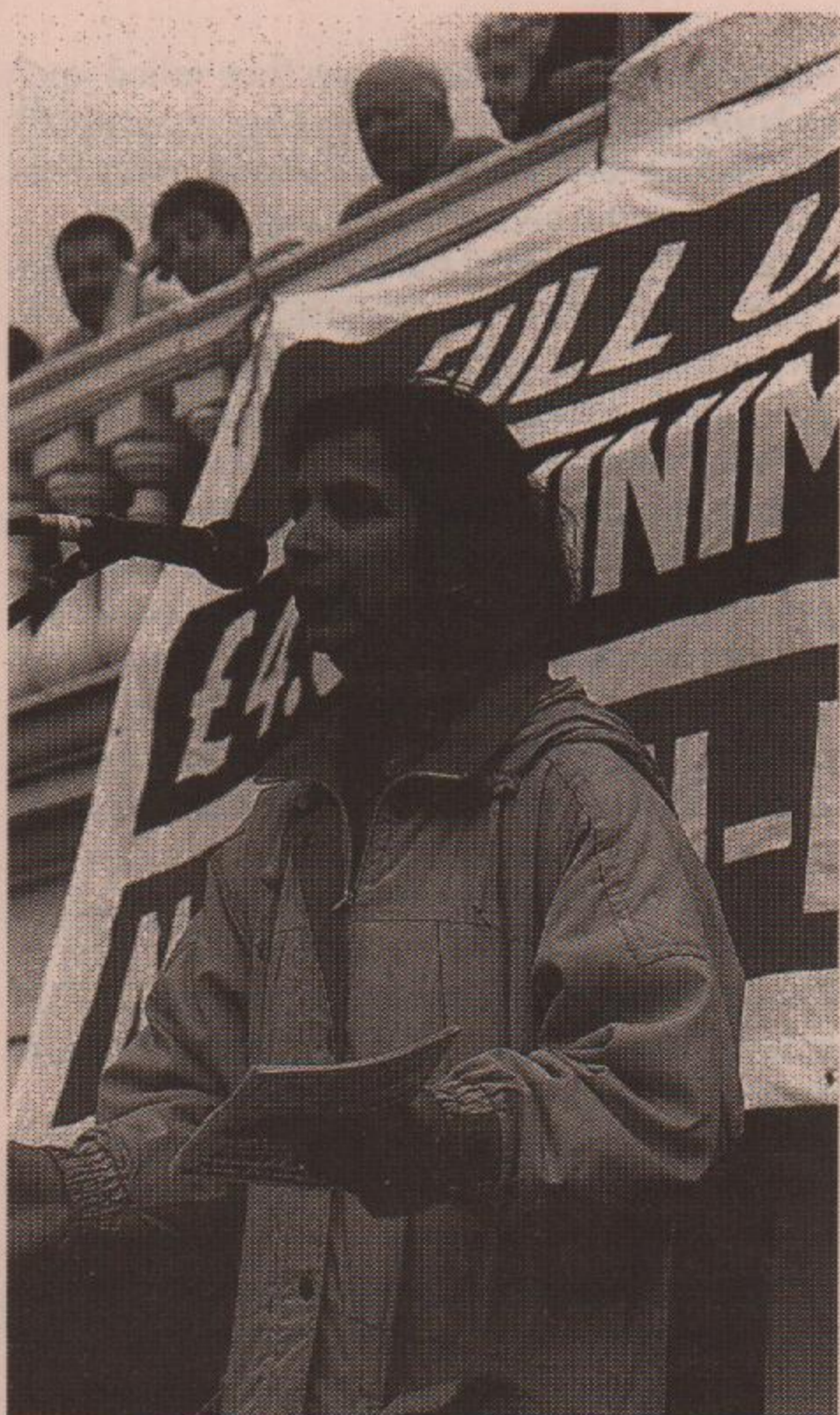
The problem with the Tory approach to the family was that aside from the ideological offensive in defence of "normal" families, and the backfiring "back to basics" campaign, it did little to address the impact of the major changes that had taken place in work and the family. They responded to demands for greater equality for women with a number of reforms, including the introduction of separate taxation for married men and women in 1989, but did little else.

