

# Workers International Press

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## Putin appointed acting President:

# Army's man in charge in Russia



Southall Black Sisters (SBS) organised a protest outside the Home Office in London in December. They demanded a reduction in the 20-year sentence handed down to Zoora Shah.

Zoora suffered 12 years of financial, sexual and physical abuse at the hands of a man whom she finally killed.

Men who kill in hot blood often get off with considerably shorter sentences.

Since women are usually slower to react to persistent provocation, they are treated as pre-meditated killers and much longer sentences are inflicted.

Zoora is currently serving the eighth year of her sentence.

She is desperate to be re-united with her children. Her sentence should be cut now so that she can be released immediately.

Banners and placards emphasised that vaunted "British justice" is both racist and sexist.

Despite requests, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, did not come to talk to the demonstrators.

by Bob Archer

THE CLIQUE ruling Russia moved with indecent but understandable haste to replace the decrepit president Boris Yeltsin with prime minister Vladimir Putin over the New Year.

Putin, a former KGB man and secret service chief, is very much a representative of the army.

One of his first acts was to visit the Russian troops trying to crush Chechnya. He symbolically presented hunting knives to soldiers, encouraging them to hunt down and slaughter Chechen independence fighters.

In doing so, he warned "enemies of the constitution" that they would be shown no mercy.

Putin's appointment and bid to win the coming presidential election is a move towards dictatorship in Russia.

He clearly aims at territorial expansion, crushing the aspirations of the peoples of the region under an iron heel reminiscent of the Tsarist empire.

A major stake in this policy is the petroleum wealth around the Caspian Sea. Russia's leaders yearn to control the oil wells and the pipelines serving them.

Recent developments make it seem likely that Russia will expand her armed forces to carry out this empire-building in the middle east and also make her present felt in Europe, pursuing rivalry with US economic interests. This in turn could lead to a certain industrial and economic revival at home. The policy pursued by the Kremlin thus bears some comparison with the strategy of pre-war fascist regimes in Italy and Germany.

A major reason why western leaders have supported crooks and thugs like Yeltsin and now Putin rather than other pro-capitalist groups with a more stridently free-market orientation is the belief that the current ruling group can prevent a big movement of the Russian working class.

This group directly speaks for the army and lines itself up with the generals, a number of whom were given a hero's welcome in Moscow recently. The army trusts and understands this group, while it distrusts the liberals.

That is why the group currently in power provides, as far as the west is concerned, the best guarantee of internal order. Because of their links with the army, they will be most able to impose a dictatorship on the working class.

As Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

has warned, the re-establishment of capitalism in the ex-USSR cannot be achieved through a democratic regime. It requires a fascist or military dictatorship.

Russian workers have time after time come forward to defend jobs and insist on the payment of wages. They have instinctively protected social ownership of industries on a number of occasions.

But the Russian working class as a whole understandably lacks a political leadership which can arm it to face all the stratagems of the ruling group.

Despite resistance by many workers to the loss of jobs and living standards, they seem to have been duped by the wave of chauvinism unleashed in the course of the present war against Chechnya.

This Great Russian chauvinism is dressed up as anti-imperialism for the benefit of Russian workers, who are hostile enough to the west after several years' experience of attempted capitalist penetration.

Here is another similarity with pre-war fascism, which at the beginning adopted a simplistic and lying socialist rhetoric to fool the victims of capitalism.

Of course it is not a matter of an arbitrary or mechanical comparison of the Russian leadership with Hitler and Mussolini. What underlies the comparison is that the dynamics of class relations is similar.

Putin and Yeltsin were able to outflank political rivals and snatch an unexpectedly high vote in recent elections. This in turn created the conditions for the ailing Yeltsin to resign and Putin to take over as acting President.

The ruling group covers its own rapacious imperialist ambitions with hypocritical attacks on foreign imperialism (attacks which nevertheless "forget" to mention the rights of Chechens, Kosovars and other nationalities to self-determination).

This was most evident during the NATO attacks on Serbia, and it was clear that they found more than a sympathetic echo among many Russian workers.

The real allies of Russian workers are the nationalities of the Caucasus (and of the Balkans) who bear the brunt of

the ruling group's expansionist drive. But the incipient movement of Russian workers is at the moment separated from the determined resistance of the Chechens. This separation could soon turn out to place Russian workers at a fatal disadvantage.

Of course the future will be determined in the course of the actual struggle itself. Continued resistance by the Chechens, especially if other nationalities in the region come to their aid, could lead to Russian military setbacks and more heavy casualties. This could bring the realities of conflict home to Russians and lead to a change in attitude towards the war.

In any case, those who call themselves Marxists in Russia have a responsibility to denounce openly and loudly the attack on Chechnya and combat the wave of government-inspired chauvinism.

This will be an essential basis for the formation of a real political leadership of the Russian working class.

### A corrupt gang

Putin's first act as President was to issue an emergency decree granting Boris Yeltsin immunity from prosecution for his extensive financial corruption. This suspension of constitutional norms was very necessary. International investigators tracing Russian financial frauds repeatedly found the names of Yeltsin and his closest cronies involved in the "laundering" of huge sums of stolen money.

Swiss investigators now claim to have linked Yeltsin and his immediate circle with nearly \$10 million in accounts in Swiss banks frozen last summer.

Despite this open corruption at the very top of the Russian government and despite threats to cut off aid if the attack on Chechnya persisted, the International Monetary Fund calmly handed on a further huge slice of aid to the country.

## PUBLIC MEETING

### After WTO —

## the way forward for anti-capitalist fighters

A discussion meeting to be opened by *Workers International Press* editor Bob Archer — Monday 31 January 2000, 7.30pm  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. Nearest Underground: Holborn

## Chinese miners clash with police

Five miners were reported injured after police were sent to remove strikers blocking a main railway line in a dispute over delayed pay.

