

In defence of Clause 4! For socialism!

DRIVE OUT TORY LIARS

THE government's promise that 1995 will herald good times is a lie. It is a lie difficult to match even by the Tory party's standards. For millions the grim reality is quite different.

■ Millions are unemployed, without any hope of a job with wages that will allow them to live in anything like decent circumstances.

■ Those forced to rely on state benefits face a crack-down in April, when it will become more difficult to claim housing and unemployment benefit.

■ Thousands of old people live in fear, wondering what will happen when they become too infirm to look after themselves. Facilities for the elderly are more and more targeted only at those with the money to pay. The rest are being left to fend for themselves.

■ Tens of thousands of workers in the industries privatised by the Tories face the sack or a severe worsening in their wages and working conditions.

■ The majority of students exist in desperate poverty, worried where their next decent meal will come from. Thousands are forced to live out on the streets of Britain's cities every night.

Meanwhile the City gents

BY THE EDITOR

are raking in millions from the government's sale of state assets. They have seen their shares rise rapidly as workers have been sacked.

Last week ScotRail announced that a third of its workers will go in the interests of 'economy'. In fact they will be sacked and the work piled on those who are left for one reason only — to make more profits for the City sharks.

Where do the Labour leaders stand as the new year opens?

They do not lift a finger against a government that millions of workers can see is at the very end of its tether. A single puff would finish it off.

Far from giving that puff Blair and company retreat in unseemly haste even from the mildest of measures that have previously been proposed.

While many children face crumbling school buildings, falling educational standards and teachers forced to

work beyond the point of endurance, Blair and company run a mile from any attack on the ability of the rich to buy their children an education.

The denationalised industries are being used by a select few to make millions. As far as the Labour leaders are concerned, there will be no more public ownership. To reassure the City parasites, Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution is to be thrown into the dustbin.

Organise

The billionaires in the boardrooms are to be given any guarantees they want about the policies of a future Labour government. Now is the time to organise the fight against Blair and the government that he and his fellow Labour leaders are allowing to remain in office.

The start of this fight must be the defence of Clause Four. This is the clause that pledges a Labour government to take into public ownership the basic industries on which the livelihood of millions depends.

Blair has thrown down the gauntlet.

■ For him the Labour

Party will have nothing to do with socialism, even in words. He wants to make the Labour Party an openly capitalist party, along the lines of the US Democratic Party.

■ He wants to break the link between the Labour Party and the trades unions, as part of making the Labour Party a 'non-class' party, that is a party that stands openly for the interests of the capitalist class.

But by raising the question of Clause Four Blair has opened up the question: What sort of party does the working class need to defend itself against the capitalist class and its state?

The widest campaign in the unions, in the Labour Party, in the working class as a whole, must be launched on two basic points:

■ Defend Clause Four!

■ Force the next Labour government to renationalise all those industries privatised by the Tories. No compensation must be paid to those who have already coined in millions. The renationalised industries must be run for the benefit of those who work in them and those who use their products and services.

Defend Clause 4! Defend socialism! Campaign's open steering committee meeting

Manchester

Sat. 28 January 1995

Open to all who want to fight for socialism and the retention of Clause Four of the the Labour Party's constitution.

For further details of the campaign and the venue for this meeting contact: the NUM, Miners' Offices, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, Yorkshire S70 2IS.

8th Workers Aid convoy has reached Tuzla!

TEN Workers Aid for Bosnia trucks unloaded food and medical aid in the central Bosnian town of Tuzla on New Year's Day.

Because of bad weather and other problems the convoy did not arrive in the Croatian town of Split (the jumping off point for most convoys to Bosnia) until Christmas Eve, and was then further delayed by the Christmas break.

Consequently, the planned New Year's Eve rave in Tuzla could not take place, although Glasgow sound

system 'Desert Storm' had travelled all the way to hold it.

Instead the truck-based sound system toured around Tuzla on New Year's Day, stopping in different districts to entertain the workers of this mining town.

The convoy — the eighth to reach Tuzla since Workers Aid for Bosnia was founded in June 1993 — left to make its way back the following day.

Six of the ten trucks were from Britain, and four from Spain.



On Christmas Day, families and supporters of innocent prisoners held, for the seventh year, a vigil outside West Midlands police headquarters, Birmingham. On the vigil were the mothers of Michael and Vincent Hickey of the Bridgewater Four
Photo: Mark Salmon

National Workers Aid Committee Meeting

Saturday 21 January
1pm, Manchester Town Hall

Come and plan the next convoy to Tuzla, and the visit of the Tuzla trade union delegation to Britain.

Workers Press

Defend Chechnya!

THE heroic defiance of the people of Chechnya against the Russian tanks, guns and planes demands the unconditional support of workers everywhere.

As in the imperialist-backed slaughter in Bosnia, this is a real test of internationalism that demands more than sympathy or token resolutions.

The television coverage has brought into millions of homes the pictures of carnage — the dead and injured, the mutilated bodies, the bombed remains of people's houses.

Workers' organisations should be calling meetings, demonstrations, and pickets of Russian embassies. Our comrades in the Socialist Workers Union of Russia have been leading the way in the protests.

In the heart of Moscow, on anti-war demonstrations and at factories, they have distributed leaflets (see pages 4&5). They explain it is the imperialist nature of Yeltsin and the new, emerging bourgeoisie that is preventing the Chechen people from independently determining their own fate, and they call for the withdrawal of Russian troops.

The television pictures have not only shown the brutality of the Russian onslaught. They have graphically portrayed the fighting determination and sacrifice of the Chechens as they defend their right to independence.

For more than three weeks the Chechen irregulars have defied over 40,000 Russian troops sent by Yeltsin to attempt to halt the republic's secession.

Armoured personnel carriers and tanks lie burnt-out and destroyed. In fierce clashes including hand-to-hand fighting, the lightly-armed volunteers have repelled a much more powerful force.

In many places hundreds of unarmed women linked hands and halted the advancing tanks; some Russian officers refused to continue with the attacks.

Workers Press salutes all the heroic independence fighters of Chechnya. Even though their struggle takes place under the banner of nationalism, it is part of the international struggle of the working class for socialism — a system free from all national oppression and exploitation.

* * * * *

THE inability of the Russian troops to carry out a decisive military victory against a state with just over 1 million people reflects, in large part, the divisions in and weakness of the new Russian ruling elite.

These sections of the old Stalinist bureaucracy fight amongst themselves for power in an attempt to line their pockets as owners and bosses in a restored system of capitalism.

But this capitalism requires a decisive defeat of the Russian working class. Yeltsin's virtual dictatorship and the parliamentary splits reflect profound difficulties in achieving this.

Yeltsin's greater Russian chauvinism conceals the fact that he actually operates on behalf of an imperialist market trying to get absolute dominance in the former USSR.

Like the Gulf war and the conflict in Bosnia this is the 'new world order' in action.

But during the Gulf war there was a united alliance of the imperialist powers which ensured the slaughter of the Iraqi army and its withdrawal from Kuwait.

Now the imperialist powers are deeply divided over the extent to which they can trust Yeltsin to act on their behalf, and are fearful of the repercussions of the huge opposition inside Russia to the invasion of Chechnya.

We support the Chechen people's right to self-determination, as we did when the country was part of the former Soviet Union. This right was guaranteed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

It was only with the usurpation of power by Stalin and the destruction of soviet democracy that the peoples of the Soviet republics became imprisoned in a 'prison house of nations'.

Ireland: the 'peace process' illusions

BY JOHN STEELE

IN Ireland the predominant thrust of the British government's tactics in the so-called 'peace process' is directed towards sucking Sinn Fein and the republican movement into new administrative structures for ruling the six counties.

This has once again been demonstrated in the climb-down over the handing in of arms. Since the IRA ceasefire John Major has been insisting that the arsenals of weapons be totally and verifiably decommissioned before Sinn Fein and the loyalist groupings could enter formal talks with the Tories and other political parties.

