

# weekly worker



No 81 Thursday February 9 1995

## Clause 4

Mûcadele etmeye  
deger mi?

Diane Abbott MP ve  
Mark Fischer (Hackney  
CPGB)

Bu toplantı İngiltere  
Komünist Partisi Hackney  
subesince

Tarih: 16 Subat 1995  
(persembe) Saat 19.30  
081-459 7146

## Clause 4

Something worth  
fighting for?

Diane Abbott MP debates  
with Mark Fischer  
(Hackney CPGB)

Public meeting organised  
by Hackney CPGB

Thursday February 16,  
7.30pm. For details  
contact Andy Hannah on  
081-459 7146

# No speed ups No job cuts

Latest for the axe are teachers' jobs. A limited pay rise will be accompanied by education cuts, forcing job losses and increasing an already high workload. Teaching is already one of the worst professions for stress due to overwork and restructuring. But making fewer workers do more work for less pay is a trend that goes right across the board

THE EUROPEAN Union's statistical office has published figures showing that working hours are longer in Britain than anywhere else in the EU. Exceptionally high levels of overtime are worked because employers can save money that way.

Rhetoric about reducing unemployment may be electorally useful, but is not profitable when you can squeeze fewer workers dry. All workers are having to work longer hours to complete heavier workloads without extra pay. Fear of unemployment and a union movement in retreat ensures bosses can pile on the workload to breaking point.

A Greenwich social worker said he worked "about fifty hours a week because of the expansion of unpaid work". But council manual workers are often worse off: "Thanks to job privatisation they have no job security and have suffered pay cuts."

The Labour council in Greenwich is viewing the prospects of cuts with an appetite. Home Care workers are being forced to sign contracts to work any time between 7am and 11pm, 7 days a week. Falling sick can make you liable to dismissal. Managers have been told they must get the maximum amount of work out of the minimum number of staff. Their promotion prospects depend on it.

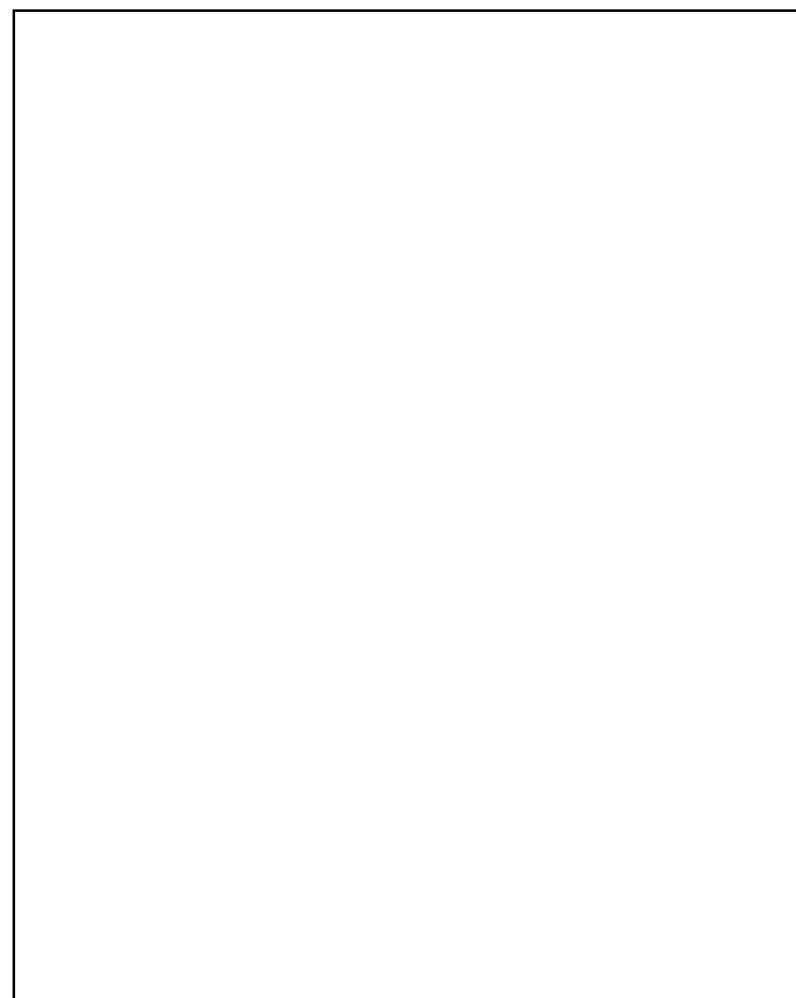
Teachers are only the latest to be at the sharp end of council cuts which are destroying services and working conditions.