About 1,000 coal miners from the Wang Village mine sat down on the line, demanding four-months back pay, an official from the Chenghe Mining District, which runs the mine in

northern Shaanxi Province, admitted.

He denied that the protesters clashed with police during their protest, on Tuesday December 14.

The Hong Kong-based Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said that five miners had been injured and four arrested, when

300 police were sent to forcibly remove them.

The miners dispersed after securing an agreement that they would receive two months back pay. The Chenghe Mining District official said the mine was unable to pay wages because of cutbacks on coal quotas by the state and late payments by buyers.

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# WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!





**A contribution to the discussion by Dot Gibson**

# Build on the socialist tradition in the anti-capitalist movement

A MULTITUDE of socialist, environmentalist and humanist groups, trade unionists and political organisations, who campaign for "their own" causes, have now come together in major demonstrations. On 18 June and in November 1999 we saw worldwide actions against the G8 capitalist leaders, city finance centres and the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle.

Together with the mutual confidence built up over a long period through campaigns against racism, the arms industry, child labour, police violence and in support of striking workers, etc. this movement has already proved that many diverse groups and individuals can work together against the root of the problems they try to eliminate.

We can now see the emergence of what has lately been called the anti-capitalist movement. *Capitalism*, proclaim the banners, *puts profit before people*. The movement is *against* capital, but what is it *for*, and what must be its development? There is much talk of *empowerment*, but opposition to conceptions of "party", "leadership" and "centralisation".

How can such a movement develop into one which can *defeat* capital.

Most of the student and other environmentalists in today's anti-capitalist movement do not like to talk of "socialism" because of their deep hostility to the socialist groups, whose attitude and method of organisation are depicted as "dogmatic", "sectarian", "elitist" and "bureaucratic centralist".

Nobody needs to explain in anti-capitalist circles that "socialism" was besmirched by the official socialist parties which joined capitalist colonial exploitation, supported "their own" governments in the the First and Second World Wars, and form pro-capitalist governments. Or to reiterate that "socialism" is not that which was epitomised in the nationalist and violent philistinism of Stalin and the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Organised socialists are a very small part of the anti-capitalist movement, and generally we are seen by the young environmentalists as wooden-headed, leadership-worshippers, i.e. Trotskyists, Maoists and (even today) Stalinists. It is true that sectarianism is rife among most of the socialist groups which organise themselves as "the sole authentic and only true representatives" of the working class, try to keep their own members separate from outside influences, and see the general anti-capitalist movement as one which they should use and take over.

However, it is a dangerous antidote to this sectarianism to

dismiss the history and consequences of the theoretical/political/methodological differences as if they have no significance for the day-to-day struggles. Differences which appeared to many as unnecessary and obscure at the time can now be understood, (e.g. the class collaboration of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Sinn Fein.)

It is a grave misjudgment to say that socialist groups take part in struggles *only* because they want to "augment their dwindling membership" (Shaun May, WIP, December 1999). Such a response gives credence to capitalist propaganda that shop stewards *only* call for strike action because of their own power-crazy individualism; that environmentalists *only* take direct action because they are violent people!

Like the workers' shop stewards and the environmentalists, the socialists come forward out of real struggles over principles important for the fight against capital. The main service the environmentalist anti-capitalists can do is to assist the socialists to open up their newspapers and their meetings properly so that a wide discussion of the agreements and differences can take place.

But the environmentalist anti-capitalists should question their own motives when they pour scorn on democratic centralism. They organise each one of their own actions along exactly those lines, and they are not critical of workers' strike committees which use the same method of organisation. Empowerment does not mean individualism — so why oppose democratic centralism?

Nobody calling themselves a socialist seriously doubts the scientific socialism established by Marx and Engels in the 1800's. Against the early utopian socialists they were able to explain the nature of the working class not simply as an exploited class but as *the* revolutionary class. Through its own actions, against being used by capital one against the other, the working class was able to reveal the need for its own centralised international, and the socialists were integral to this development.

In fact there is a strong socialist tradition within the anti-capitalist movement. Although it is a general guiding factor rather than the stated aim of the movement, over recent years there has been a conscious move towards linking the environmentalist movement to workers' struggles. We saw that in Britain in the London Underground workers' actions in 1995, and then in the 1995-98



Liverpool dockers' dispute; on the US West Coast longshoremen and environmentalists have campaigned together, and there are examples all over Europe, Japan, Australia, India, Latin America etc.

The important steps towards the working class by the environmentalists are a significant realisation that the working class is *special*. So far this collaboration has taken the form of a simple agreement on specific direct actions and the testing of each other through the common struggle. The idea is to "keep things simple" — there is no need for long theoretical discussion, or even political agreement — just action. This is generally described as being "non-sectarian", "anti-dogmatic" collaboration. The past and present theoretical and practical struggles of the socialist movement are avoided.

But it is a dangerously oversimplified view that the natural progression towards collaboration with workers taking industrial action will automatically lead to socialist conclusions. To be a socialist is to be in a constant ideological and practical struggle in an organisation fighting for a new socialist society in which the world's riches are shared equally by the world's people. That brings us back to the question of the party.

The anti-capitalist movement is facing a rich and fully-armed enemy, with state and world institutions and intelligence organisations, geared to protect private property and profit by every means at its disposal, including germ-and nuclear warfare. Capital has no conscience about mass extermination of the

NATO and also against Milosevic and for the self-determination of the Kosova Albanians; and in the Gulf War where it was necessary to support Iraq against imperialist intervention, at the same time supporting those Iraqis, and particularly the Kurds, who are against Saddam Hussein's regime.)

Everyone in the anti-capitalist movement will surely agree that the answer to these problems and tasks is becoming more and more urgent each day. How should we respond?