British government civil servants had already met with Martin McGuinness and other Sinn Fein leaders in preliminary talks but the insistence on the surrendering of arms was building up into a major obstacle to further involvement.

However, speaking on 30 December, Major modified his stance to a vague statement that 'significant progress' had to be made on the decommissioning of arms.

Apart from the fact that it is

impossible to confirm if all weapons and explosives are surrendered, there is no chance of the British government either risking the involvement of the republican leadership in the talks or perhaps even provoking a split in the IRA.

The speed with which the Tories are proceeding and their readiness to ditch negotiating positions flow from these fears of a rejection in the republican movement or the emergence of an armed splinter group in opposition to the sell-out.

Even if Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams has to come up with a token gesture to facilitate his rush to sit around the table with the Unionists and the British government there is no doubt that these talks will take place without any substantial handing in of weapons.

Desire

They will proceed on the back of a genuine desire by the people of Northern Ireland for 'peace' — for an end to the killings, bombings, intimidations, army harassment and state repression.

But it is clear that this will be a phony peace. The Sinn Fein leadership's policy is based on

the illusion that there can be a period of increased capitalist development which will dramatically alleviate Ireland's mass unemployment and poverty and create a situation in which a majority of the Unionists can be persuaded that their interests lie in a united capitalist Ireland.

It is not only the openly capitalist parties who encourage this illusion. It has become the catchword of the spineless trade union leadership whose ideology has been influenced to a large extent by the remnants of Stalinism in the Communist Party of Ireland.

In effect it says that the basic antagonisms between the working class and the bosses must be subordinated to the collaboration between all political parties in the 'peace process'.

In Britain this odious view is regurgitated in the editorials of the Stalinist 'Morning Star'. Thus on 24 December there is a plea that the release of prisoners and the decommissioning of arms should not be made into absolute principles which will hinder the 'peace process'.

Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of 'a permanent peaceful solution'. And according to the Stalinists, this will be obtained not only by re-

conciling the differences between the Nationalists, Unionists, and the Tories.

They also (10 December) want the inclusion of trades unions and 'organisations representing the business and farming community' at the talks. Their aim is to portray the view that all differences can be subordinated in the drive to attract 'investment aid from Britain, the European Union and the United States'.

Promises

This is directly in line with the needs of imperialism. Britain is attempting to behead the nationalist struggle with promises of economic expansion.

Above all it fears an independent mobilisation of the working class which links the fight on the economic issues with the unresolved national question and the state repression which flows from it.

All those republicans who are concerned at the incorporation of the Sinn Fein leadership in talks which hold no prospect of the removal of partition must seriously consider which policies they fight around and which class they align themselves with.

New Year's greetings: 1995

Warm greetings to readers of Workers Press.

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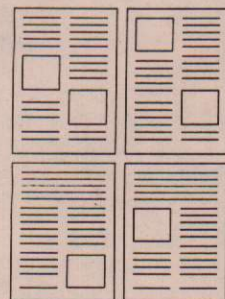
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A happy and politically prosperous New Year to all Workers Press readers from Sumner Type

School cuts deepen crisis

BY BOB ARCHER

GOVERNMENT cuts in education spending are set to bite hard in schools in 1995, at the same time as concern is growing in universities at the standard of science and mathematics teaching in schools.

The Association of County Councils says that some schools face cuts of £100,000 per year in their overall budgets.

Oxfordshire faces a cut of 6.3 per cent in its education budget, an average of £133 per pupil. Northumberland has suffered cuts of £200 per pupil over the last three years.

This makes a mockery of any attempt to improve standards in schools. How can they improve the education delivered to pupils with fewer teachers, larger classes and less teaching material?

Maths professors at a number of universities have claimed

that students arriving from schools to study for science and maths degrees lack basic knowledge of the subject.

Chris Robson, professor of pure mathematics at Leeds University, says: 'Throughout scientific higher education, there are worries about the mathematical competence of people coming up to university. We are being forced into changing what we teach and when we teach it.'

Peter Saunders, professor of mathematics at King's College, London, said: 'The national curriculum leaves out the rigour of the subject. I don't think anyone is happy with maths in the schools except the educationists.'

The London Mathematical Society is to prepare a report calling on the government to take urgent action. Some academics claim children at school do not get a chance to practice skills like algebra and are no longer taught fundamental concepts such as the notion of proof.

These claims inspired press stories last week that led to an angry exchange of newspaper letters.

Margaret Brown, another maths professor at King's Col-

lege, pointed out that the real problem was a shortage of high-quality candidates for maths A-level, partly because the subject was perceived to be boring.

Many students have turned away from maths and science at university level, preferring economics, business studies, law, and medicine in order to improve their career prospects.

Another correspondent pointed out that the national curriculum does call for fundamentals like algebra to be taught from an early age.

She accused professor Saunders of wanting young children to learn routines without any understanding and asked: 'Does he care if they are bored? Hate maths?'

In fact maths teachers have put in a huge amount of work together with educationalists to improve the way mathematics is taught, to identify and concentrate on the essential skills and to improve teaching materials.

However, lecturers in the European Business Management School at the University of Wales, Swansea, have provided statistics which, they claim, show that average scores in a

controlled maths test have dropped from 43.1 to 37.3 between 1987 and 1993.

They say this reflects the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in place of the traditional O-level.

Above all, the crisis in all branches of learning is a reflection of the stagnation of the productive forces, paralysed by the social relations of production under capitalism.

The relative decline of industrial production and the vast expansion of parasitical activities such as the media, advertising, and the provision of financial services has distorted the demand for graduates.

For many people in past generations, their culture was bound up with the craft they learned and which ensured them a productive place in industry.

This option is quite closed to most of today's young people; even relatively qualified graduates are being excluded from any role in production.

This recoils upon the very centres of learning in schools and universities, causing an inner corrosion.

Struggle against longer hours is international

BY PETER GIBSON

THE pressure on workers to work longer shifts, and extra overtime is not just a problem in Britain and western Europe. In the US workers are struggling against attempts by employers to impose 12-hour shifts.

Employees at the US firm A.E. Staley were locked out during a dispute opposing a bosses' demand for a 12-hour working day, reports the American union publication, 'Labor Notes'.

There were warnings also to workers at the American auto company Packard, at a recent meeting of Union of Automobile Workers (UAW) activists, against any negotiations on a 12-hour day. One section of their plant is already on an 'experimental' schedule of 12-hour days, with three days on and three days off.

Bill Inger of local (branch) 717 told the meeting: 'If you do not buy a newspaper, you do not know what day it is.'

The UAW members voted to make shorter working time with higher pay one of their campaigning points for the union's convention.

In France, a court has been told that the driver of a 44-ton

lorry that crashed into a line of cars on a motorway in August 1993, killing 6 and injuring 13, had been forced by his employer to work excessive hours.

The driver said in court: 'A good driver is one who obeys the instructions of his employer, even if he breaks the law.' He had worked at least 85 hours in the week before the accident, and admitted falling asleep at the wheel after failing to take the breaks required by the law.

His managers said that difficult economic circumstances forced them to make such demands.

Maximum

The maximum working week in France is supposed to be 48 hours, but two French trades unions have now signed an agreement with road-haulage employers for a maximum of 60 hours per week.

So people can be killed or injured, and workers suffer ill health because of stress and long unhealthy hours — but this is excused if there are 'difficult economic circumstances'.

The call at the first May Day demonstration in London in 1890 was for 'The legal eight-hour day'. This slogan must be taken up again by workers everywhere.

Police pay out more in awards

BY JENNY JONES

IN 1994 the Metropolitan Police paid out £61,000 in awards made by the courts to people who had complained of ill-treatment, assault, or wrongful arrest. But the Met also paid out £700,000 in out-of-court settlements, higher than in previous years.

Over £250,000 was paid out in cases involving police officers from Stoke Newington police station, even though the police accepted no liability and only two police officers from the station have been charged with any offence.