The education secretary, Gillian Shephard, defended the cuts by saying that there is no research "which shows that marginal increases in class sizes harms standards." Maybe not, but any teacher who has had to dash from pupil to pupil to try and accommodate their individual and very diverse education needs will tell you that a class of 10 is infinitely preferable to the now common class of 30 or more.

David Blunkett, Labour shadow education secretary, whimpered, "This is a cut too far." But there has never been a cut which has not been 'too far' for workers. Spending cuts implemented by both Labour and Tory councils with zeal are only in the interests of the bosses' profits, never in the interests of workers who are at the receiving end.

Professor Handy, a business theorist, thinks "the 67 hour week is just around the corner ... The trend among employers is to employ half the people, drive them twice as hard and get three times the productivity. If they burn out, so what?" There are plenty of unemployed to take their place. Twenty-five percent of manual workers are already working more than 48 hours a week.

Workers' health and social life are increasingly being ignored by bosses obsessed with competitive cost cutting. There is nothing inevitable about the decline in working conditions: as with wages, they are established in the



Strike together to beat back attacks

market place in struggle between the classes, but at the moment the bosses are winning.

The recent NUT ballot to drop the boycott of Sats, which will increase teachers' workload even more, does not bode well for a fightback among teachers now.

But the latest cuts have angered teachers and parents alike. Rank and file teachers who led the campaign against Sats now need to mobilise that anger into a united campaign against education cuts and threats of job losses.

## Performance-related profits

NATWEST, the high street bank, wins my vote for charitable institution of the year.

Under its complicated performance-related pay scheme almost 50% of the staff are being allowed to stay on at their old pay levels despite having contributed nothing to the company's expected £1.5 billion profit.

Chief executive Martin Gray says the 83% rise in profitability during the first six months of last year was due to getting rid of 'third world debt'. Not the efforts of his high street staff who are only the backbone of the business.

Management claims that about half the staff will get rises above the rate of inflation (ie, will not be getting a pay cut), but only a handful are to be offered the 9% top award.

Like so many employers of white collar workers, NatWest is viciously increasing the rate of exploitation. Demanding more work, more responsibility, more time on the job - without regard to reward or family life.

Fortunately for shareholders, no such threats are being levelled at them.

Capitalists would make us pay to work for them if they could. When competition gets fierce, employers become ruthless. The good news is: we do not need them.

Phil Kent

**Smash public sector pay freeze!**

# Letters

## Who, me?

I can reassure comrade Cozens (Letters, February 2) that I am not some wild-eyed ultra-leftist who is pursuing a hateful one-man vendetta against the left (indeed, some of my best mates are leftwing). Nor am I a diabolical MI5/Tory mole.

Also, I am not remotely “sectarian” (me, I’ll talk to anyone) or “elitist”, nor am I engaged in a quasi-mystical quest for “perfection”, communist or otherwise. Yes, I too respect “diverse opinions” (isn’t it amazing how many left groups are petrified silly by the prospect of open ideological discussion?), and I am also “very pro-working class”.

I must confess that I am slightly puzzled as to how fighting for revolutionary communism is to “divide the working class ... for the Tories” (presumably passively voting for Blair’s Labour Party does not?), or how one can get misty-eyed about a savage imperialist world war (the Great Patriotic War indeed) in which the world communist movement “sank their differences” with imperialism.

Comrade Cozens, you are more than welcome to join the Communist Party. I suspect that you might be surprised at finding so many imperfect, “fallible” comrades. In fact, mere mortals just like you.

**Eddie Ford**  
South London

## Diverse mix

DC Cozens feels Eddie Ford expresses the “elitism” he thinks is inherent in the CPGB.

Eddie writes with all the youthful zeal of someone who has a passion for what he believes in. He expresses his opinion in his articles. We all have our own opinions and should be encouraged to give them.

Comrade Cozens writes that others in the CPGB feel like Eddie, with contempt for other left groups and individuals.

For myself, I have no contempt for others on the left, who have the same desire for change in society as I, and others in the CPGB. If we did, we would not bother to devote so much space in polemics with other organisations, debating correct tactics for revolutionaries.

We do take the working class as it is, warts and all, because we believe it will in time aspire to become the ruling class in society.

We also believe the CPGB of coming years will contain all kinds of disparate views and tendencies, and welcome such a diverse mix in the revolutionary organisation that will give revolutionary consciousness to the working class.

Eddie Ford, I am sure, will contribute much to such an organisation, as indeed would comrade Cozens.

**Stan Wallis**  
Manchester

## Stalin fan club

I recently had an interesting chat with two comrades from the Communist Action Group. Whilst the talk was friendly and comradely, I must admit that I was slightly alarmed by some of the viewpoints expressed.

Two ‘orientations’ in particular stood out. The first was a near disdainful attitude towards the working class in Britain. Comrade Bill expressed his support for the Revolutionary Communist Group’s view that the (white) working class is a complete dead loss, whose members had all become ‘aristocrats’, mindless consumers, etc; he just felt that the RCG drew the “wrong conclusions” from this.