Jackie Vance (WIP, October 1999) rightly says that the movement as a whole would do well to learn from the Workers Revolutionary Party's experience. After dissolving itself in 1997 the WRP embarked, with others, on the building of a new socialist party and the Movement For Socialism (MFS) was founded.

We made the grave mistake of failing to clarify that this dissolution did *not* mean that we ceased to be Trotskyists and to explain how we would carry forward and discuss with others our proposal that the MFS should be part of the Workers International To Rebuild the Fourth International.

I now think it was a mistake to take the step to form the MFS outside of discussions with other political groups. Our reason for not doing so was that we succumbed to the notion that *they* were all sectarian, whilst the very act of dissolution meant that we were non-sectarian!

The logic of this position is now clear, and our party has split on the question. One time secretary of the WRP, Cliff Slaughter and his supporters now reject the Fourth International, saying that Trotskyism *itself* is sectarianism. Their reasoning is that capital has only just reached its final structural crisis, and so the whole past struggle for the building of the International was wrong and doomed to failure.

They now say it is wrong for the Trotskyists to explain that defeats (such as in Germany and Spain in the 1930's and the British 1926 general strike) were the responsibility of Stalinist mis-leadership. According to them these defeats were historically inevitable.

I maintain that the WRP was right to point to the necessity for the working class to build its own new socialist party, and those of us who remain in the Workers International are right to call for such a party to be in the Fourth International.

Most people in the general anti-capitalist movement say that this internal dispute in our small socialist group is of little consequence in the *real* world. However sooner or later these very questions must be addressed.

Can the anti-capitalist movement remain ambiguous about socialism? No it cannot! Socialism is anti-capitalism.

Is there some "God-given" socialism outside of the struggle of the socialists themselves, acting against capital? No! Socialism arises in the material world where men and women act to overcome the problems of their lives. The ideological and physical path of the struggle for socialism must be studied.

Can socialism be achieved except through the world working class revolution? No! The working class *is* the revolutionary class, and socialists must join that class to build the party of revolution.

Should such a new party be part of the Fourth International? Yes! The First, Second and Third Internationals are dead. The Fourth International is the highest point so far in the fight for socialism. It's leaders were murdered, tortured, imprisoned, but its historic struggle against Stalin and Stalinism has been vindicated. There can be no "socialism in one country".

Our programme states: "Without inner democracy — no revolutionary education. Without discipline — no revolutionary action. The inner structure of the Fourth International is based on the principles of *democratic centralism*: full freedom of discussion, complete unity in action." That is the kind of party that is required to defeat capital.

Does that mean that as Trotskyists we are not willing or able to work with others who come from different traditions (even Stalinist). No! Millions of workers and socialists have reached this point in their fight for socialism through different paths. In testing out our ideas and actions in today's conditions we will reveal past struggles more clearly.

How can we go forward? I think the main thing is for environmentalists, socialists and workers to spend as much time as possible working together on common agreed tasks and actions. We must build a culture of patience and tolerance which allows proper criticism and not labelling. We must build international actions.

In turning more and more towards the working class, we must constantly find ways for vanguard workers to take the leading place in the anti-capitalist movement. We must find ways to study, discuss and write about our common problems and tasks in a thoroughly open way. At the same time we must be more vigilant of each other's security against state provocations.

Let's see where we can go from here!

Although many in the anti-capitalist movement say they oppose centralisation, workers have to organise their struggles in a democratic and centralised way. The London Social Justice March (left) successfully united a wide range of groupings in the struggle against capitalism



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# The Irish worker – compiled by John Steele

## RUC not Guilty in Rosemary Nelson killing—DPP



Rosemary Nelson: Subjected to constant death threats and sectarian abuse by RUC for defending Republicans.

**ONCE AGAIN** it has been demonstrated that the north of Ireland state and the structures that defend it cannot be reformed. The recent decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) not to take action against the RUC officers who issued death threats against murdered solicitor Rosemary Nelson reveals the corruption at the heart of the legal system.

This decision by the DPP follows a long tradition of not bringing prosecutions against the RUC when they are involved in the deaths of nationalists. In each and every case they have been able to act without fear of accountability to any one. It is beyond question

that there was some level of state involvement in her murder in a car-bomb explosion outside her Lurgan, Co Armagh home on 15 March last year.

Rosemary Nelson, a campaigning solicitor for civil rights and a representative for the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition, had been subjected to constant death threats and sectarian abuse by members of the RUC for defending republicans.

In 1998 she told a US Senate inquiry, "For the past ten years I have been representing suspects detained for questioning about politically motivated offenses. Since I began to represent such clients and especially since I became

involved in a high-profile murder case, I have begun to experience difficulties with the RUC. These have involved RUC officers questioning my professional integrity, making allegations that I am a member of a paramilitary group and, at their most serious, making threats against my personal safety, including death threats."

Last year, in an attempt to make people believe that her murder would be honestly investigated, the Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC) forced the RUC Chief Constable to hand over the investigation to a Commander from the London Metropolitan Police.

The ICPC report at the time detailed the police hostility to the solicitor and stated that the local RUC's attitude to an inquiry "bordered on the obstructive". But it is clear that these comments were a sham, designed to let the RUC off the hook.

The Nelson family have reacted with anger to the DPP ruling. Her husband said, "This decision by the DPP is another body blow for our family. Nearly ten months after her death, there is no sign of any commitment to truth or justice for Rosemary."

"Tony Blair must recognise his responsibility in relation to truth and justice for Rosemary and establish an independent international judicial

inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding her murder."

This call for an independent inquiry echoes a similar call from Sinn Fein. It is a correct call in these circumstances and should be fought for widely throughout the labour and trade union movement.

But Sinn Fein is wrong in believing that a police force can be established in the six-county state that will be fully accountable.

The British government will push ahead with the Patten Commission Report which proposes minor changes affecting flags and insignia and the changing of the name of the RUC to the Northern Ireland Police Service.