New Labour uses very similar rhetoric, and is often heard applauding the "normal" family, although stressing that they do not wish to discriminate against other forms of the family. But their policies are attempting to redefine the relationship between the state, the family and work in a way that has not been done since 1948.

Labour has recognised that the increase in women's paid work and the decline in male secure employment are not temporary but persisting trends. Similarly, the increasing numbers of disabled, sick and elderly people claiming benefits and pensions are the result of demographic change and the declining ability of the individual family to absorb the costs of supporting dependants for prolonged periods. The principles underlying the welfare state have to be ripped up, and a new set put in place. Labour's answer, often repeated, is work.

"Work for those who can; security for those who can't", said Tony Blair in March 1998 when the Green Paper on Welfare Reform was launched. "Above all, the system must change because the world has changed, beyond the recognition of Beveridge's generation. The world of work has altered - people no longer expect a job for life... The role of women has been transformed. Family structures are different."

Blair argues that the current system has led to increased poverty and inequality, while costing the state more and more, and that there are inbuilt disincentives to work. The answer is to



Hillingdon striker speaks at rally: Labour's policies do nothing for women in low paid

Labour is trying to create a system where all possible members of society work to help support themselves. Not surprisingly in this New Labour world of individual responsibility, it will be young working class women and the disabled who will be the ones who have to pay.

develop "an affordable system that aids those who need it, helps people to help themselves".

The proposed changes to benefits are now well known. There is pressure on everyone, single parents, long-term sick and people with disabilities to find work. For some there are explicit penalties and loss of benefit if work is not sought; for others, such as single mothers with young children, it remains largely at the level of bullying by a personal adviser, and through the system of a "single gateway to work". The adviser is supposed to convince single mums that they will be better off in work than on benefit.

This may sound similar to many Tory attempts to cut the benefit bill, but there is an important difference. Labour has ditched the assumption that it is better for mothers to stay at home than to work. A modern capitalist economy needs women available for work, and mothers are attractive as workers as they are frequently willing to work part time, are generally low paid while having skills and experience, and make fewer demands for training. This change in policy is shown most clearly by their encouraging, and no doubt eventually forcing, single mothers to work. Labour are explicit about this:

"Having a parent in work provides children with an active, valuable role model. It helps provide the parent with self-respect and a social network. And most important of all, a waged family is less likely to be poor and benefit-dependent than an unwaged one."

Blair has admitted to being influenced by some of the welfare programmes set up in the United States. In certain areas, single mothers are forced off benefits and into low-paid jobs. Some are denied help with housing and are instead expected to live in hostels with their children, presumably until they can afford to support themselves. In the recent debates over single mothers, the creation of hostels specifically for young, unmarried mothers was seriously proposed.

Blair has referred to his proposed reforms as a "Third Way" in politics: "not dismantling welfare leaving it simply as a low-grade safety net for the destitute; nor keeping it unreformed and underperforming; but reforming it on the basis of a new contract between citizen and state, where we keep a welfare state from which we all benefit, but on terms that are fair and clear."

Citizenship is a central part of New Labour's ideology. Unlike Beveridge, women are seen as citizens too, and therefore have responsibilities to work as well as rights to benefits, the NHS etc. Just being married and bringing up children is not sufficient, contributions through paid work are what count. At the same time, Labour are continuing to eliminate some of the obviously discriminatory rules and laws. Previously, widows received pensions but widowers did not. Now both will be eligible, but the actual benefits are being reduced, for example where there are no dependent children. Legal changes mean that divorced women will have more access to their husband's pensions.

In addition to these reforms, Labour has a number of specific proposals on the family. Unlike the Tories, Labour does see a role for the state in fashioning family life and childcare. There are a number of key proposals. Families will be "supported" through a National Institute for Parenting and the Family, telephone advice lines, better training for health visitors, and schools will run parenting classes. Child benefit is being increased by £2.50 per week for the oldest child, a substantial rise after years of falling value. There will be proposals to tax this for higher rate tax payers, but this is proving difficult because it threatens to undermine independent taxation for women. The new Working Families Tax Credit is a way of offering incentives to working families, by guaranteeing a minimum income and reducing disincentives to work.