In 1993, there were 5,000 complaints to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA), but only ten police officers were convicted, while a further 25 were dismissed or resigned.

This record of cover-ups explains why people now go to a solicitor to complain about the police rather than the PCA.

Anson King was recently awarded £70,000 by the courts for assault, battery, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution. When he had been arrested by two Stoke Newington police officers he was strip-searched and locked up. He claimed that evidence was fabricated that he was in possession of the drug crack cocaine.

King went to the PCA but got nowhere. His solicitor, Raju Bhatt, said: 'Mr King would not have needed to come to me if the police complaints procedure worked. It's outrageous that the PCA did not even look at the case.'

The two Stoke Newington police officers are still on the street.



Education cuts will deepen in 1995, while concern grows over teaching standards in science and maths

Wandsworth Tories hit at the elderly

BY MARY IDE

THE Tory leader of Wandsworth council in south London, Edward Lister, has applied to turn his house into an old people's home. He has declined to comment to newspapers on his application, which is to be considered by the council's planning department.

At a recent council meeting the Tory councillors voted to give the go-ahead to cuts and the privatisation of the council's old people's homes. The Tory majority argued that the cuts were justified because of the increase in home care and a decline in the elderly population.

Workers at the Balham Family Centre, which provides for the elderly, fear that the cut of £18,000 in its £88,000 budget will mean either losing a worker at the centre or a cut in services.

The Bedford Hill centre, which already has an 18-month waiting list and which provides a base for a number of self-help groups, is also in danger from the cuts planned by Wandsworth council. Centre management committee chair Caroline Hartnell said: 'We were absolutely devastated when we heard about the cuts.'

Maybe councillor Lister has another house he can set up — at a profit, of course — as a centre for the people of Wandsworth.

Hostels turn away 200 homeless

BY PETER GIBSON

MORE than 200 homeless people were turned away by emergency hostels in one night last year because of a lack of vacancies. The depth of the crisis is highlighted in a report by Homeless Network, an umbrella group of 30 organisations working with the homeless.

The report showed that 42 emergency night shelters and short-stay hostels were unable to provide help for 204 people, many of whom were sick.

The same report says there was a 7 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough — all this in spite of the

extra temporary beds provided by the government's winter-shelter programme.

The scheme, which gives help to provide emergency shelter to aid the homeless find permanent places to live, is due to end in March 1996. 'Where we now see hundreds on the streets every night, we will see thousands — many of them the most vulnerable, and the most desperate,' said Steve Wyler, the director of Homeless Network.

Louise Casey, director of housing services for Shelter, the charity for the homeless, said: 'The increased levels of homelessness in the capital are a direct result of the lack of affordable rented housing.'

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Inside left

Birds of a feather

'THE Troubles We've Seen', a film about war reporters in Bosnia, is due to be screened by the BBC this year. It was made by Marcel Ophuls, who shocked France 15 years ago with his frank portrayal of wartime collaboration in 'The Sorrow And The Pity'.

Discussing the new film, a British television reporter featured in it describes his shock when Serb Chetnik officers he was interviewing boasted that 'a British knight of the realm' was advising them. It was Sir Alfred Sherman, former adviser to Margaret Thatcher.

I would imagine Sir Alf, a former Stalinist who has wound up on the far right of the Tory party and invited French fascist Jean Marie Le Pen to Britain, was quite at home with the Chetniks.

Another admirer of Serb nationalism is David Hart, the wealthy businessman who played a big part in the Thatcher government's dirty war on Britain's miners and financed an anti-communist witch-hunting bulletin called 'British Briefing'. Hart has written speeches for right-wing Tory Michael Portillo and is a consultant to Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind.

Miners' leader Arthur Scargill rebuffed Bosnian campaigners a year ago, telling them 'I support the Serbs'. Arthur might have forgotten the support Tuzla miners gave the British miners in 1984-85, but he cannot have forgotten what David Hart was up to. Time for a rethink, brother!

Mac and IRIS

LET another appalling example has been revealed of British public figures being suborned by a 'foreign' intelligence service. I'm referring to the British security service, whose standards of behaviour and notion of the 'national interest' are foreign to most of us. We, the working class, are 'the enemy within', as Thatcher said.

Newly-released cabinet papers revealed by the 'Guardian's' Seumas Milne (2 January) show that in 1963 prime minister Harold Macmillan authorised the payment of £40,000 (in today's terms more like £500,000) from the service's budget to the Industrial Research and Information Service (IRIS), for its activity against the left in the trade union and labour movement.

Macmillan was responding to a private and personal approach from Lord Shawcross, a former Labour attorney-general. Sir Hartley Shawcross (or 'Shortly Floor-cross' as some of his parliamentary colleagues had dubbed him) had defected to the Tories, and become a director of Shell and Associated Electrical Industries. He remained a trustee of IRIS, a body supposedly dedicated to 'moderate' labourism.

Macmillan agreed to bring in bankers and businessmen with 'the security people' to urge the BBC to broadcast suitable programmes, and to enlist the support of 'Daily Mirror' and 'Daily Herald'.

Shawcross wanted money for five full-time IRIS organisers to defeat engineering in the Amalgamated Engineering Union and other unions. Macmillan and Shawcross also discussed the possibility of anti-union legislation after the forthcoming elections.

The direct damage done to the labour movement by defectors like Shawcross is minimal, compared with that done by those they leave behind to carry on their dirty work, the Tories' fifth column, particularly in positions of leadership.

Charlie Pottins

No to the wa



A protester outside the Kremlin calls for Yeltsin to 'Return our sons'

THOSE who rule our country are again at war. Russian forces have been thrown into battle to suppress Chechnya — where, now, the blood of peaceful men, women and children is flowing, homes and hospitals are being destroyed, and Russian soldiers, too, are being killed.

In whose name?

President Yeltsin and his government tell us it is necessary to liquidate the sources of conflict on Chechen territory. But who is doing everything possible to inflame that conflict? Who puts tanks, artillery and ammunition in the hands of 'oppositionists' — that is, criminals like Labazanov [a member of the Chechen opposition supported by the Russian government]? Who sent armed, trained mercenaries to Chechnya? The same ruling circle in Russia that today hypocritically pretends to the role of 'peacekeeper'.

Impose

No, these rulers do not want peace. Their credo is the old imperialist principle, 'divide and rule'. 'Let these Chechens destroy each other, to make it all the easier to impose our rule.'

We are told that the purpose of the military operation is to 'restore democracy to Chechnya, save its economy, stop the spread of crime'. But who operates the blockade that condemns Chechnya to hunger, ruin and decay? The rulers of Russia.

It is really they, not the 'leaders

Ukraine: for in

MORE and more often, one can hear miners asking with irritation: 'Who needs these trade unions? What use are they?' It's clear: these days people only see the worst in everything. Therefore it is particularly important not to give way to the general disillusionment and not to lose our points of reference.

It's precisely now that we, who were there at the start of the Independent Miners' Union (NPG), should remember how it was founded and what it has been able to achieve in the four years of its existence.

This is especially relevant at present because the PRUP-ists [PRUP is the Trade Union of Coal Industry Workers, the 'official' trade union], or to be exact their most hypocritical representatives — encouraged by the workers' apathy and by support from the management — have the cheek not only to claim for themselves all the achievements of the 'independents', but even to agitate among miners for the amalgamation of our workers' trade union with the PRUP.

Absurd

The authorities, whose representatives appear as the management, and the hired worker, together in one organisation — what could be more absurd?!

Already at the dawn of the workers' upsurge, during the strike movement in 1989, PRUP demonstrated its disposition as a loyal servant to the authorities, when on one

This article by a miners' leader in Pavlograd, eastern Ukraine, appeared in 'Lava', the newspaper of the Independent Miners' Union of western Donbass, in October.

It opposes a proposal by the Trade Union of Coal Industry Workers, the old 'official' Stalinist-led union, to merge the two organisations — for the reason that the 'official' union continues to work hand-in-hand with the state.