But this police force will remain armed and ready to act in defence of a state which—now with the help of Sinn Fein ministers—continues to play a crucial role in dividing the Irish working class and ensuring the rule of capital.

The police cannot be neutral. They remain the servants of a state which is not neutral. In the same way as "the peace process" and the Belfast Agreement, based as they are on the illusions of progressive capitalist development, cannot remove the religious, sectarian divisions, a six-county police force will continue to reflect the innate corruption of the structures which defend the state.

## New 'terror' bill — new rights abuses

By Jackie Vance

Since its inception the six-county state in the north of Ireland has been ruled by emergency legislation. Despite all claims that, "Northern Ireland is as British as Finchley", the British state could not allow an extension to the region of many of the democratic rights that had been won by the British working class. It could only rule through anti-democratic legislation backed up by its armed forces.

Now the New Labour government, through its Terrorist Bill, is proposing to extend similar legislation to the rest of the United Kingdom. This is undoubtedly a very real indication of the fear that Blair and the ruling class have of the growing anti-capitalist movement in Britain and its world-wide connections.

Despite the bleating from New Labour's home secretary, Jack Straw, that Britain is still a liberal democracy there has been a steady erosion of democratic rights which this Bill intensifies.

It is part of a long line of attacks on civil rights through such measures as the Criminal Justice Act, the Asylum Act and the anti-trade union laws.

At the centre of the Terrorist Bill is the power to "proscribe" organisations, that is, make membership of certain organisations an illegal act. The only organisations currently proscribed are those associated with the north of Ireland and this Bill gives the secretary of state the right to add to these.

And it is not only membership of a proscribed organisation

that will be a crime. To attend and speak at a meeting where a member of that organisation was speaking makes you liable to 10 years in prison! This applies even if you don't agree with the views of that organisation.

The Bill extends the definition of terrorism to include both the use and threat of action against people and property for political, religious and ideological ends.

Obviously, Straw has the direct action individuals and organisations in his sights. They are now being labelled as "terrorists". Destroying a field of genetically-modified crops or throwing a brick through a MacDonald's window is now considered in the same category as planting a bomb.

It is surely only a matter of time before Reclaim the Streets and other campaigning groups on the environment are proscribed and their supporters subjected to the same vicious repression as republicans in the north of Ireland over the last thirty years.

In a section which has serious implications for journalists, the Bill attempts to create legal informers. It makes it an offence not to report people to the police if you have suspicions that they may be using money or property to contribute to any of the acts or organisations that the government has decided are "terrorist". Failure to do so will make you liable to a five-year prison sentence.

Many liberal commentators, such as Francis Wheen in the Guardian, have been particularly incensed by clause 57 of the Bill under which it will be a criminal



offence to, "incite another person to commit an act of terrorism wholly or partly outside the United Kingdom..... It is immaterial whether or not the person incited is in the United Kingdom at the time of the incitement".

As Wheen points out "terrorism" has been redefined to include a threat of action against not only a person but also property. He correctly states that this legislation would have made criminals of refugees as diverse as VI Lenin and General de Gaulle who lived in London and, "If the Straw law had been in force 20 or 30 years ago, every supporter of the African National Congress in Britain would have been liable to prosecution.

"Anyone who demanded the eviction of Indonesian troops from East Timor, or spoke in support of the Sri Lanka Tamils, could also have expected a visit from Sergeant Straw and his plods".

Up to now "terrorist" legislation has been reviewed annually in the British parliament but this Bill puts it on a permanent footing thus withdrawing the right to scrutiny on a regular basis. (In opposition the Labour Party annually voted against the Prevention of Terrorism Act).

People suspected of offences under this Bill will have fewer rights than other "criminals". Arrest powers previously specific to the north of Ireland will now be introduced in Britain

with the police having greatly strengthened powers to search and enter without a warrant.

For some offences the burden of proof is reversed. This means that instead of the onus being on the court to find a suspect guilty, that suspect must prove that he is innocent.

Similarly, a court may draw inferences from a suspect's silence, while at the same time preventing him from accessing a solicitor or lawyer.

Revealingly, a special section applicable only to the north of Ireland has been included. This retains the non-jury, Diplock courts which accept a lower standard of admissibility of evidence. The word of a senior police officer is sufficient

'Direct action' individuals and groups are to be labelled terrorists under the new act. Left: demonstrators picket a McDonald's in London's Strand

to count as evidence that a person is a member of an illegal organisation.

The "anti-terrorism" laws have produced some of the worst human rights abuses in the past 30 years. Thousands of innocent people, most of them Irish, have been jailed. Many of them have been tortured and fitted up for crimes they never committed.

This new Bill reflects the limitations of a "liberal democracy" for capitalism. Faced with a growing opposition to Blair's attacks against many of the disadvantaged sections of society and his disregard of the environment, the capitalist state centralises its authority and resorts to more blatant repression and disregard for human rights.



## Economics

# High-tech shares dive in New Year panic

## Nick Bailey reviews the month's economic news

THE NEW YEAR saw a major drop in share prices in the US and London. By 6 January, the London FTSE 100 index had fallen 483 points from a high at the end of 1999.

The immediate cause of the sudden fall was actually improved confidence about economic growth in the coming period. Share dealers were worried that central banks will put interest rates up to prevent growth from leading to "overheating" and inflation. When interest rates go up, investing money in bank accounts becomes a more attractive proposition, and so a certain number of shareholders sell part of their portfolios to do this.

However, the dramatic nature of the fall reflected unease among capitalists over the real value of their shareholdings. Over many years, the nominal values of shares have by and large steadily risen. But ultimately the values of shares must reflect the ability of industry to extract surplus value from workers.

Fears that share prices were "irrationally" high were underlined in the wake of the crisis of 1997-1998, when a number of finance houses were only saved from bankruptcy by the skin of their teeth.