There are a number of proposals to help lower paid families with the costs of childcare, including a tax credit of up to 70 per cent of childcare costs, alongside an expansion of state nursery places for 3 and 4 year olds, and of after-school provision. There are plans to allow more time off work for parents (the Parental Leave Directive), unpaid of course, and to promote family-friend-

ly work practices through limits on the working week (the Working Week Directive).

Tony Blair described the package as "practical measures to support family life, to offer help when wanted so that families can bring up their children properly".

Taken together, Labour's plans do amount to a significant shift away from support for the male breadwinner/dependent wife model. However, although there is little explicit in the reforms about family types, Jack Straw has made Labour's support for married heterosexual families clear:

"What we know from the evidence is that generally speaking stability is more likely to occur where the parents are married than where they are not."

Some of the reforms are real attempts to support families and work, particularly in childcare and tax allowances for the low-paid. They are woefully inadequate, given the real costs of childcare compared with the low wages that many women are likely to earn. They are also going to deny women the choice of looking after their children themselves, because the state is likely to be able to withdraw or reduce benefits, or at least keep them so low as to make it difficult to live.

The family has always been, and will remain, a problem for the capitalist state and its government. Labour are attempting to address a problem that the Tories largely avoided.

This century there have been repeated "scares" about the family falling apart, and with it social dislocation and potential rebellion increasing. Each time the state responds with an ideological offensive to promote "normal" family life. But the tension remains - capitalists require workers in the public sphere to exploit. They are reluctant to pay, either through wages or taxes, sufficient to support all those who don't work (children, disabled, pensioners, sick) and so the stability of the family suffers.

Labour is trying to create a system where all possible members of society work to help support themselves. Not surprisingly in this New Labour world of individual responsibility, it will be young, working class women and the disabled who will be the ones who have to pay. Predominantly women workers will be forced into low-paid, temporary jobs and still have to juggle work and home commitments and at some point yet a new "crisis of the family" will lead to a new set of policies.

Capitalism cannot resolve the problem because it cannot approach the family from the standpoint of the needs of human beings. It shapes its family policy according to its need to sustain the profit system. Our alternative is to break down that barrier between work and family, to take as much of the labour in the home into the public world of work. This would mean providing free, high-quality 24-hour childcare facilities, funding community canteens and washing facilities.

The socialisation of housework and childcare is the means by which alternative social structures to the existing form of family - with its attendant oppression of women and youth - can eventually be created. But the precondition for this socialisation on a truly society-wide scale, is the overthrow of capitalism.

The revolution they

Oliver Cromwell was born four hundred years ago. As the English Revolution unfolded in the 1640s Cromwell became its decisive leader. Cromwell's memory is still so detested by royalty that at every state opening of Parliament his statue is covered to shield it from the monarch's eyes. The entire story of this momentous revolutionary class struggle is consciously concealed in the official history books. *Bill Jenkins sets the record straight*

E NGLAND IN the seventeenth century was ripe for revolution. Since the abolition of the monasteries and separation from Rome under Henry VIII capitalism had been growing apace. Particularly in the south and east of England capitalist merchants and landowners began to produce for the market. The export of wool and cloth to the United Provinces (Netherlands) expanded massively. Privateers launched a free-lance foreign policy in the Americas, founding colonies, seizing Spanish treasure and trading in slaves.

Production surged in shipping, coal, iron and wood. On the land a class of yeoman farmers began to develop as the cash economy grew and capitalist aristocrats began the craze for "improving" their land, undertaking capital investment to increase the output of commodities like food and wool. The enclosure of common lands, traditionally farmed by the feudal village community, became widespread. The capitalists were the new power on the land.

Their development was severely hindered by the feudal state. The nobility, church and monarch held political power, but they were in decline as a class. The import of gold and silver from the Americas, principally through Spain, had led to an inflationary crisis in the preceding century. Rents, which were fixed in perpetuity or for decades, had collapsed in value. So too had tithes and other traditional fines and taxes, now paid in money rather than goods. The feudal aristocracy's sources of wealth were drying up.

Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I were forced to sell lands and titles to defend their waning influence against the rising bourgeoisie. A vicious circle ensued as each sale further undermined the power of the monarch it was intended to protect.

As the situation became more desperate the monarchy revived redundant feudal rights, taxes and fines. To counter this the bourgeoisie launched a struggle to establish parliamentary control over taxation thereby depriving the monarchy, and the feudal state, of its main source of revenue.