Over the last two years Workers Press has reported attempts in the former Soviet republics by the right-wing US and German trade union federations to undermine the independence of miners' and other workers' organisations in another way: by tying them politically to pro-capitalist policies of the so-called 'free market', including closures, privatisation and the abolition of price controls.

These attempts have been assisted financially by the US government, which has poured

side of the negotiating table sat representatives of the government and PRUP, and on the other side the strike committees.

This relationship of forces has continued at all levels, right up to the present day. The NPG was formed solely on the basis of the strike movement — which, naturally, influenced the character of its activity.

Some of the PRUP-ists, the 'analysts', explain the rise of the independent union by saying that the leaders of the strike movement do not want to give up their comfy leadership positions. Yet hardly any member of the strike commit-

tees of recent years remains in the leadership of the NPG. Many of them returned to their jobs and have no kind of privilege.

And anyway, how can material advantage be spoken of, if the NPG exists only because of the payments made by its members, while to this very day the PRUP feeds from the hands of the management? The only exception that can be made is the PRUP pit-level organisations, whose representatives are financially maintained by their members' contributions.

Let us remember who obtained an increase in the amount of holidays and supplementary pay-

ments, an increase in wages, and the signing of a collective agreement acceptable to the workers? Let us remember who went to Kiev on hunger-strike when our wages were not paid? The state trade union only joined these campaigns at the end — and only to take the credit and show off the victor's laurels.

Trick

The 'independents' have had their share of bumps and scrapes — especially at the start, when every trick in the book was used by managements to avoid recognising the 'troublemakers'.

War in Chechnya!

This statement was issued in Moscow by the Socialist Workers Union, the Russian section of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, together with the Group of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists. It was distributed as a leaflet, on anti-war demonstrations and at factories in the last week of December, as the Russian offensive against Chechnya intensified

of Caucasian nationalism', who are responsible for the growth of crime in the country.

When the former and present-day nomenklatura [higher bureaucrats] and the new bourgeoisie stuff their pockets at the workers' expense, when the robbery of the people is organised by the state, when the government encourages swindlers of all kinds, when the official ideology of the regime can be said to be 'get rich, at all costs' — then to speak of the 'Chechen roots' of crime is the height of vulgarity.

And to believe it is the height of stupidity. The same could be said about all the talk of 'democracy'. Will democracy really be enriched in Chechnya if an Avturkhanov [leader of the Russian-backed Chechen opposition] rides in on a tank to take the place of [Chechen president Dzhokhar] Dudayev?

The main argument of those who have sent the armed forces to Chechnya is that it is 'necessary to preserve the territorial integrity of Russia'. But who says that the Chechen people want to be ruled from Moscow? It was not by its own free will that Chechnya was incorporated into Russia.

For 40 years of the last century, Chechnya was needed by the Russian autocracy in order to conquer the Caucasus. For these four decades, the Chechen mountain-dwellers resisted this occupation, and could not be subdued even when their country was transformed into a colony by tsarism and then by the 'Soviet' empire. Nor have the Chechen people forgotten the brutality of the Stalinist regime, which exiled the Chechen people from their homeland.

Now the Yeltsin 'democracy' shows its imperialist nature to the Chechen people. Working, at all costs, to prevent the Chechen people from independently determining their own fate, the 'democratic' government shows itself to be the genuine continuator of the policy of autocracy and totalitarianism.

Not without reason have these 'democratic' forces united with the 'patriotic opposition' — Yeltsin and prime minister Chernomyrdin speak a language surprisingly similar to that of Zhirinovskiy [extreme right-wing demagogue, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party] and Baburin [leader of the Russian Popular Union, part of the 'red-brown opposition']. Essentially,

this alliance also extends to those 'communists' who consider the cause of all misfortunes to be the break-up of the bureaucratic structures of the USSR, which resulted in Chechnya having 'too much' sovereignty.

Rallied

In this way, all the most important political groupings of the Russian ruling class have rallied together on the basis of their imperialist ambitions. It is *their* war. They need to establish political and economic power over the largest possible territory; they need a strategic foothold in the Caucasus; and they need Chechen oil in order to augment their capital.

They care nothing of blood and suffering, when power and money are at stake. It is not their sons and brothers who are becoming murderers, or being killed themselves, in Chechnya. Ordinary people face the bullets — the rulers divide the profits and the 'spheres of influence'.

All this has happened before in our history. The most recent example was Afghanistan. Then, a heavy price was paid by our people for the politburo's attempts to expand its possessions. If we do not stop today's war — the same thing will happen.

Of course, Chechnya's capital, Grozny, can be taken, the Chechen forces — including the aged and the young — routed, and the whole of Chechnya filled with soldiers. But it would be naive to think that this

would solve anything. A lengthy partisan war against the occupation forces would begin — a war that would last decades and, possibly, cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

Yeltsin hopes that the Chechen adventure will help him in internal politics — first, by distracting people's attention from the everyday social-economic problems and by at least partly turning the growing discontent against the image of a 'Chechen enemy'.

Second, in the name of withstanding the 'Chechen threat', it

'Working, at all costs, to prevent the Chechen people from independently determining their own fate, the "democratic" government shows itself to be the genuine continuator of the policy of autocracy and totalitarianism.'

will be possible to 'tighten bolts' in Russia itself, especially in the case of unwelcome strikes or other actions by workers. Already internal repression has begun in Moscow; the authorities are showing displeasure even with the limited 'free speech' that exists on television, etc.

In reality — where there is war, there is dictatorship.

There need be no division between the working people of Russia and the ordinary Chechen people. We face the same evils and the same enemies — the bourgeois-bureaucratic state which is carrying out this war in the interests of the parasitic elite.

Today all honest people, who do not want Yeltsin's terror in Chechnya to be carried out in their names, must raise their voices against the aggression, against the war, against a new Afghanistan. The politicians are silent; the 'international community' is silent — so the people must have their say!

Furthermore, we must remember: this aggressive war of plunder is the inevitable consequence of the whole policy of the ruling regime and the class it serves.

Adventure

In order to destroy the basis on which this senseless and criminal adventure has been mounted, the working people must create their own powerful, independent organisations capable of taking control of society into their own hands.

No to imperialism and aggression!

Russian forces out of Chechnya!
Long live the international solidarity of the working people!

Socialist Workers Union and the Group of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists

Independent unions



Miners relaxing during the strike in the Ukraine in 1990. The independent union has led the strike movement but the official union has sought to take the credit

But now the phase of constant mass meetings has passed, and the time for serious, meticulous work has arrived. In the resolution of certain issues — such as wage rises or the increase in the quota of coal set aside for the workers' use — we may work as partners with the management and the PRUP. [The coal quota is a small amount, 5 per cent of total production last year in Pavlograd for example, which the

workers' organisations are allowed to put on to the market in exchange for consumer goods or other benefits for the workers.] All the more so today with spiralling inflation.

However, merging the NPG with the structures of the state trade union would be a serious mistake, because they have different natures, two different aims. The organisations have different potentials: in 70 years PRUP did not

achieve one-tenth of what the NPG has in the four years of its existence.

The fact that a breach of discipline and regulations by some members of the NPG raised the issue of openness [glasnost] bears testimony to the unblemished morals and strength of a trade union that is not afraid to show even its unattractive side and is ready to root out renegades. [This presumably refers to one of the corruption

scandals that affects the NPG from time to time.] The PRUP has never had such openness.

There are other, not inconsiderable, arguments against the merging of the two trades unions. But I think the ones I have enumerated are enough to justify the rejection of this nonsensical idea.

The fact is, we join trades unions not in order to receive some additional material benefit, but to de-

fend ourselves from the tyranny of the management and from the many unforeseen problems that can emerge in our ruined economy. If we put ourselves in a single harness together with the state trade union, we can never be assured of mounting such a defence.