Indeed, if anything, the working class in Britain had “let down” the Soviet bureaucracy and ‘comrade’ JV Stalin, who were urging them to take to the streets and overthrow the bourgeois state - what monstrous ingratitude!

On a similar vein, both comrades enthusiastically endorsed Stalin’s barbaric terror, *especially* that directed against Communist Party members. Apparently, all Stalin was doing was clearing away the (potential) counterrevolutionary deadwood who were objectively impeding the anti-fascist war effort. Naturally, along the way, “many innocents were killed”, but such is life.

When I expressed some surprise at this blithe justification for the butchery of hundreds of thousands of communists, the comrades shrugged their shoulders wisely and slurped their tea nonchalantly; after all, what was I getting so fretful about? After the terror had subsided membership of the Communist Party rose to an all time high. The comrades clearly believe that it is quantity not quality that matters.

While I have no desire to insult or slander the comrades, what are we to make of an organisation which so casually, and cynically I would argue, dismisses the working class and is so unmoved by the massacre of untold communists; which takes unswerving loyalty to Stalin as an absolute ‘communist’ bench mark?

**Danny Hammill**  
South London

Note: Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed.

# Running for profit

THE REALITIES of rail privatisation are beginning to manifest themselves. Roger Salmon, the franchising director, has announced a minimum timetable for the train operating companies (TOCs). This is the level of service that any TOC will be required by law to provide. Not surprisingly the minimum service level is far below that which now prevails.

Major cuts are envisaged in off-peak services. So much for the government’s promise that service levels would be based on the existing timetable.

Salmon also announced that through-ticketing would effectively be withdrawn with only a small number of ‘core’ stations being required to provide such a service. Most station and on-train ticket issuing will be at the discretion of the TOC operating the train - and why go to the trouble of selling tickets for another operator?

On the safety front another nail was driven into the coffin when two trains collided at Kirkby-Stephen on the Settle to Carlisle line. Railtrack admitted that it had six minutes prior warning of the impending crash from the driver of the derailed train via the cab radio. It was unable to contact the driver of the second train via his cab radio because British Rail had bought the cheapest available system that has ‘blind spots’ due to hills - something the rail lines across the Pennines are not short of.

In these days of mobile phones and satellite systems it is criminally negligent not to fit all driving cabs with this technology. Had it been available, this accident and the previous one at Cowden could have been prevented by a simple telephone call.

Instead four people have lost their lives.

*Aslef driver, Manchester*

# Mexican house of cards teeters

THE ACUTE financial crisis which has struck Mexico like a whirlwind from nowhere over the last couple of weeks has starkly exposed the contradictions of capitalism in this global epoch of interdependent national economies.

At the eleventh hour, as the Mexican peso faced near annihilation, Clinton and the international financial community mobilised an astonishing \$50 billion of support, an unprecedented bail-out. This total far exceeds the aid package for Russia assembled in 1992 (most of which never materialised, of course) or for Britain during the 1976 sterling crisis. Why this sudden display of ‘altruism’ by the US and global capital?

The answer is not too difficult to find. Mexico is seen as *the* pre-eminent emerging market model on which ‘reforms’ across Latin America, the developing world and eastern and central Europe have been based. If Mexico was allowed to fall into a financial black hole the new-found capitalist triumphalism would be severely punctured, so therefore it was “all hands to the pumps to keep the system going and not discourage others....Western capitalism looks after itself” (*The Observer*, February 5).

The Mexican ‘reforms’ were a sordid experiment. Mexico was compelled to organise its capital inflows through a series of short-term ‘spot market’ transactions in the capital markets. The investment attraction was that Mexican stocks, shares and dollar-denominated bonds (Tesobonos) could be bought and sold at will. However, sentiments quickly changed as it became obvious that the vast build up of short-term liabilities could not be serviced by a country in chronic trade deficit (approaching £96.6 billion, equivalent to the rest of Latin America and Asia combined).

Absolute panic broke out among the American investors. Hardly surprising. They had poured billions of dollars into the country in the pursuit of higher interest rates than were available in the United States, hence higher profits to be made - after all, greed and hunger for profits is what makes capitalism tick. So, in many ways the \$50 billion was designed to bail out the petrified American investors as well as the Mexican economy.

It could be too late. Already some \$200 billion has been wiped off the value of Latin American stock markets and it seems inevitable that the sky-high Mexican interest rates will trigger a wave of corporate collapses. Naturally, the masses will end up paying the price, as the regime unleashes swingeing spending cuts and tax increases. The future looks fairly bleak for Mexican capitalism, it has to be said.