In 1637 John Hampden, a cousin of Cromwell, was convicted for refusing to pay Ship Money. This was a royal tax, notionally levied to support the upkeep of the navy. But it was really a means for Charles I to secure his independence from Parliament.

Hampden's determination provoked a major crisis. This came to a head when a Scottish army, in co-operation with Hampden's parliamentary opposition, invaded England in 1639.

In April 1640, Charles called the Short Parliament to resolve the crisis. But it refused to grant the taxes and Hampden and four other parliamentary leaders were arrested. This was a declaration of war by the King on Parliament. In November 1640 the bourgeoisie replied, convening the Long Parliament. The English Revolution had begun.

In its first days the feudal prerogative courts were abolished. Taxation without the consent of Parliament was declared illegal. The Earl of Strafford, the king's most loyal minister, was executed. Bishops were excluded from the House of Lords and triennial Parliaments agreed. Parliament could not be dissolved without its own consent.

But the alliance between the big capitalists, aristocrats transforming themselves into capitalist landowners and an openly revolutionary bourgeoisie, was already beginning to crack. Parliament may have agreed on the need for reform, but significant sections of it directly benefited from the king's largesse.

Furthermore, as the reform movement grew, social unrest began to break out. The protests against enclosures spread and the London apprentices came out onto the streets. The weakening of English rule in Ireland led to a national rebellion.

The bourgeoisie needed to get rid of feudalism. But many of them hoped to achieve this by reform. They feared that the masses of small farm-

ers and urban artisans, whom they relied upon to support them against the King, might take things too far and demand a democracy that threatened the bourgeoisie's own privileges.

Initially, therefore, the bourgeois leaders concentrated on fighting the king by parliamentary means. But without a revolutionary struggle – that is without the direct entry of the masses onto the stage of history, as Trotsky put it – the logjam could not be broken.

Recognising this, Hampden, and other bourgeois radicals, brought a "Grand Remonstrance" to the House. It was a list of charges against Charles' personal rule. Most significantly, the radicals printed it and circulated it to the people, effectively appealing to them to support it. Its effect was immediate and electric.

Swords were drawn in the Commons. The King tried to arrest the parliamentary leaders. They fled to the City of London. Charles left the capital and headed north to rally support. In August 1642 civil war began in earnest.

Cromwell was a central figure in the parliamentary opposition to Charles. As MP for Huntingdon he moved important resolutions against the king and called for the organisation of military opposition to the monarchy. It was as a military leader that he made his central and distinctive contribution.

At the start of the war the parliamentary armies were in the hands of the old aristocratic leadership. The Commander in Chief was the Earl of Essex. This leadership did not want a decisive victory against the King and did not organise to win one. They wanted compromise. The Earl of Manchester moaned in 1643:

"If we beat the King 99 times yet he is King still, but if the King beat us once, we shall all be hanged."

Cromwell replied:
"My Lord, if this be so, why did we take up arms at first?"

From the outset Cromwell followed a quite different policy. He organised a revolutionary army which rested on the "middling sort of people", the yeomanry, the small capitalist farmers who wanted to rip the roots of feudalism out of the ground:

"I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows than what you call a gentleman and is nothing else."

Religious radicals, whose extreme Protestant faith expounded revolutionary democratic ideals – Brownists, Anabaptists, the Independents – flocked to Cromwell's banner. Inevitably his bold policy, and his willingness to mobilise the masses, brought Cromwell into direct conflict with the aristocratic leadership of the Parliamentary armies.

Cromwell came to the head of the "win the war party" and in the first purge of the revolution this party moved to establish control over the entire parliamentary army. In April 1645 Parliament adopted the Self Denying Ordinance. This prevented any member of the House from holding a command in the army. It was a risky policy. Cromwell himself lost his rank but the Ordinance successfully removed the aristocratic leadership who feared a social revolution. In the words of Essex:

"Posterity will say that to deliver them from the yoke of the King we have subjugated them to that of the common people."

In June 1645, on the eve of the battle of Naseby, Cromwell was re-appointed Lieutenant General. Sir Thomas Fairfax was the new Commander in Chief. Their New Model Army was by now the powerhouse of the revolution. The great strength of the Cromwellian army lay in its cavalry. They displayed an unmatched discipline and will to defeat the royalists. Cromwell is alleged to have said:

"That if the King chanced to be in the body of the enemy that he was to charge, he would as soon discharge his pistol upon him as at any other private person."