Many bourgeois economists boast that capitalism has achieved a "new paradigm" through the development of technology. They think this has enabled them to get round the tedious necessity of actually fighting out with the working class the extraction of surplus value.

Partly such illusions are buttressed by the success of the shares of companies involved in new technologies, like Microsoft.

Just at the end of last year there was a lot of discussion in the press about a company called Sage, which produces accountancy software. Someone who invested £500 in Sage shares in 1989 would now own shares worth £14 according to reports.

This kind of coverage encouraged a number of entrepreneurs to launch companies to exploit various aspects of electronic mail, electronic commerce and electronic share trading. The latest is a growing practice. Anyone

with a PC, a modem and a bank account can apparently dabble in share dealing from the comfort of home.

A 24-year old called Jonathan Rowland set up JellyWorks late in 1999. Effectively it was a vehicle for investing his family's wealth, but he floated it on the stock market and on the first day shares rose in value from 5p to 54p, finally settling at 49p. By the end of December 1999, the family's holding had risen in value to £70m.

The London "Guardian" sourly noted that the huge success was based on "running off a few copies of what is probably one of the thinnest placing documents ever seen in the city and... arranging a picture story in the Sunday press".

Then it was the turn of Mark Slater, son of Tory politician and spectacular bankrupt Jim Slater. Mark Slater's Internet Indirect was to channel investors' money into suppliers of software systems and "specific content" to Internet Service Providers. The young entrepreneur solemnly promised investors he would only invest in totally racing certainties.

His shares were placed on the stock market at 5p and quickly rose to 44p.

It is hardly surprising that one group of young businessmen put together a company and launched it on the stock market in the few days between Christmas and New Year. The company's purpose was to post information for investors on the internet. Spokesperson Javid Hamid promised that information would be of high quality because "time-wasters" would be weeded out.

The strongest fall in share prices has understandably been in Nasdaq, the US stock market that concentrates on new technology companies.

Since new year, investors have been selling off their high-tech shares and investing in more reliable, longer-established companies.

The trade in shares will continue to flourish and take on even more developed forms in the new decade. It is nevertheless a crash waiting to happen.



Investors who were seduced by the mixture of computer technology and share dealing (left) lost a packet in the first days of trading in the new millenium. George Soros' Quantum Fund is alleged to have lost \$600 million in the space of four days

## Mergers, job-cuts and wars

BOUND up with an active stock-market is the endless round of mergers and takeovers. A recent example has united US oil giants, Exxon and Mobil.

This serves to remind us of the truth that under capitalism the most vicious competition is only the road to monopoly.

The companies merged because they hoped to make overall savings of about \$4 billion. They expect to be able to sack 18,000 workers around the

world by the end of this year. That is 18 per cent of the current joint workforce.

On third of executive employees of the companies will be sacked.

The merger has given the new company some ready cash, and it is eyeing the possibility of investing in the Middle East. This would be a new departure for this US company, and will mean political involvement in a sensitive area.

It looks more and more as if

the Middle East and the Transcaucasus will become an area of increasing economic rivalry between Russia and the US, spawning new political instability and wars.

Meanwhile Rolls Royce announced 1,000 job cuts at its aero-engine and operations units in Derby in the UK.

The company made record profits last year, controls a third of the international market for civil jet engines and has a swelling order book.

Engine deliveries stood at 200 a year in the late 1980s but reached 900 in 1998.

Nevertheless a spokesman insisted that the cuts were necessary to "secure the profitable long-term future" of the company.

He said the group still faces extremely tough competition from Pratt and Whitney and General Electric in the US: "We are one of three in the market and it's tough out there".

## UK utilities slash jobs

ANOTHER recent merger in the UK joined together London Electricity and Eastern Electricity. Both these utility companies have come under foreign ownership since the electricity supply industry was privatised by the Thatcher government in 1988.

London Electricity is owned by Electricite de France (EDF) and Eastern Electricity belongs to Texas Utilities.

The other thing that has happened since privatisation is that half of the 160,000 jobs in the sector have disappeared.

The latest merger means that

800 more workers will lose their jobs. A spokesman for Texas Utilities' European subsidiary blamed Britain's regulatory system for the changes:

"It is the responsible management response to the challenges of the tough Ofgem price control".

Privatisation is revealed as a deliberate attack on workers' jobs linked to an endless intensification of their labour.

When government appointed regulators demand price cuts, it is the working class that suffers.

Last December water suppliers also announced forth-

coming job cuts. Pennon, which supplies water and removes waste in south west England and the Welsh utilities group Hyder will sack about 1,200 workers following pricing reviews by the water and energy regulators.

Water supply company Kelda announced it would sack 500 workers at its subsidiary, Yorkshire Water and a further 240 within the next two years. Another water supplier, Severn Trent, announced 1,100 jobs cuts.

Altogether job losses amounting to 9,000 in UK water supply were announced late in 1999.

Sir Ken Jackson, leader of the AUEW engineering workers' union and a close political ally of New Labour prime minister Tony Blair, wept crocodile tears over the redundancies. He was especially furious that they were announced in the run-up to christmas.

However, they resulted from the policies of the Blair government. Perhaps Jackson should call on Blair to restore the right of trade unionists to take solidarity strike action and defend each other as a class. Nothing less will restore these jobs.

# Death threats expose Brazil police racket!

By Colin Pendleton

Threats to the life of a Brazilian trade union leader expose the growth of a major racket involving senior police officers in the private security industry. Joao Soares, president of the Federation of Security Guard Trade Unions in Parana state, FETRAVISPP, has received death threats after the union made complaints about police officers illegally moonlighting as private security guards, sometimes during their official duty hours. Police operating as private "security" guards have been linked in the past with death squads carrying out the "culling" of poor street-children.