The Mexican crisis highlights the increasingly redundant nature of the nation state, which is becoming more and more of a fetter to capitalism and its innate need to expand globally in search of those elusive profits. Bad news for the Teresa Gormans and Michael Portillos of this world - and the left reformists who still dream of a *British* road to socialism.

*Frank Vincent*

## Fighting fund

LAST SATURDAY’S Critique Conference - ‘Why did the left groups fail?’ - was a mighty disappointing affair. Not because of the Trotskyite slamming of Stalinism. The crimes of ‘official communism’ are legion. But having blamed Stalin for everything, not one critic saw any reason to change their own organisations. If Trotsky was generally correct, why not get together on the basis of democratic centralism in a single party?

Only the Communist Party is prepared to welcome all revolutionaries into membership. Our efforts to reforge the CPGB urgently need your financial support to reach our £3,000 target by the end of the month.

*Phil Kent*

## Viewpoint

Steve Kay

### Cuba - the candle that yet burns

THIS ARTICLE is a continuation of the one published in the *Weekly Worker* 78, entitled ‘Cuba - revolution in danger’. I should add that the reference to “Cuba’s peculiar isolated bureaucratic socialism” was an editorial insertion and not my view. Cuba is not simply a tropical reproduction of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the end of that article I wrote that I would try to examine reasons for Cuba’s continued survival after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

One reason might be the social gains from the 1959 revolution. For example Cubans have a life expectancy of 76 (the same as US citizens), while for Haitians it is 56. When I visited health centres, hospitals and the like, Cuban officials repeatedly stressed that priority was given to healthcare and other social concerns, in spite of the effects of the US blockade.

On the other hand, the shortage of consumer goods probably counteracts official statements about social gains, at least to some degree. The Cuban authorities cited the results of a survey by a US polling agency which revealed that 90% of Cubans approved of the social system in which they lived. Personally, I found no signs of political dissidence on the island, but my knowledge of Spanish is limited.

Perhaps a stronger reason for the endurance of the system is nationalism. Cuba was a colony of Spain right up to the end of the 19th century. This was followed by several years of military occupation by the USA and then a political and economic relationship with the giant to the north which can fairly be called neo-colonialism.

Just after the arrival of the new year,

Yaremi, a Cuban teacher of English, turned to me and said: “Today is the birthday of my country.” (Fulgencio Batista, the US Mafia’s friend, was overthrown by Fidel Castro on January 1 1959). Clearly, for Yaremi and many Cubans, the triumph of the revolution was the point when Cuba stopped belonging to somebody else.

In my view Cuba’s distinctive socialist system is under threat but will not undergo the sort of meltdown experienced elsewhere. The USA would be extremely unwise to attempt an invasion, and a repetition of the Bay of Pigs incursion by Cuban exiles would also fail.

A major threat to Cuba’s social and economic system is posed by something far more insidious. This is tourism. The tourist trade is being officially encouraged in Cuba as a means of making up for some of the economic damage caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tourism has given a powerful impetus to black market trading and prostitution. I could not walk around central Havana without being accosted by Cubans of all ages trying to beg for or sell something.

A by-product is the erosion of social equality. Some Cubans have access to US dollars, which are now legal tender, and they can use these to gain access to goods not available with the peso.

I believe that as many people as possible should become involved with solidarity organisations like the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. At least as important as making revolution at home is the task of assisting the survival of revolutions abroad - and the Cuban example is a flame that still flickers against the odds, like a candle still burning in spite of a howling gale.

**Zapatistas took up arms against the results of Nafta, but workers unity across North America is needed**

# Towards the Communist Party

From an interview published in *The Call*, paper of the British Socialist Party, with Albert Inkpen, the party's general secretary, February 12 1920

SOCIALISTS in this country watching Russia's triumphant struggle against world capitalism have an idea which is ever uppermost in their minds. That idea is the desire for a strong, united communist party. It is known that negotiations have for some time been proceeding in this direction between the BSP and other left wing organisations ... the SLP [Socialist Labour Party], the Workers Socialist Federation and the South Wales Socialist Society ... It was conveyed to us by the Third International that it was our duty as sincere communists to make every effort to bring about the uniformity of all bodies in this country that adhered to the communist platform...

So far as fundamentals and the general basis of unity - revolutionary mass action, Soviets or similar organisations, working class dictatorship as the weapon for expropriating capital - are concerned, there was complete unanimity. The differences were on the relations of the Communist Party to the trade unions and the Labour Party ...

The Communist Party is coming and very soon. And the stronger we can make the BSP in the meantime, the greater strength we shall add to the Communist Party when it comes.

C · B · P · C

Y E A R S

JULY 31 1920  
JULY 31 1995

# Anti-racism charter calls for state bans

ORGANISED by the Tower Hamlets Anti-Racist Committee, the national assembly against racism held in London's East End last weekend was addressed by an array of establishment speakers, as well as local ethnic and community leaders, and families of victims of racist violence.