Unlike the royalist cavalry, when the Ironsides charged they did not chase their opponents across the fields in pursuit of glory and loot; they regrouped to charge again, each charge being directed towards winning the battle. This gave them devastating power and enabled them to win the battle of Naseby, the decisive victory which destroyed the royalist forces.

But victory divided the victors. Parliament, the bastion of the bourgeoisie and "improving" aristocrats, remained fearful of the revolutionary democratic movement the war had unleashed. And in the army the "middling sort of people" who supported democratic ideals were organised and conscious of their power. After all it was they who had destroyed the King's forces.

On 18 February 1647, Parliament resolved to disband the army without payment of their arrears of pay, or even indemnity against actions carried out in pursuit of the war. They were ordered to enlist for an army for Ireland with new officers loyal to the Presbyterian majority in Parliament. The Presbyterians – the "party" of bourgeois order in the new regime – passed a Declaration of Dislike which denounced those who opposed the "relief" of Ireland as "enemies of the state." The Presbyterian Parliamentary majority had "so much malice towards the army as besots them", Cromwell wrote to Fairfax in March 1647.

The revolution now enters its second and decisive phase. The army mutinied and elected delegates from every unit called Agitators. The influence of the revolutionary democratic movement in the army, the Levellers, began to grow dramatically. Led by John Lilburne, who had been imprisoned by Charles I, the Levellers represented the extreme left wing of the bourgeois revolution. And they recognised that the New Model Army was the decisive means of defending and extending that revolution.

Under Leveller influence the Agitators denounced the Irish expedition as a "design to ruin and break this army to pieces." Parliament responded to this by imprisoning Ensign Nicholls, a delegate sent to explain the army's concerns.

The military MPs, Skippon, Ireton, Fleetwood and Cromwell, were directed to pacify the army. Quickly realising the impossibility of their task the high command, or Grandees as they were known, threw in their lot with the Agitators. On 1 June, probably with Cromwell's consent, Cornet Joyce seized the King, who was at that time imprisoned at Oxford. Fairfax explained their dilemma:

"I am forced to yield to something out of order, to keep the army from disorder, or worse inconveniences."

The General Council of the army was founded in July 1647 consisting of two officer and two Agitator delegates per regiment.

At a general rendezvous (mass meeting) of the army at Newmarket a Solemn Engagement was passed which agreed that the army would not disband until its demands had been met. The army began its advance on London. At this point Cromwell remained in favour of a monarchy:

"No man could enjoy their lives and estates quietly without the King had his rights."

He entered into negotiations with Charles. But to no effect. Charles would not compromise. Meanwhile the Agitators insisted on the occupation of London. As the army drew near Parliament split with 57 MPs joining the army. London was occupied on 6 August.

Cromwell was still hopeful of doing a deal with the King. With Ireton and Lambert he drew up the Heads of Proposals. This proposed a constitutional monarchy. It represented the demands of the army high command and as such it described the limits to which the revolutionary bourgeoisie, represented by Cromwell, were prepared to go.

It was opposed by the alternative Leveller constitution, the Agreement of the People. This proposed a revolutionary democratic constitution: universal male suffrage (barring servants and wage labourers), annual parliaments, disestablishment of the church, abolition of tithes and a republic.

would like to forget

Debated at a General Council in Putney 1647 this constitution was fiercely opposed by Cromwell and Ireton. But in spite of their intervention its central element, the extension of the franchise, was passed. A general rendezvous of the army was called. Something had to be done to curtail the radical democratic movement. Four days before the expected rendezvous it was.

On 11 November the King escaped from custody. He fled into the arms of Cromwell's cousin, the newly appointed governor of the Isle of Wight. There is only circumstantial evidence of Cromwell's part in the escape but it was nevertheless very convenient and the Grandees quickly took advantage of it. Instead of one, they called three rendezvous. They used the fact of the King's escape as a means of pleading for military unity and discipline and an end to mutinies.