The latest row followed FETRAVISPP complaints about private security firms being run by military police officers who employed other policemen. FETRAVISPP said these firms were breaking the law which

specifies that security guards must be formally registered after completing approved training courses. It further alleged that they were diverting resources from public security.

The Brazilian police authorities have generally turned a blind eye to police moonlighting, because it is cheaper than raising police salaries. There are laws requiring security firms to register, but many operate outside the law. Reports that officers were doing their private jobs during official on-duty hours have raised concern, but the involvement of high-ranking officers deters any in-depth investigation, or action.

It may also suit the authorities to have some police dirty work done under cover of the private sector, so the politicians can pretend their hands are clean. In 1993 the Federal Congress's Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the Extermination of Children showed evidence of

considerable overlap between clandestine security firms and death squads involved in 'social cleansing'.

After press reports of the union's allegations, Joao Soares received anonymous phone calls advising him: "stop the denunciations, you don't know who you're messing with", and warning "the military police are getting very irritated by the denunciations".

On 23 October a computer containing records of the complaints was stolen from Joao Soares's office. Two days later a military policeman arrived at FETRAVISPP offices bearing a message from a military police colonel advising the union to withdraw its complaint about a particular security firm. On 30 October, Joao Soares made a formal complaint to the police about the threats. On 21 December, police informed him they were making significant progress with their enquiries.

Despite this, they have failed to take action in relation to the death threats or to offer protection to him and his family, who have been threatened on two more occasions. In addition, Soares has been told that police are furious at the prospect of losing extra income.

On 14 December, Joao Soares and other security guard union representatives met Justice Minister Jose Carlos Dias and asked him to order a federal investigation into police involvement in security companies, an investigation into the death threats to Joao Soares, and police protection for him and his family.

Amnesty International has urged supporters to send messages to the Brazilian authorities expressing concern at the threats to Joao Soares and his family and the fact that these death threats appear to have been issued by military police; asking the authorities to initiate an immedi-

ate, impartial and independent investigation into the death threats; and asking them to carry out all necessary measures, deemed appropriate by Joao Soares and his family, to guarantee their safety.

### APPEALS TO:

#### Minister of Justice

Exmo Sr Ministro da Justica do Brasil [Salutation Your Excellency / Vossa Excelencia] Dr. Jose Carlos Dias Ministerio da Justica Esplanada dos Ministerios, Bloco T 70064-900 Brasilia, DF, Brazil Telegrams: Ministerio da Justica, Brasilia, DF, Brazil Faxes: + 55 61 224 2448 (if voice answers say: "por favor dar o sinil do fax")

#### Governor of Parana

Exmo Sr Governador do Estado do Parana [Salutation: Your Excellency / Vossa Excelencia] Jaime Lerner Palacio Iguacu Centro Civico 80530-909 Curitiba PR, Brazil Telegrams: Governadoria Estado, Curitiba,

Parana, Brazil Faxes: + 55 41 254 2399

#### Secretary of Public Security

Secretario de Seguranca Publica do Estado do Parana [Salutation: Exmo. Sr./ Dear Sir] Dr Candido Martins de Oliveira, Rua Deputado Mario Barros, 1290 80530-280 Curitiba PR, Brazil Telegrams: Secretario de Seguranca Publica, Curitiba, PR, Brazil Faxes: + 55 41 254 8838

#### Please send copies of your appeals to:

His Excellency Senhor Sergio Silva do Amaral, Embassy of Brazil, 32 Green Street, Mayfair, London W1Y 4AT. Fax: 020 7399 9100 Email: rubens@infolondres.org.uk, rubens@residencia.demon.co.uk and, if possible, to the following: Federation of Private Security Guard Unions Federacao de Sindicatos na Vigilancia Rua Iapo 1566, Prado Velho 80.215-020 Curitiba, Parana, Brazil



**German tax reform**

# A major attack on the working class

By Bob Archer

PLANS for a massive tax reform, announced at the end of 1999 by the German Social Democratic government of Gerhard Schroeder, contain a hidden but major attack on the working class.

Cuts in income tax of DM7.3 billion (some £2.4 billion) a year could be welcomed by individual workers delighted to see fewer deductions from their earnings. However, this move has been welcomed much more by employers who know that high income taxes are always a burden on their wage bill.

They are perfectly aware that high income taxes spent by governments on schools, hospitals, social housing, pensions and welfare services are actually a "social wage" at the employers' expense which benefits workers.

The government actually went to great lengths to hide one very important change in the small print. While many people were happily calculating how much smaller their income tax would be, they did not notice that the government announced the abolition of capital gains tax.

Many German businesses and banks have major shareholdings (cross-holdings) in other businesses and industries. Over the years such holdings have often grown in value, but a very high capital gains tax has discouraged firms from selling them. This arrangement has contributed to the long-term stability in German industry. But abolition of the capital gains tax will:

- open the door to a stock-exchange bonanza as companies sell off their cross-holdings to realise the profits tied up in them;
- encourage the sale of subsidiaries that are not profitable or do not mix well with the firm's "core business";
- weaken the working class by creating higher unemployment as workers receive their redundancy notices

The "Financial Times" newspaper (29 December 1999) rubbed its hands with glee over "Schroeder's plans to speed Germany's industrial restructuring through far-reaching tax reforms".

This is a break with the arrangements paraded by many Keynesian economists as a preferable alternative the "short-termism" introduced into the US and British economies by monetarist governments in the 1980s and 1990s.

But it looks as if Schroeder will not face massive opposition to the reform, which has so far enjoyed solid backing among SPD MPs and local leaders and has caught the working class off-guard.

When Schroeder published his plans to cut the social and welfare budget earlier in 1999 (see WIP nos 16 and 17) the working class stubbornly and instinctively resisted these direct attacks on their living standards, welfare benefits and jobs. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) suffered humiliating losses in a series of local and regional elections, winning clearly fewer votes than the ex-Stalinist c Socialism (PDS) in some cases.