Although a detailed anti-racist charter was distributed, no serious discussion of its contents took place, as only half an hour was set aside for contributions from the floor. Among those reminding delegates of the evils of racism were John Monks, the TUC general secretary, and various Labour MPs and MEPs, including Diane Abbott and Bernie Grant.

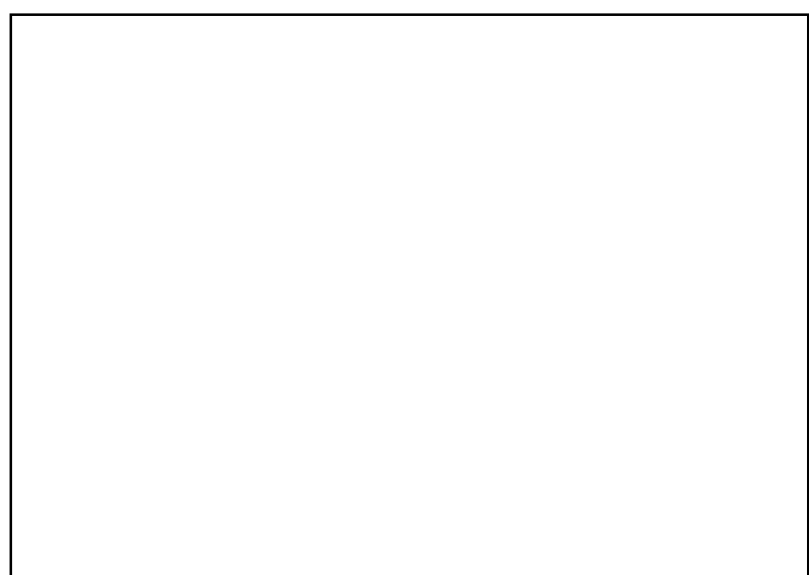
Despite the commitment of the charter to "an agenda which centrally tackles racism at its roots", it was hardly surprising, given the politics of these worthy ladies and gentlemen, that capitalism was not identified as the dragon to be slain.

Diane Abbott stressed the importance of challenging racism as *individuals*: "Name that person!" she implored us.

Kashmir Singh from the British Sikh Federation advised us not to be afraid of asking for support from unexpected sources. For example, "Lady Margaret Thatcher" had backed the successful campaign to exempt sikh motorbike riders from wearing crash helmets.

The assembly was conceived out of the internecine rows which blew the Anti-Racist Alliance apart. The dead-end of black separatism is therefore reflected in the charter, which combines the call for black leadership with appeals to the state to ban racism out of existence.

One delegate who was prepared to



ARA placards at TUC demo. Its surrogate is repeating the same mistakes

go beyond the platitudes of what he called "the high and mighty here this morning" was Assad Rahman of the Newham Monitoring Project. In a fighting speech from the platform he referred to the "East London shitholes" where both black and white workers are expected to live. The British National Party seems to many whites to be providing 'answers', however false they may be. Those conditions must be tackled, but "when the fascists come out, we have to stop them physically".

Afterwards, I asked him what he thought should be done.

"The conditions for electing Beackon had been there for years," he said. "The BNP learnt the lessons of the past and started to take up issues like wheely-bins. So it is not just a question of defeating racism, but of taking up the economic issues. People are turning to the BNP as a protest vote, but it is also a vote of despair."

SO MUCH of the left sees it as its duty to go chasing around wards and constituencies where the BNP is contesting elections in order to 'combat fascism'. The most inane example is the Socialist Workers Party and its Anti-Nazi League surrogate with their call, "Don't vote Nazi". When workers press them as to how they *should* vote, they are inevitably directed back towards the rotten politics of the Labour Party.

It is therefore a small, but positive step that Militant Labour has taken in deciding to stand in the forthcoming Weavers ward by-election in East London's Tower Hamlets. The article in the February 3 issue of *Militant* announcing the decision highlights the Labour council's proposals to raise rents by £7 per week and push through yet more cuts in essential services. Rightly the article concludes on the need "to build a viable socialist alternative in the area", rather than to "simply denounce the BNP", which is also standing.

ML's decision was taken after long internal debate which, according to some members of the organisation, saw it "split right down the middle". The argument was not so much about splitting the Labour vote to let in either the Liberal Democrats or the BNP. That, despite all Labour's proven rottenness, would still be seen by Militant as a disaster. No, Labour seems certain to win the Weavers seat, and the argument was about the possible 'derisory' size of ML's own vote.