Fairfax drafted a remonstrance promising to take up the issue of pay arrears and indemnity. At the same time radical army dissidents were killed or jailed. The bulk of the troops responded to Fairfax's pleas and order was restored. When the King rejected a proffered compromise and re-commenced military action the army once more rallied to Cromwell's call for unity.

Parliament itself voted for no further negotiations with the King. After a series of swift victories the second civil war was quickly won by the end of 1648. In close co-operation with the Levellers, Ireton and the Council of Officers brought forward their demands, a Remonstrance, to Parliament.

Most importantly it replaced the constitutional monarchy with a "supreme council of parliament" and described the King as being guilty of the "highest treason among men . . . guilty of all the innocent blood spilt thereby." Pride's Purge followed, it excluded all those MP's who continued to oppose the army's demands. Cromwell only arrived from the North the day after the purge although he approved of the action.

The next two months saw a re-run of the debates around the Agreement of the People rehearsed at Putney 18 months before. Once again the Grandees were unable to win the majority of the army to their more moderate constitution and against the Leveller demands. However, these debates ran alongside the trial of the King which opened on January 20 1649.

Cromwell showed no equivocation. When Algernon Sidney questioned the validity of the tribunal he responded, "I tell you I will cut off his head with the crown on it." He wrote the order for the King's execution and on Tuesday 30 January 1649, after the deed was done, William Hewlett, the second executioner, held the royal head up to the assembled crowd and proclaimed: "Behold the head of a traitor." The monarchy was abolished in March along with the House of Lords.

The execution of the King meant, however, that the Grandees had no reason to continue their alliance with the Levellers. While the revolutionary bourgeoisie were prepared to destroy the power of the feudal aristocracy, church and King they could not tolerate a more widespread or thorough-going democracy. Any extension of the franchise beyond the very limited property qualifications acceptable to them would have posed an immediate threat to capitalist property, to the social stability they required as a pre-requisite for their economic development.

The limits of the bourgeois revolution were becoming clear. A series of Leveller pamphlets were produced denouncing the Grandees for their refusal to implement the Agreement of the People. The widespread support these demands generated within the army and particularly on the London streets prompted the leaders of the new order to arrest Lilburne and other Leveller leaders. Repressive measures limiting democratic rights in the army were introduced.

The time had come to destroy the left wing of the revolution and call a halt to the reforms it

The execution of the King meant that the Grandees had no reason to continue their alliance with the Levellers. While the revolutionary bourgeoisie were prepared to destroy the power of the feudal aristocracy, church and King they could not tolerate a more widespread or thorough-going democracy

was pushing forward. Once again it was the question of Ireland which brought the crisis to a head. The Levellers opposed the dispatch of an army to Ireland. Firstly because they supported the right of Ireland to self determination and freedom of religion, but more importantly because they understood that the army was the only guarantee of the implementation of their own democratic programme in England. Its withdrawal and the suppression of the democratic rights won by its rank and file would end any prospect of the continuation of the revolution.

A mutiny broke out in four regiments. However, the rebellion lacked coherent leadership and after a series of skirmishes, culminating at Burford, the Leveller revolt was defeated. Four of its leaders were shot. The bourgeoisie well understood the significance of this event. Cromwell and Fairfax were rewarded with a feast from the City of London and degrees from the royalist city of Oxford.

In August the re-conquest of Ireland was begun. The fruits of the bourgeois revolution were already evident. Now that its representatives were in power, the City of London showed no hesitation in providing all the necessary resources required to mount the invasion. In a brutal campaign Cromwell quickly and violently subdued the Irish resistance so as to discourage future rebellion. At Drogheda around 2,800 of the 3,000 defenders were massacred. After the siege of Wexford up to 2,000 of its inhabitants were butchered by the English forces. Cromwell pronounced:

"I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgement of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood, and that it will tend to prevent the effusion of blood for the future, which are satisfactory grounds to such actions, which otherwise cannot but work remorse and regret."

Ireland was the first English colony, but Cromwell still needed to secure the English border against the Scots in the North. In July 1650 Cromwell launched the invasion of Scotland. In a brilliant attack on the Scottish army at Dunbar, where his forces were outnumbered two to one, Cromwell smashed his enemy. Victory was complete when Cromwell permitted Charles II to re-enter England with a Scottish army and march to Worcester, so separating his forces from their base of support before crushing them.