Schroeder was therefore forced to tuck and manoeuvre to find new, less direct ways to carry out the attacks he must make on the working class if German capital is to withstand the more and more cut-throat competition on the world market in which new industries have been built up in areas with low wages and without trades unions and health and welfare services.

And it is not only German capital that is at stake. European capitalists have gone to enormous lengths to overcome national divisions and the accumulated gains of the working class. The arrangements for European economic and monetary union were designed both to strengthen and unite European capital and continue the break-up of all the advances European workers have made over many decades.

The economic crisis of 1997-1998 only added to the viciousness of the competition between groups of capitalists. "Socialists" like Schroeder, aided and abetted by trade union leaders, are making sure that the burden falls on the working class. Thanks to them, capitalism was able to survive the crisis despite the series of severe shocks which swept through banks and stock markets all over the world.

The resistance of the working class was weakened and divided. Instead of pointing out that capitalism is the enemy of all workers in all countries and encouraging the unity of all workers to fight against exploitation, official "socialists" and union leaders have urged their members to accept sackings and speed-up as the price of "competing" for jobs with workers in other countries.

Nevertheless Schroeder has recovered from the crisis only by a mixture of shrewd manoeuvres and luck.

He has been greatly assisted by the crisis racking the only realistic challenger for office, the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The retired CDU leader Helmut Kohl has been involved in scandal over secret donations paid to the party, presumably as bribes. The scandal has spread to engulf his political heirs currently running the CDU.

The crisis in the CDU has taken a lot of heat off the Schroeder government in the short term, although it should be emphasised that both major parties are losing credit in the eyes of the voters.

After the widespread reaction against his cuts programme, Schroeder has gone out of his way to silence some leading critics in the party by giving them government jobs. He has also made a tactical turn to appease SPD voters.

He stopped smoking large cigars and wearing ostentatiously expensive suits in public. He carefully did the rounds of even the smallest regional gatherings of SPD delegates and wooed them with reference to SPD "core values".

When the Philip Holzmann building company went bankrupt his government made sure enough funds were forthcoming to get it on its feet again. This apparent retreat from free-market policies did a great deal to restore Schroeder's standing.

Then the merger negotiations between the old German engineering giant Mannesmann and the British Vodafone company collapsed and turned into a hostile takeover bid by Vodafone.

German sensibilities were outraged. Mannesmann is a long-



Members of the IG Bau Agrar Umwelt trade union demonstrate against job losses when the Holzmann building firm was faced with bankruptcy. German workers have consistently resisted attacks from employers and the government but the lack of political leadership in the working class exposes them to serious dangers

standing engineering concern which has been struggling to diversify into high technology sectors like computer peripherals and telecommunications.

Such companies embody a long tradition of class-collaboration in Germany, where "stakeholder value" has been preferred to short-term gains.

For decades, not just shareholders but others with a stake in the business, like trade unionists and environmentalists have been encouraged to feel that they have a role in "Mitbestimmung", in helping to decide the path companies take. Compromises have often been made to protect jobs in times of economic hardship.

Schroeder's government made a great fuss about rallying to Mannesmann's defence. He was rewarded by a fairly unanimous vote of confidence by the national SPD.

It is in the wake of this defence of jobs, catching the working class at a disadvantage, that Schroeder now puts forward his tax reforms which will certainly open the way for attacks on workers' jobs and welfare.

German workers are paying a price for the absence of a political leadership of their class. Such a leadership is badly needed in order to explain at every step the political machinations of the ruling class and put forward a strategy to mobilise the working class to oppose them.

The absence of such a leadership is reflected in the separation of many Marxist groups from the working class. These groups can see what the bourgeoisie and its state are up to, but their activity is in general confined to denouncing the

bourgeoisie and its politicians from the sidelines.

So far Schroeder has been able to head off the incipient crisis in the SPD and the unions over the turn to more reactionary anti-working class policies. Even figures like Oskar Lafontaine, who resigned because of disagreements with Schroeder, has not become the kind of focus for a working class opposition that seems to be crystallising around Ken Livingstone in the UK.

What is needed is to devote the greatest possible attention to encouraging the development of a working class leadership among the most class-conscious workers, assisting them to build a movement within which there can be a struggle for the highest possible level of political understanding.

Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International is dedicated to this task.

## VW pioneers private pensions

THE German automobile giant, Volkswagen, has introduced a private pension fund for its workers.

According to reports, 100,000 Volkswagen employees have already taken advantage of the scheme, which is a novelty in Germany.

Germany virtually invented government pension and welfare provision in the late 19th century when Chancellor Bismarck wanted to prevent the growth of a powerful socialist movement.

But all investments in private pension funds in Germany today amount to only 4.5 per cent of annual gross domestic product (GDP). The equivalent figure for the UK and Holland is over 80 per cent, and for the USA nearly 70 per cent.

Volkswagen are exploiting a clause in a recently-passed law on flexible working hours. This law

allowed overtime and bonus earnings to be set aside before tax and invested in high-interest accounts. Workers approaching the end of their working lives could then go on short time and draw on the money invested to compensate for loss of earnings.

While the measure actually gave the employers the benefit of greater flexibility, it was trumpeted as creating job-opportunities for new entrants to the labour market.

Volkswagen took the idea one step further with approval from the tax authorities and with explicit support from Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Schroeder is a former board member at Volkswagen.

The money thus removed from workers' pay packets will go to fuel activity on the newly-flourishing German stock markets.

## SPD'S record in office

UNDERNEATH rhetoric about "social justice", the coalition government of SPD (socialists) and Greens ruling Germany is continuing policies which have eroded workers' social gains over the last ten years.

Between 1990 and 1997, income from property and business activities rose by 44.1 per cent, while income from wages rose by a mere 3 per cent.