V. Bondarenko, pit craftsman, member of the NPG at the Heroes of the Cosmos mine

A smokescreen of lies

MARK OSBORN has sent the following letter to Workers Press:

If I have got 'a splinter under my skin' [this column, 19 November 1994], then I am not the only one, to judge by Peter Fryer's response to my comment on his introduction to Harry Ratner's 'Reluctant Revolutionary'.

After devoting a lot of pointless bluster and pedantry to an analysis of what I wrote about the opinion he 'seemed' to hold, he then fervently repeats — but with no additional argument — the opinion that I dismissed as 'idiocy'. (In the last paragraph of a favourable review of Ratner.) What's the point?

Headless reiteration was always the prevalent [socialist] [about] [league] [old] [workers] [revolutionary] [party] notion of profound analysis and meaningful engagement in dialogue; I expected better from Fryer.

The question of revolutionary activity and commitment, as against academicism, what Marxists used to call contemptuously 'Kathedersozialismus', can not be reduced to a choice between selling Socialist Organiser and writing the book on Black History which Fryer wrote.

To say that, comrade Fryer, is — elitist — demagoguery!

I did not and do not want to deny — even implicitly — the value of Fryer's work. But the connection of such work with serious socialist activity to change the world, is not something given: it has to be elaborated in practical work on a whole series of fronts. This is ABC, of course, but it is not I who brought it to this level; Fryer did.

I brought in Fryer's long absence on 'sabbatical' as an oblique possible explanation for his bizarre idea that the 'Workers' Press' tendency and its international associates are the 'real', 'official', franchised 'Trotskyists'. Does Fryer not know the history of the group he rejoined after a 27 year absence? If he does, how can he make such claims for it?

The Trotskyism of Trotsky divided into mutating fragments half a century ago. Certainly, I would argue that Socialist Organiser/Alliance for Workers' Liberty is Trotskyist — and that Workers' Press/WRP is not — but only in the sense that we best continue, develop and interpret Trotsky's politics. It is a matter of judgment and politics not of childish label sticking.

The idea that the Cannon-Pablo-Mandel tendency, which emerged in the 40s — and of which you, politically speaking, are a sub-section — are the 'real' Trotskyists — that is only a factional conceit of people who have got themselves stuck in a mental time band. Now that history's verdict is in on Stalinism — Stalinism whose survival in Russia and expansion in Eastern Europe and Asia was the — mystified — centrepiece of the 'perspectives' of post-Trotsky 'official' Trotskyism — it is a self-evidently ridiculous opinion to hold!

And even if a 'real', 'authentic', 'official' Trotskyism exists, how could it be that current embodied in Workers' Press? Since it flowed for decades through the septic political sewer wherein Gerry Healy reigned as both monarch and pontiff — that would be a miracle against which the changing of water into wine would be as nothing!

'POINTLESS bluster and pedantry' is what slapdash writers always whine when their mistakes are pointed out.

But I don't think Osborn was just being careless when he wrote ('Socialist Organiser', 10 November 1994) that I 'came out of the CP in 1957', whereas I was in fact expelled from it in 1956; nor was I being pedantic in correcting his apparently trivial mistakes.

There is a resonance about

PERSONAL COLUMN

the year 1956 which is lacking from 1957; for 1956 was the year of the Hungarian revolution, my support of which led to my expulsion.

By post-dating my exit from the Communist Party and presenting it as a voluntary act, Osborn enabled himself to avoid mentioning not only Hungary but also that group of CP dissidents, including Cliff Slaughter and the late Tom Kemp, who under the impact of the Hungarian events joined the organisation he characterises as a 'septic political sewer'.

These mistakes of Osborn's are no accident. They reveal the dishonesty of his method.

Osborn's reference to 'Kathedersozialismus' (for which, by the way, there is a perfectly adequate English translation: 'academic socialism') is wide of the mark; Marxists viewed such professors with contempt not because they occupied university chairs but because they were spineless right-wingers who grovelled before the capitalist state.

In any case, I am not an academic. And to my mind 'serious socialist activity to change the world' includes literary activity throwing light on the history of oppressed minorities.

I objected to 'long sabbatical' (which Osborn now elaborates into 'long absence on "sabbatical"') because 'sabbatical' is defined as 'absence from duty'. And frankly I resent being told by a political pipsqueak like Osborn that when I wrote 'Staying Power' I wasn't doing my duty.

Osborn's 'oblique' (read: dishonest) method is most clearly shown when he attributes to me the 'bizarre idea' that the Workers International are 'the "real", "official" Trotskyists'.

This shameless lie is based solely on the following 22 words in my introduction to Harry Ratner's book: 'those of us who still work, hope and live for the rebuilding of the Fourth International as the key to human progress'.

The reader of that introduction will search in vain for the grandiose 'claims' I am accused of making there on behalf of the WRP.

There is not a single word in that introduction about 'the continuity of the living forces of Trotskyism' or about the WRP as embodying that continuity. The words 'real' and 'official', which he attributes to me and even mendaciously puts within quotation marks, simply do not appear. (Nor, for that matter, does 'franchised', whatever that means.)

Contrary to Osborn's assumption, I have not 'rejoined' the WRP. Nor, contrary to Osborn's assumption, do I take the simplistic view that the continuity of the Trotskyist tradition is to be found in one organisation alone.

Moreover, if Gerry Healy's organisation was only a 'septic political sewer' and nothing else, how on earth did it manage to rid itself of Healy ten years ago? Or was that indeed some sort of miracle?

OSBORN's own 'factional conceit' is expressed in those vainglorious words: 'we best continue, develop and interpret Trotsky's politics.'

But he gives the game away by focusing his attack on the very idea of rebuilding the Fourth International: an idea which, though central to Trotskyism, is so hateful to him that he bitterly attacks it under a smokescreen of lies.

Peter Fryer

Money or machines?

PETER JEFFRIES comments on those who lament over the decline of British industry at the hands of the financier

THE 'Guardian's' economics correspondent, Will Hutton, has started the year as he undoubtedly means to go on — with a ritual complaint about the harmful influence exercised by the City of London over British industry and the need to do something about it. ('Money before machines', 'Guardian' 3 January).

Hutton has been subjecting 'Guardian' readers almost weekly to this sort of thing for the past five years and more. But it is not simply that paper's readers who will suffer in the coming year, for Hutton is about to present a series of programmes — entitled 'The City' and to be heard on Radio 4 — setting out his argument at length. And it is a simple, not to say simplistic one.

Damning

Since the time of the industrial revolution, the City has been more interested in financing international trade and credit operations than in backing British industry. Despite many damning reports on its activities throughout the present century nothing has fundamentally changed, it is claimed.

Thus the 1931 Macmillan report complained about the lack of support from the banks for small and medium-sized firms. Successive Labour attempts to right the situation after 1945 ran into the sand, Hutton moans.

Such attempts included the ill-fated Industrial Reorganisation Corporation and the National Enterprise Board. Their grand plans to divert funds to investment in British industry and bring the banks, industrialists and the trades unions together in a joint effort to meet this end were quickly stamped on by the Treasury and the Bank of England.

Hutton sees the root of this problem as lying deep in British cultural traditions and its class structure: the tradition of 'gentlemanly capitalism' in this country. Just as the officer caste in the British army traditionally preferred the 'gentlemanly horse' to the 'smelly tank' as a weapon of war, so the members of the Oxbridge-educated elite have preferred jobs in the City to dirtying their hands in industrial production. It is in the City that fortunes can be made and a place in society secured.

The opening of 1995 sees Hutton a deeply worried man. He fears that time is running out for the formation of a 'formidable coalition' to defeat the bankers and pave the way for a regeneration of British industry. It was of course Hutton's intellectual mentor, John Maynard Keynes,

who proposed just such a coalition against the *rentiers*, those 'coupon clippers' whose rapid demise he so confidently predicted in the 1930s.

Keynes wanted to see an alliance forged between labour and the representatives of 'productive capital' against the 'money lenders'.