Cromwell now turned his attention towards the aggressive foreign policy demanded by English capital. The Navigation Act of October 1651 excluded foreign ships from carrying English goods or trading with English colonies. This was aimed at undermining the Dutch monopoly of the carrying trade. After England's offer of union with the United Provinces was rejected, England went to war with the Dutch.

But every step towards the total triumph of the bourgeois revolution undermined Cromwell's own position. The removal of the foreign threat encouraged the conservative bourgeois who wanted a return to lower levels of taxation and the abolition of the standing army. Cromwell's victories over the left wing, both outside and within the army itself, meant that he had an ever more narrow base of support for his rule. Increasingly he relied upon military dictatorship alone.

In 1653 Cromwell dismissed the remnants of the Long Parliament, the Rump. It was replaced with the army-nominated Barebones Parliament. The Barebones Parliament undertook the re-organisation of the state administration begun with the execution of the King.

Cromwell did not smash the existing machine, he perfected it for bourgeois rule. A permanent civil service was established and a series of committees brought into place to oversee the running of government policy. Cromwell could not accept the radical proposals of army Barebones MPs for the abolition of tithes so, in December 1653, the Barebones Parliament was dismissed. The following day Cromwell was proclaimed Lord Protector.

His regime now leaned ever more towards the constitutional monarchists who had led the bour-

geois revolution at the start and whose ideas Cromwell had supported in the Heads of Proposals.

Direct military rule replaced the Barebones Parliament and from 1655-58 England was ruled by the Major Generals, with only the most enfeebled form of nominated parliament.

There was no question that this was a bourgeois government. But the bourgeoisie remained concerned by the still aroused democratic aspirations of the masses they had relied upon to win the civil war for them. They remembered only too well how the army had threatened a far more radical revolution only a few years before and could not tolerate the exceptionally high cost of taxation required to maintain a standing army.

To remove this danger Cromwell was offered the crown in 1657. He rejected it under pressure from the army, but the offer itself from key members of Britain's new ruling elite signified the extent of the unfolding counter-revolution against the radical democracy of the English Revolution.

With Cromwell's death in 1658 and a palace revolution against his son and successor, Richard - backed by a purged and conservative army led by an ex-royalist general, Monck - the way was clear for the bourgeoisie to put a final stop to the democratic impetus of their own revolution. In May 1660 Parliament recalled Charles II to the throne and the democratic movements that flowered during the revolution were crushed by a reign of brutal repression.

But this political counter-revolution proceeded on the basis of a social order that had been firmly consolidated by the revolution. Feudalism had been destroyed, and while the existence of the monarchy itself was the most powerful reminder of the limits of the revolution, the path had been cleared for the dramatic development and expansion of British capitalism over the next two centuries.

Oliver Cromwell personified the revolution that made this possible. Capitalism was born in a violent struggle between living social classes. Its birth is proof positive of something that today's bourgeoisie desperately seek to deny - that human progress is driven forward by revolutionary class struggle.

In remembering Cromwell we remember this lesson of history and we remind capitalism that as it was born, so it will perish - by revolution. This time, however, the revolution will not only be made by the masses, it will also be made in their own interests. It will be a working class, socialist revolution.

workers POWER

WHERE WE STAND

CAPITALISM is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

THE LABOUR PARTY is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.

THE TRADE UNIONS must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

OCTOBER 1917: The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

IMPERIALISM is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

DEMONSTRATE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE

**Saturday 10 April, Newcastle Upon Tyne
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Called by Unison, supported by the TUC**



New Labour's genetically modified ministers

In the pockets of the food bosses

THE FIRST major political scandal to hit the Genetically Modified (GM) food industry broke last month. But it's not just the potential health risks that leave a nasty taste in the mouth. New Labour have shown themselves to be as corrupt as the Tories, when it comes to choosing between food safety and capitalist profits.

The recent debate was sparked off by a group of scientists in Aberdeen who claimed that their colleague, Dr Arpad Pusztai, was unfairly dismissed last year after publishing research into the effects of eating GM foodstuffs. His experiments on rats had revealed damage to their immune system, brains and stomach lining after being fed on GM potatoes.