Although the national leadership finally backed the local organisation's

In the recent Newham South by-election the Newham Monitoring Project distributed leaflets simply calling on workers not to vote BNP, without suggesting an alternative. I asked Assad whether he thought this just drove people back into the arms of the Labour Party.

"I agree that Labour is seen as part of the problem in terms of these issues. Somebody has got to give these people answers and it is up to the left to provide them. Our job in the NMP is to combat racism and fascism here and now. It is up to you to offer the long-term solutions."

But trying to defeat the BNP without organising against capitalism itself is like banging your head against a brick wall. Short-term victories can be gained, but new and more vicious dangers will continually arise if that task is not put right at the top of our agenda.

*Peter Manson*

# Militant hushes up election stand split

desire to contest, the arguments continued - but not in the pages of *Militant*. The January 27 issue carried an article by the candidate, Hugo Pierre, which made no mention at all of the by-election!

The whole election question is an essential one, not only for ML's own supporters, but for the entire left, and should be the subject of the fullest possible public debate.

Militant Labour itself does not provide the solutions the working class need. It is still oriented towards the Labour Party, while its own reformist programme, *Militant: What we stand for*, proclaims that socialism can be brought about "through an Enabling Bill in parliament" to nationalise the "top 200 monopolies".

Workers should not give their vote to any candidate who cannot support basic working class rights. That is why we put forward a *minimum* platform to test out such support. We challenge Militant to stand on this platform.

*Alan Fox*

- For a £250 minimum weekly wage
- Work or full benefit at the level of the minimum wage
- Free abortion and contraception on demand
- Against immigration controls
- Unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland
- Support for the right of self-determination in Wales and Scotland

# What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs, ie communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

We urge all who accept these principles to join us. A Communist Party Supporter reads and fights to build the circulation of the Party's publications; contributes regularly to the Party's funds and encourages others to do the same; where possible, builds and participates in the work of a Communist Party Supporters Group.

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# Loyalist socialist?

WHILE THE mainstream unionist parties are expressing outrage at the contents of last week's leaked framework document proposing cross-border bodies and are accusing the government of continuing to 'appease the IRA', some grassroots republican and loyalist activists have begun to set up working contact groups.

One example was the meeting which took place in West Belfast earlier this week on proposals for 'community development'. This included on the one hand Tommy Gorman, former IRA activist, and on the other Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party, closely allied to the loyalist murder gang, the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Tommy was interned for civil rights activities in 1971, escaped, was re-arrested and only released with the ending of internment in 1975. He then took up the IRA cause and was arrested again in 1978, spending three years 'on the blanket' in Long Kesh. Apart from a brief period of freedom in 1981, he spent the whole of the decade incarcerated by the British state.

So how is it that this heroic revolutionary now finds himself sitting opposite a representative of sectarian killers, whose sole purpose of existence has been to 'maintain the British link' - that is, act as an auxiliary army for British imperialism?

"Billy is a chink, an exception," says Tommy. "He is very open-minded."

We do not think that this is the case. Hutchinson's 'socialist' rhetoric and concern "to accommodate both Irishness and Britishness" has more to do with an opportunist appeal for popularity among loyalist workers

than real working class politics.

In 1987 the *Morning Star* published a disgraceful interview with Gusty Spence, central to the UVF's reformation in the sixties. Spence expressed keenness to "sit down round a table and talk" to Sinn Fein - "if the IRA put down its guns". Like Hutchinson, Spence too claimed to be a socialist. He described the PUP as "the only socialist unionist party in Northern Ireland".

As we commented in *The Leninist*, "There is no such thing as a pro-imperialist socialist, and the link with Britain is there to ensure Britain's continued domination of Ireland."

The British state is the main enemy of workers both in Britain and the Six Counties.

Billy Hutchinson sees the cross-border institutions proposed in the leaked framework document as presenting no problem - "They could be of mutual benefit." This is quite a contrast to the mainstream unionist parties' knee-jerk reaction, but much more in tune with most loyalist opinion. The difference is that official unionism is peeved at being side-lined by the discussions around the 'peace process', while the smaller groups believe that their day has come: they know that what is proposed amounts to a new Stormont, perhaps with a power-sharing element.

But what of Hutchinson's call for class politics, "a realignment on a left-right basis"? His vision of a Workers Party/PUP alliance 'on the left', facing the SDLP/Official Unionists on the right, says it all. It is a vision for a bourgeois 'socialism' within the existing capitalist Six County statelet.

*Jim Blackstock*



Free bus  
tactic  
wins support

# Beating them at their own game

An article in *Socialist Worker* (January 28) criticised Bill Morris and the Transport and General Workers Union leadership in the Badgerline bus dispute in Chelmsford for appealing to public opinion rather than for solidarity action - a well know bureaucrat's cop-out. But it particularly criticised the free bus service the union was running. We spoke to Bill Horslen, one of the sacked workers and a Labour councillor, about the dispute and how the bus service can be used to gain solidarity action

A PRODUCTIVITY deal was negotiated between the TGWU and Badgerline management in 1992 but was rejected by the membership throughout the country.