As Robert Skidelsky, the biographer of Oswald Mosley, the leader of fascism in England in the 1930s, notes '[Keynes] tended to assume an identity of interest between workers and manufacturers against their common enemy, the rentier and the banker.'

'This notion of the conflict of interest in the capitalist community between workers and

ated similar things. They defended so-called 'productive capital' against the financiers, and on this basis proposed their popular-front alliances against the 'reactionary' sections of the capitalist class.

Such ideas — which are themselves reactionary — ignore the nature of contemporary capitalism. It is one of the essential characteristics of imperialism that it involved the domination not simply of capitalism but of finance capitalism. This involves the merging of the giant monopolies and the financial institutions into what Lenin called an 'oligarchy'.

■ First, it is a myth to claim, as Hutton and his fellow reformists often do, that there is any fundamental conflict between the giant monopolists (usually operating on an international basis) and the banks and insur-

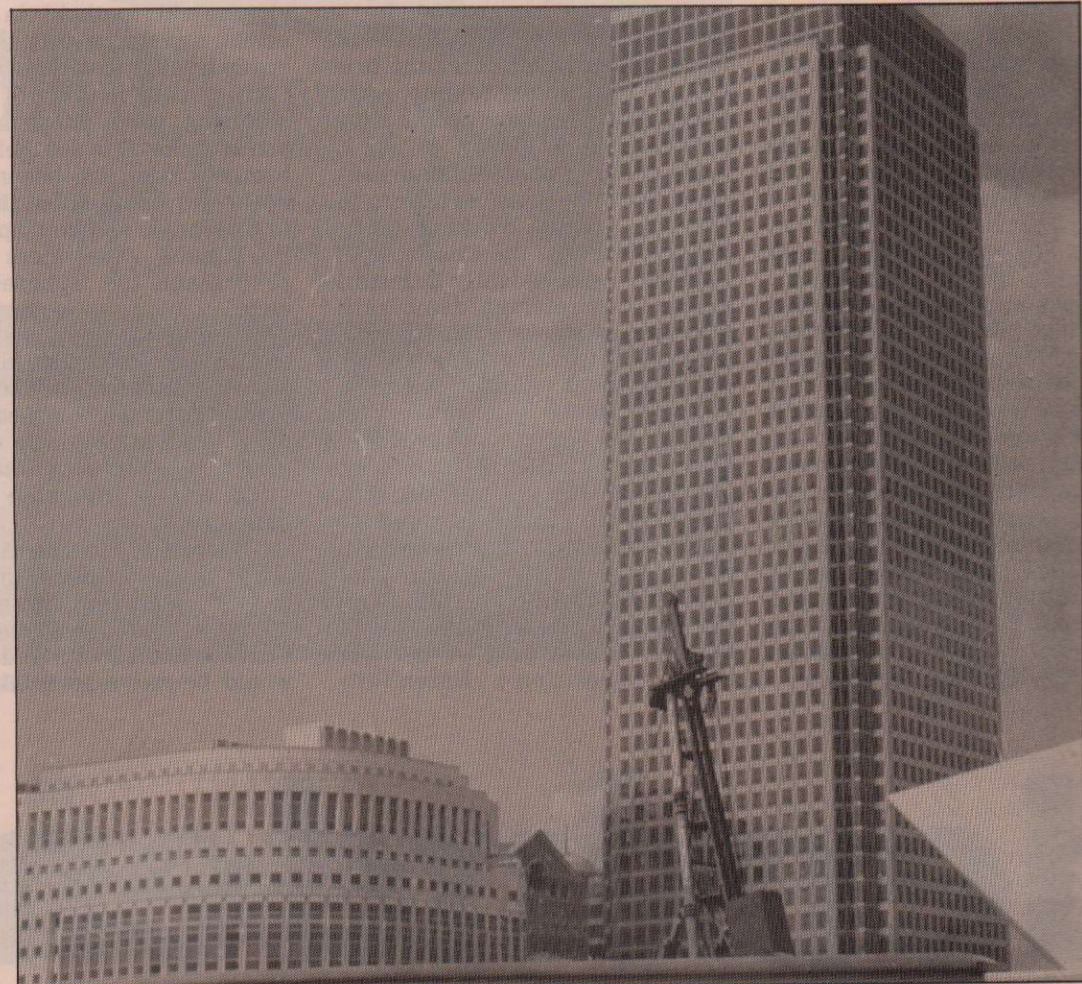
the result of 'strong policies' that could, for instance, be put right by a Labour government, as Hutton pretends.

Capitalism is more and more interested in shifting money around the world, making billions out of speculation if not outright criminal activities. When fortunes can be amassed in this way, why bother with the tedious problem of actually producing things?

That this is so is a sign of the historic decline of capitalism as a system, and not that there are 'reactionary' elements in the ruling class to be counterposed to some supposed 'progressive' sections.

■ Third, it is nonsense to say that the crisis of British capitalism stems from the social and ideological background of members of the ruling class.

Britain is the world's oldest



Canary Wharf tower: a symbol of City speculation

Photo: Rex Dunn

one section of that community — the manufacturers — was to have a profound influence on Mosley's thought. . . . Henceforth the producers' state would be the goal; the finance the enemy' (R. Skidelsky, 'Oswald Mosley' p. 141).

And given that finance was, asserted Mosley and his fellow fascists, under Jewish control, this provided a ready rationale for the virulent anti-Semitism that characterised Mosley's movement.

The Stalinists for long repe-

ance companies.

The continuing decline of British industry has principally been due to the decline of medium and small-scale producers. The financiers, often hand-in-glove with the monopolists, have driven many such producers to the wall, thus intensifying the concentration of capitalist production and the centralisation of finance.

■ Second, it is the very character of the epoch in which we live that capitalism becomes ever-more parasitic. This is not

capitalist country. Its emergence as the leading financial power in the last century reflected the fact that it was the first to experience the industrial revolution, a priority that made it for a decisive period the 'workshop of the world'.

If today it expresses more acutely than any other leading capitalist power the sickness of a dying system, this testifies to not the abnormality of its development, as Hutton would like us to believe, but its thoroughgoing capitalist character.

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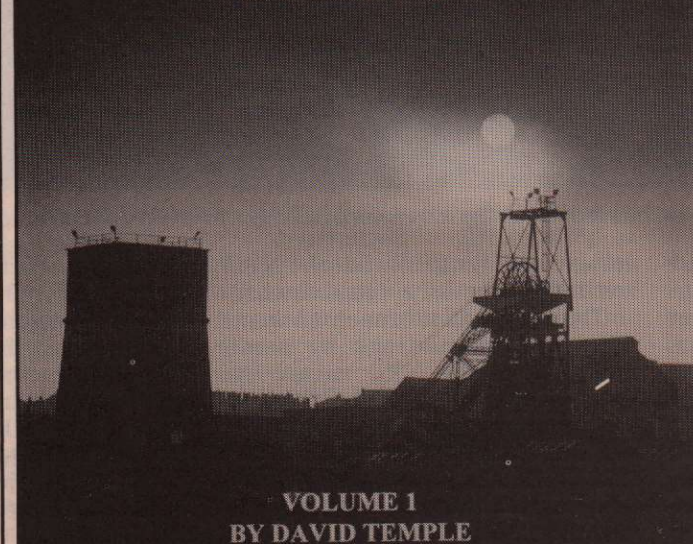
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THE COLLIERIES OF DURHAM



VOLUME 1
BY DAVID TEMPLE

Asbestos miners fight for justice in Australia

BY BOB ARCHER

ABORIGINE asbestos miners and their families in New South Wales, Australia, are campaigning for adequate compensation for pollution-related illnesses and deaths suffered by their community.

About 350 Aboriginal men worked at a mine, owned by James Hardie Industries, in the north of the state at Baryulgil, during the period from the 1940s until 1979 when extraction finished. Those still alive tell of how they had to work in conditions where the asbestos dust was so thick it ran like mud down their faces and mixed with their saliva.