Very quickly the scandal became more than just a scientific debate. Tony Blair, rather than take seriously possible risks to public health, proved himself to be an admirer of the tactics of the Tory ex-Minister of Agriculture John Selwyn Gummer by declaring that GM food is completely safe, he eats it and is happy for his family to eat it. Has Blair really learnt nothing at all after the BSE scandal mired the Tories in sleaze and devastated the British beef industry?

The truth is that this "Frankenstein Food" scandal proves a long-held socialist belief: that parliamentary democracy is a "facade" to conceal the real power in society which lies in the hands of the bosses, the multinationals and the state apparatus that defends them.

Since Labour came to power they have had 81 meetings with multinationals promoting GM foods and Monsanto, one of the world's seven biggest corporations and already making super

profits out of GM foods, sponsored last year's Labour Party conference.

The most blatant evidence of the influence of capitalist profiteers over the government comes in the shape of Lord Sainsbury—a minister at the Department of Trade and Industry and a member of the government's biotechnology committee. This "man of complete integrity" as Jack Cunningham describes him, has a £1 billion shareholding in the family firm that is most actively promoting GM foods on the high street; he set up a foundation which spent millions researching the profit-making potential of GM foods; his firm controls worldwide rights to one of the key gene modification processes; he sits on the very committee that makes decisions about whether such foods are safe for the rest of us to eat and whether planting GM crops is a risk to the environment.

Any brain-damaged rat would seriously question Lord Sainsbury's objectivity—but not Tony Blair. After an embarrassing two weeks of calls for sackings and the banning of GM crops, the government reluctantly agreed to a moratorium on GM food production in the UK for one year. But imports are still allowed, and Lord Sainsbury, crucial to the pro-business image of New Labour, remains in the government.

If anyone is still worried about the uncertainties surrounding GM food they would do well to remember that the House of Commons cafeteria was one of the first to ban GM food products!

The food industry is the biggest consumer industry there is, and while representatives of multinationals such as Monsanto, Zeneca and Dupont are on

the research bodies and fund the laboratories and university departments we will never really know what the risks relating to eating or growing GM foods are.

The Rowett Institute in Aberdeen that sacked Dr Pusztai receives hundreds of thousands in funding from Monsanto—his ousting is a clear warning to any scientists considering blowing the whistle on research that threatens multinational profits in the future.

Even if the government brings in controls to try and limit risks to health or environmental damage, the multinationals can afford to ignore them if they choose to. In Lincolnshire last month a court found that Monsanto had failed to stick to regulations governing the experimental growth of GM crops. In the first case of its kind in Britain the company pleaded guilty to failing to provide a proper barrier between GM modified oilseed rape and surrounding crops, thereby allowing pollen from the experimental crop to be released into the environment.

So how did the court decide to punish Monsanto for this blatant breach of regulations? By imposing a fine of £17,000. Monsanto's turnover last year was £5.4 billion!

The US government is also mired in corruption over GM foods—Clinton was backed in his 1996 re-election campaign with very large sums of money from big business, millions of which came from Monsanto and the other GM food multinationals. In addition, the GM food companies successfully "planted" ex-employees into the US Food and Drug Administration, who then had the task of reviewing those companies' safety

records.

Socialists have a duty to expose the claims of Clinton and Blair that they want to see an end to world hunger, or a more environmentally safe agribusiness as bare-faced lies.

Of course, humans have always altered foodstuffs, from the cross breeding and selection of animals, to controlling chemical reactions in bakeries. We do not reject the genetic modification of plants or animals. But we do support a moratorium on all GM food production in the UK, because the absence of independent workers' inspection and control over such processes means they will be abused by capitalists seeking genetically enhanced profits at our expense.

Genetic engineering does have enormous potential benefits in the realms of medical progress, and could be useful in improving food production. But only really independent research under the control of the working class will enable us to find out how safe it is.

The real issue behind the Frankenstein Food of the twenty-first century is not the science. It is the political engineering of the Blair and Clinton administrations by a powerful wing of the ruling class, intent on gaining a world monopoly of the food industry. And once again the Labour government has shown its complete incapacity, and unwillingness, to stand up to the interests of big business.

We say:

- Sack Sainsbury now!
- For workers' control of a nationalised food industry, with no compensation to Monsanto or any other of the food for profit bosses!

FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 0181 981 0602

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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