It was then imposed after the managing director, Robin Orbell, went round the smaller garages threatening them with closure. The deal was eventually accepted by all the garages except Chelmsford, which continued negotiation and then introduced a work to rule in 1993. The duties were eased, but in 1994 even worse ones were imposed.

That triggered a call by the membership for a ballot. The membership voted 74.4% in favour of industrial action. We were all surprised by the high vote in favour of action. It is not a traditionally militant garage although we do have a reputation for not being push-overs.

Management informed us that if we took industrial action we would be repudiating our contract and would be deemed to have dismissed ourselves.

Obviously this infuriated the members who at a mass meeting decided to take immediate strike action and 105 of us were sacked. We had the disciplinaries this Monday, but no one was given their job back.

We've been running the dispute since November 18 and are now running ten 17-seat mini-buses. The company has employed new staff but they don't know the routes or the fares. Some of them have to use maps. The level of service has definitely deteriorated.

We are targeting the most profitable

routes and on most of them we are running a 30 minute service. We have our own garage opposite Badgerline, underneath the railway arches. We are doing very well. Robin Orbell says it is not affecting him but he has been to the police to stop us using the bus lanes and is obviously worried. We met the police tonight and they don't know what action to take, but have said they will stop us using one particular bus lane.

The buses are full and we are looking to get bigger buses. The public in Chelmsford are not getting a good service from Eastern National, Badgerline's subsidiary, and of course it is very expensive. People are voting with their feet and supporting our service. They wave Eastern National by and get on our buses. Although it is a Tory area we have got a lot of support and a lot of money in the buckets we carry on the buses. People tell us it's about time workers stood up to the management, because these days everybody feels under threat.

Conditions on the buses have been driven right down as a result of privatisation - and particularly over safety. We are the first to challenge this with our own service and I would think it is being watched by all busworkers, whose conditions have been hammered throughout the country. The rate of pay today on London Transport of £3.60 per hour was applicable in 1960.

Last Friday we went to the Badgerline company in Bristol and met the trade union representatives to look at a way we could

No ticket to ride

introduce a free bus service in Bristol to put further pressure on Badgerline. Chelmsford workers would run the buses. We're also looking at other areas. We've been invited up to the Midlands and to Sheffield later on this month.

We can hit them with the very weapons the privatised companies have been using against each other. Darlington was a classic example where Stagecoach introduced free bus services and drove the local company into receivership. We're using the same tactics against them.

We've been in contact with Badgerline companies throughout the country and Bill Morris has called a national delegate conference on Wednesday February 15 in Transport House where all Badgerline groups should be represented. We are looking for solidarity action from other groups. We hope the conference will decide to hold ballots for industrial action.

We've been all round the country prior to the conference to spread the word and convince them that this is a fight for all of us. I think we can win that argument because we are not just talking about our working conditions but trade union rights and the right to strike. Working conditions around the company are atrocious and if Badgerline wins this one they can only get worse.

It is true that running the free bus service has been taking up most of our resources, leaving only a few of us going round the country trying to spread the dispute. But you have to work for solidarity action.

At the moment we are hitting the employer where it hurts most. If we can get the rest of the trade union movement behind us then we can win - no question about it. By running the service we are showing other workers how strong a tactic it is, that we are determined to fight and that we can win with their support.

## M77 dead end

"MY FIRST thought was that they were a bunch of thugs hired by the contractors to kick us off the land." Lindsey Keenan of Earthfirst later realised that it was Allan Stewart, Scottish Office minister, who, according to demonstrators, brandished a pick axe at them. All say they are committed to non-violence.

Stewart has since resigned and faces assault charges. His son and another young man present are both being investigated for carrying firearms.

For the past 10 months protesters, led by members of Earthfirst, have occupied Pollock Park in Glasgow in an attempt to block the proposed M77 Glasgow-Ayr motorway extension.

The £53 million road will destroy 6 acres of woodland on a green site only 15 feet away from some of the most run down and depressed housing schemes in Glasgow.

Locals and conservationists see this development as unnecessary and as destroying further the quality of life of thousands of workers who live in conditions of damp and squalor.

Lindsey Keenan links the campaign to save this park with the call for improved public transport: "We don't need a motorway; we need a decent bus service - one bus every 45 minutes is a disgrace."

Keenan does not fall into the trap of just "blaming the Tories". He was clearly pleased with Stewart's resignation, but said that the next resignations he wanted to see were those of the Strathclyde Regional councillors - Labour - who voted through this motorway against the demands of their constituents.