No safety information was provided. Protection against dust was inadequate.

Possibly the closest estimate is that about 100 of the former miners have died as a result of the asbestos. James Hardie claims there is no medical evidence to link their deaths with asbestos.

Diagnosed

A further 86 members of the Baryulgil community were examined for the effects of asbestos exposure in 1989. Fourteen of them were diagnosed as having an asbestos-related condition.

The miners and their families lived in Baryulgil Square, less than a kilometre from the mine and 83 kilometres from the nearest town, Grafton.

The local river, for a long time the only source of water, was contaminated with white asbestos (chrysolite) waste.

Mains electricity and water were only connected in the 1970s.

The schoolyard, the school and all the houses were constructed of asbestos materials. The houses were lined with asbestos bags.

Chrysolite was discovered in Baryulgil during World War I. During the 1920s the Bundjalung Aborigine people were forcibly removed from Clarence River to the Baryulgil area by white farmers seeking grazing land.

During World War II the companies Wunderlich, James Hardie Industries and Woodsreef started mining asbestos in Baryulgil. The displaced Bundjalung people had no alternative to working in the mines.

For 12 years Gerry Burke was manager of the mine. He now suffers from prostate cancer, and a 1982 biopsy revealed asbestos in his lungs.

His youngest son, Mark, has suffered from recurrent lung collapses. Pathology tests show 100,000 asbestos fibres in each sample of tissue taken from him. The other four Burke children suffer from asthma.

Gerry Burke told an Australian newspaper that he estimated dust levels in the mine ranged from 3,000 to 4,000 fibres per cubic centimetre. 'Visibility in the old mill was so bad you could stand alongside the machinery and you couldn't see it operating. The man working next to you was only a dim outline,' he said.

In 1984 a parliamentary inquiry found that 'Hardie's could, and should, have done far more to achieve dust controls at Baryulgil and to safeguard the health of the workforce . . .

Hardie's response fell short of that which could be expected of a reasonable employer.'

Before 1970, the report says, there had been 'a lack of managerial concern'. After 1970 reforms were often 'delayed, piecemeal and spasmodic'.

The same can be said of the approach of official white Australia to the problem since mining finished in Baryulgil.

The Australian Workers Union collected the miners' membership subs for years but have done nothing for them. Safety conditions and wage rates at the mine were not within trade union rules.

The various doctors who have examined ex-miners have refused to diagnose conditions as asbestos-related.

The Aboriginal Legal Service has side-stepped the miners' campaign for proper redress by seeking paltry pay-outs from the Dust Diseases Board.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has ignored the problem.

After the closure of the mine, Baryulgil residents were relocated to a new 'town', Malabugilmah, which is actually 5km further away from any settlement.

Familiar

Plans were trumpeted for 23 houses, recreational facilities, a school and a shop. In fact there are only 16 semi-habitable houses.

Some British miners will be familiar with the sort of 'structural planning' that has followed the mine's closure!

Plans were announced to rehabilitate the mine site after an

environmental impact study. However, the Department of Mineral Resources says there are not enough resources for a complete clean-up.

In 1988 the former miners established the NSW Asbestos Ex-Miners Aboriginal Corporation to fight for the whole community for compensation from James Hardie. But the ATSIC has refused repeated requests from the corporation for funds to help its campaign.

Bid

The corporation has launched a legal bid together with a Sydney law firm with a record of successful compensation claims.

Corporation chair Charles Moran has campaigned successfully for support for the case in the working class. He has spoken at workplaces, shop stewards' meetings and other working-class bodies, and on community radio.

Moran also visited the US to meet campaigners who obtained compensation from the Australian CSR asbestos company.

There is a clear need for international support from other working-class communities fighting for their existence against profit-hungry corporations.

Send messages of support to the NSW Asbestos Ex-Miners Aboriginal Corporation, 23 Norwood Avenue, Goonellabah, NSW 2480, Australia. Phone: (066) 242 174.

Send protests against the refusal to aid the corporation to: The Commissioner, ATSIC, 234 Sussex Street, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia.

Bronwen Handyside reports

Two nations

Royal road-hog

DAVID SHARP, aged 76, has devoted the last 25 years of his life to bringing about his most cherished dream — to make a path for walkers alongside the Thames from its source to the London flood barriers.

Unfortunately for him — and thousands of others — he has first run into a rather more stubborn barrier, in the form of our own dear Queen.

She is adamantly refusing to allow the riverside path to run through her Windsor Castle estate — despite months of negotiation, and an invitation by the Countryside Commission for her to open the path.

Her representatives insist that the royal personage's security would be endangered if her subjects were able to parade through her private grounds at will.

David Sharp told the 'Guardian' that it was sad there was no decent alternative to the path through the Queen's grounds. Walkers will have to walk through the town of Datchet on 'a rather nasty main road'.

Sharp felt the explanation given that the Queen's security would suffer was not entirely convincing.

'Anyone can travel a few feet from the bank and land on it by boat. People walking along the tow-path are hardly likely to be any more of a threat,' he said.

The Thames path follows the original tow-path used by barges, which was originally blocked at Windsor by Queen Victoria.

She wished to enjoy the grounds all the way down to the river in private. The path is now only used by the tenants of the 'grace and favour' apartments (let by the Queen to current and former flunkies at minimal or no rents, at a huge cost to the taxpayer).

The path would, of course, be only a few hundred yards from where the Queen has recently given permission for a company to drill for oil. Thus far she has made no objections about the danger to security represented by the oil company.

Proud to be a pom

ANOTHER cantankerous, rich old bat hit the news last week. Wealthy widow Elsie Bushen left most of her personal fortune — nearly £2 million — to help repay the national debt.

The woman in charge of the nursing home where Elsie spent her twilight years said: 'She was a great fan of Baroness Thatcher'.

Hands up those who think Mrs Bushen's heroine will use some of her own personal fortune to help the rest of us out in paying off Britain's £252 billion debt?

Elsie left the money to the nation, she said, because she felt privileged to have been a citizen of the United Kingdom. She must have died before the cricket scores came through.

Who's in control?

THERE was a public outcry before Christmas when recently privatised British Gas raised its chief Cedric Brown's salary by 75 per cent, and simultaneously cut its showroom workers' wages by 12 per cent.

Less well publicised has been the ongoing 'restructuring' that followed privatisation and has meant the dumping of

a third of the workforce.

In line with policies, as in the other privatised industries, to introduce 'market forces', organised, permanent workers are being 'persuaded' to leave — initially through voluntary redundancies. They are being replaced by temporary workers on weekly contracts, who are being paid £4 an hour — one of whom most kindly sent us a copy of British Gas's in-house magazine.

It makes a fascinating read.

Page 1 explains the advantages of voluntary redundancy. Jack Stewart is a consultant with 'Focus', an 'outplacement agency' which holds out straws to workers drowning in the pool of redundancy. Stewart inspires the workforce with such statements as:

'The only thing to fear is fear itself. Redundancy is often an opportunity to do something you have always really wanted to do.' (Like achieve that super-model figure you've always wanted by not having enough to eat, for instance?)

On page 2, redundant British Gas employee Roger Chung-Wee scores a full-page spread about how he started a travel agency and a whole new life in the front-room of his semi-detached house.

Page 3 is about voluntary redundancies in Wales.

On page 5, a company executive explains why it is too much hassle since privatisation to donate redundant British Gas computers to schools and charities.

Page 6 is a kind of agony-aunt letters page about voluntary redundancies. An employee who must have come down in the last shower (or more likely is a plant) asks what the difference is between voluntary and compulsory redundancy. The crocodile stops smiling to give the reply:

'Norman Blacker has stated . . . "I would much prefer to achieve restructuring with voluntary redundancy, but I have also said that one can never give a guarantee that compulsory redundancy will not be required."