The protesters do not fit the middle class hippy stereotype of veggie tree worshippers. They are highly disciplined and trained in non-violent direct action

techniques. They are also characterised by their lack of naivety: they work well with Scottish Militant Labour because of their links on the estates, but they see Labour as part of the problem, not the solution - with or without clause four.

Although some trees have been felled the protesters are optimistic. "We're looking for a result," said Keenan. "Get as many buses here on February 25 and give us some support. We'll look forward to seeing you." He and the people around Pollock Park mean business.

Although we do not automatically support often reactionary conservation projects, this is quite clearly a ridiculous scheme to run a motorway through what was a leisure facility in an otherwise very decrepit and rundown area. Needless to state nothing like this amount of money is being splashed out on housing improvements or on improving public transport in the area.

The protesters are working closely with the Scottish Alliance Against the Criminal Justice Bill, which is yet to be passed in Scotland and is an attack not only on anti-road protesters but any organised action against the state. The campaigns have combined to organise a mass demonstration on February 25, marching from Glasgow city centre at 12 noon, to 'Pollock Free State', Pollock Park.

Mary Ward

This Saturday, February 11, is the conference called by the Scottish Alliance Against the Criminal Justice Act. 10.30am, Strathclyde University Student Union, Glasgow

## Royal Mail attacks right to strike

IN RECENT years the continual barrage of anti-union laws has made effective trade union activity illegal. The leaderships' role has thus increasingly become one of membership policing. By their very nature they are much happier at the negotiating table than on the picket line. Unemployment and the anti-trade union laws have virtually paralysed activity, with members fearing for their jobs and the leaderships fearing for the union funds, their office and their pay packet.

Last month postal workers went against the tide in an incredible show of spontaneous strength and solidarity. Following an official one hour stoppage in Camden, 150 workers were suspended. The whole unit walked out on unofficial strike and two thirds of London postal workers followed them. Management were forced to withdraw all the suspensions and threats of disciplinary action - a tremendous victory at this time.

Victorious unofficial action has not always been so rare. In the 1970s a strong shop stewards' movement staffed by the influential (though at that time thoroughly opportunist) Communist Party could bring workers out on unofficial action against the pleadings of the union leadership and against the anti-trade union laws.

It is not the laws in themselves which are the problem, but rank

and file weakness. Only rank and file organisation can smash these laws. The union bureaucrats certainly have no intention of breaking them, let alone smashing them.

Leaders of the postal workers' union, the UCW - which on Monday merged with the NCU to become the Communication Workers Union - refused to back the action because they knew it threatened their funds. Nevertheless they did not repudiate the action either. As a result the union was taken to court by Royal Mail and fined a total, including costs, of £100,000, despite its hands-off approach and efforts to keep the peace.

Royal Mail has not used such tactics against past unofficial action. It obviously feels confident enough to do so now and is firing a very heavy warning shot. One of the Badgerline strikers commented: "This is a serious attack on union organisation. But it should not stop action. The union should be about supporting members not protecting its funds."

As long as the working class is on the defensive, the attacks on our rights will get worse. Workers have never been given anything by making peace with the bosses. It is when we are strong and on the offensive that bosses and governments dare not implement their own laws.

Linda Addison

## Gesture politics

THE LABOUR Party took control of the London Borough of Brent council briefly last week. This will last only until Tory councillor Richard Buckley rises from his sick bed. Its gesture politics therefore paint a false picture of Labour as defender of the poor and needy, a picture belied by the party's performance where it has more long-term control.

While Brent Labour cancels the privatisation of old people's homes, they are being sold off in Labour-controlled Camden. While Brent scraps 'Tory' increases in home help charges, the trail blazer for this great new idea was Labour-controlled Greenwich.

Labour's lucky break came on January 30, when 28 Labour plus five Liberal Democrat councillors took advantage of their temporary majority of one to take control of Brent Council. Tory control is likely to be restored at an emergency council meeting on Monday, after only two weeks.

Today, Brent council tenants will receive official notice of a 6% rent increase - a great Labour achievement, for which they are expected to be grateful, as

'Tory' rent increases would have been higher. No doubt this will help the 'socialist' council service its half a billion pound debt burden to diverse moneylenders - a burden of exploitation which will be passed on to those who pay council tax and rents when the council sets a legal budget again on May 15, whoever is in control then.

Whatever the particular combination of council tax and service cuts, Labour's promise of "responsible and prudent" management has nothing to offer workers in Brent.

Stan Kelsey

Running out of patience  
The story of the nurses' strike  
in Victoria, Australia

7.30pm, Wednesday March 1  
Featuring Pat MacManus of  
Central Middlesex Hospital  
Unison Branch, a veteran striker  
and a member of Unison's  
London health committee  
Organised by Brent Communist Party  
081-459 7146