A special financial adviser on page 7 tells you what to do about your pension when taking voluntary redundancy.

Latest news from British Gas (amongst other creative proposals) is the plan for another 25,000 redundancies, and the drastic slashing of the safety budget.

All of this has taken place without a peep from the trade union leaders. Not to mention Labour's earnest assurances to financiers that it has not and never will oppose privatisations.

Safety on the railways

WHICH brings us to the preparations for the privatisation of the railways.

Last week the government lap-dog, the Health and Safety Commission, approved the abandonment of a planned £600 million railroad safety system, which was urgently proposed after the 1988 Clapham rail disaster in south London that killed 38 people.

An inquiry after the Clapham crash recommended that the Automatic Train Protection System (ATP) should be phased into the railways over five years.

In all fatal rail accidents since Clapham the railway inspectorate has recommended the installation of ATP.

If you have any material for this column, please send it to me at Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.



Lola Mundine visiting the graves at Baryulgil cemetery of her six brothers who worked at the asbestos mine

Chinese labour camp's inhuman conditions

A CHINESE dissident who was refused political asylum in Hong Kong and sent back to China says prisoners at the labour camp where he is being held are subjected to inhuman conditions and frequent beatings by the guards.

Chen Pokong has revealed details of the terrible regime in a letter smuggled out of the camp.

Chen says 'production quotas' at Guangzhou No. 1 'Re-education through labour camp', in south-east China, are set so high that prisoners have to work over 14 hours a day, seven days a week, with only three days holiday a year during the annual spring festival.

During the day they carry out heavy labour in a stone

quarry, transporting and loading stones into boats. At night they make artificial flowers which are sold for export. Prisoners who do not meet their quota are liable to have their sentence lengthened.

'Inmates who labour slightly

slower are brutally beaten and misused by supervisors and team leaders (themselves inmates).

'Inmates are often beaten until they are blood-stained all over, collapse or lose consciousness (shortly before I was sent here, one inmate was beaten to death)... Several times I was beaten by the team leader. I am constantly exposed to terror,' Chen Pokong states.

Injured and sick prisoners are forced to work despite their illnesses.

'Many inmates, including myself, their hands and feet squashed by big stones, stained with blood and pus, have to work as normal. As a consequence,

many inmates are crippled for life,' says Chen.

He also describes the harsh living conditions, with prisoners being given insufficient food, mainly consisting of coarse rice and rotten vegetables, and medical treatment being practically non-existent. 'I understand that once my letter is published, I might be persecuted even more harshly. I might even be killed. But I have no choice!' says Chen.

Chen Pokong, also known as Chen Jingsong, was a teacher in the economics department at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou when the big pro-democracy movement broke out in 1989. He was arrested in

August 1989, and in February 1990 he was charged with 'carrying out counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement'. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Fleeing

After his release in July 1992, Chen took up his political activity again and, he says in his letter, by August 1993 he was wanted by the authorities again. Fleeing across the border into Hong Kong, he applied for political asylum but his application was refused. On 1 September 1993 he was forcibly sent back to China, where he was placed in police custody.

On 20 October Chen was sentenced, without trial, to two years' 're-education through labour' for 'illegally crossing state borders'. He was sent to the Guangzhou forced-labour camp.

'Re-education through labour' involves detention for up to three years, usually in a labour camp. This punishment is imposed by administrative committees composed of representatives from the public security (police), civil affairs and labour departments of the local city and provincial authorities.

Those sentenced are given no trial, no access to a lawyer, and no right to defend themselves.

BY COLIN PENDLETON

Serbian police terrorise schools in Kosovo

POLICE of the Serb-dominated rump Yugoslav state, who are carrying out a reign of terror in the mainly-Albanian Kosovo region, have turned to attacking teachers and school students.

Last month police entered a building in Kosovska-Mitrovica where pupils of the Architect Sinani secondary school were having lessons. They ordered the pupils to leave. They then reportedly beat teacher Rexhep Ahmeti, and forced him to burn in a stove a sociology textbook by Croatian author Rudi Supekin.

The police also beat another teacher, Bujar Naxhiu, and forced English teacher Luljeta Sefaja to burn an English language textbook.

The following day police entered a house where pupils of the Trepca technical school were being taught, attacking the pupils as they attempted to flee.

Police officers also beat a teacher, Sami Rama, with truncheons and allegedly forced him to place his hands on a burning

stove. He received severe burns, as a result of which he needed medical treatment. They also reportedly slapped and hit a woman mathematics teacher, Avdie Haxhiu.

Kosovo was the first victim of the same Serbian nationalism that is waging war in Bosnia. Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, climbed to power with nationalist backing by pledging Serb domination in Kosovo, where the majority of people are ethnic Albanians.

Since 1990, when Serbia adopted a new constitution that effectively deprived Kosovo of its autonomy, most ethnic Albanians have refused to recognise Serbian authority in the province.

The majority of teaching staff at secondary schools and at Pristina University were dismissed from their posts after refusing to teach according to curricula set by the Serbian authorities. However they have continued to hold classes in private houses, as appears to have been the case in the two incidents described.



Indonesian workers jailed after sit-in

THESE Indonesian women are among 13 workers jailed after a sit-in over pay at a cigarette factory was ended by troops storming the factory. The women were accused of 'hostage-taking'.

After being attacked by security guards armed with sticks and knives, workers occupied the STTC factory in north Sumatra and held three staff members in the office. No harm was done to these 'hostages'. But anti-terrorist troops flown in by helicopter stormed the factory and took away 200 workers.

Many have since been victimised, and troops remain on the premises, harassing workers.

Baltimore lays down law on living wage

TRADES unionists in the US are hoping a new law adopted by the city of Baltimore, Maryland, will prove a breakthrough in beating low pay in the public services. Baltimore has decided that contractors working for the city must pay their workers a living wage — not just the minimum.

From 1 July 1995 all workers employed by city contractors will see their wages jump from \$4.25 to \$6.10 per hour. Over a four-year period, the rate would climb incrementally to \$7.70. Although these are not high wages, unions see the principle involved as important.

'This law provides a unique and concrete social compact for the workers who do some of the most thankless jobs in the city: people who clean the toilets in office buildings, empty trash cans in our schools, assist children on school buses, and make beds in one of Baltimore's finest

hotels,' said Gerarld W. McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

The union campaigned for living-wage legislation together with Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), a church-based organisation, and the Solidarity Sponsoring Committee (SSC), a new grouping those in Baltimore's low-wage services sector.

Help

SSC leader Charles Garrison, 25, a school custodian until an on-the-job injury sidelined him last September, said: 'This will help many people. It should have been done a long time ago. But we still have a long way to go. There's still the private-sector workers. This is a great victory, and now it's time to move on the next one.'

Like other US cities, Baltimore had made a practice of awarding lucrative service contracts to private contractors, turning a blind eye when the contractor paid poorly, and trying to cope when low-wage workers turned to food stamps, publicly financed health care, and other costly assistance.

The Baltimore bill has ramifications for every big city in the US. AFSCME/BUILD argues that cities pay a high price for having a large poor working-population — a decline in tax revenue, an increase in those on food stamps, inadequate medical care, and other social maladies.

McEntee sums up: 'We see manufacturing jobs replaced by low-wage service work. We see permanent, full-time jobs replaced by temporary, part-time work. And we see good public jobs privatised and replaced by low-wage, dead-end contract jobs. With this bill, Baltimore

has taken the first step away from a low-wage economy that degrades work, to one that creates jobs that will allow Baltimore's families to support themselves.'

Renewed

While some union leaders may see legislation as a way of avoiding having to leading actions, the demand for a living wage as of right is bound to turn workers towards politics. They are already renewed calls some unions to break with the capitalist Republican and Democratic parties and start Labour party.

What's more, in spite of right-wing past (in the 1960s served as a conduit for the CL the AFSCME's struggle boosts workers in Britain elsewhere fighting on what basically the same issue: the right to a living wage.

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