Schroeder's government has done nothing to stop this trend. It has refused to re-introduce a property tax and is cutting taxes, which will mainly benefit business.

The government is continuing the drive to make workers pay for their own pensions by paying into private pension schemes. This pushes vast amounts of money from the state sector into the private

sector, financing and fattening an army of parasites in and around stock exchanges.

The industrial concerns which traditionally dominate the German economy have carried out massive rationalisations in recent years, introducing new technology and new staffing ratios and work practices in order to meet and beat the sharpening competition on the world market. Workers are pushed to work harder and to work more overtime.

The result is that the proportion of turnover devoted to wages has fallen. In the case of Hoechst chemicals, BMW cars and the electrical giant, Siemens, the share of turnover paid in wages has fallen by between 6 and 8 per cent. Daimler-Chrysler has seen wages paid fall from 34.5 per cent of turnover in 1993 to 24.3 per cent in 1997.

The government may or may not cut the retirement age to 60. The engineering union IG Metall is pushing for this in the framework of the "Alliance for Jobs", but employers are against the idea. Schroeder is trying to use concessions on the retirement age to make the unions moderate their wage demands.

In any case the main drive of both employers and government is to make workers responsible for saving up for their own pensions.

The SPD-Green coalition already has a rotten record on environmental issues. They promised to shut down atomic power stations as a matter of urgency, but this has turned into a plan to run the atomic power stations down gradually over a twenty-year period.

And Germany has adopted an increasingly belligerent stance

in foreign affairs under the SPD, joining in the savage NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and sending troops to join Kfor, which is preventing Kosovo from winning real independence.

The SPD government has also sold tanks to the Turkish government despite its appalling record of violating the rights of Kurds.

Social democrats are also not immune from corruption charges. SPD leaders from North-Rhine-Westphalia have for years been enjoying private jet travel sponsored by the "Godfather" of the regional bank WestLB.

In one notorious instance, a politician called Friedrich Farthmann was flown in a private jet with a party of friends to celebrate his 69th birthday hunting in Tito's former game reserve in Yugoslavia.



## Letters to Workers International Press

**WORKERS INTERNATIONAL PRESS** has received the following letter from leading members of the Movement for Socialism. We are very pleased to help them disassociate themselves from the support for the NATO bombing (and occupation of Kosova for that matter) expressed in the Free Kosova Committee statement (see WIP no 18). Nevertheless the MFS failed to make a clear public stand on the issue of the NATO bombing. The document submitted to MFS's annual general meeting by Terry Brotherstone and CS, discussed elsewhere on this page, explains the coyness on the issue of the bombing and imperialism which is actually a political characteristic of the MFS.

WE have recently been sent photocopies of an article from you paper headlined "Movement for Socialism and the UN".

This piece maintains that Bob Myers, Anton Moctonian and Liz Leicester — all supporters of the Movement for Socialism — signed a statement from the Free Kosova Committee.

We did not in fact sign the statement and have cleared up this misunderstanding with the Committee, who

have removed our names.

It is implied in this column that we shared the views of some members of the Committee who supported the NATO bombing. We did not and we have made that clear to the Kosovans we worked with.

In fact we do not hold any of the views you attribute to us in your paper.

However, we do want to make it clear that we support the Committee's insistence on the right of self-determination for Kosova and will work in collaboration on this issue. We do not believe that NATO, the United States or British governments will assist the Kosovans to achieve that self-determination.

We would appreciate it if you would print our letter in order to set the record straight.

Bob Myers,  
Anton Moctonian,  
Liz Leicester



Workers International participated in all the main marches in London against the bombing of Yugoslavia under the banner: "Milosevic and NATO — hands off Kosova! Arms for Albanian Kosovans! No to Partition of Kosova! Build workers' Convoys!"

## Is the campaign against NATO of secondary importance in the struggle for independence?

# MFS and Kosova

**BRONWEN HANDYSIDE** makes some points about the document "Wars, International Working-Class Solidarity and the Movement for Socialism" by Terry Brotherstone and CS circulated at the annual general meeting of the MFS in November 1999

IN THIS document, the Movement for Socialism attempts to justify its lack of a position on the NATO bombing during the recent Kosova war. At no stage did it make a public statement in opposition to the bombing, nor did it participate in any of the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" marches. Although invited, it did not join the Left Bloc organised by a number of political parties to march on the Peace Committee marches carrying banners, placards and leaflets opposing the bombing and calling for 'Independence for Kosova'.

To say, as members of the Movement for Socialism did, that "really" we are against NATO, but we would rather not say so publicly was not only an evasion, it was a capitulation to pressure from the Albanian Kosovans who, understandably, welcomed the bombing. The capitulation arises from their "new" theoretical approach, which is laid out in the document.

In explanation of MFS's position, Brotherstone & CS begin by saying:

"...the test of theoretical thinking is its ability to come to grips with a new political world. To do so, it is necessary to cast aside the crutches on which left-wing ideas have had to hobble since Stalinism...appropriated the mantle of Marxism. The slogans of the past, mechanically repeated as though they were immutable principles, may have kept real principles alive for the generations who had no choice but to fight under the conditions Stalinism created. But now, far from serving as crude approximations to answers to the critical problems of human society, they have become a major obstacle to even asking the right questions."

On page 4 of the document we discover what one of those slogans of the past might be, but this time, a little confusingly, as defined by the reformists rather than Marxists. "The reformist

obsession with the nation state derives from a period when it was at least rational to believe that, by extending parliamentary democracy and using it to gain control over national resources, the working class could make incremental inroads into the system of capital as a whole. To fight your 'own' ruling class (and those in the labour movement who act for it) was therefore the way to support workers everywhere (the chief enemy is at home)."

Brotherstone and CS go on to assert: "It is quite different today, not only because the economy of capital is 'globalised', but also because the diplomatic strategies which sustain it are not at all confined to the 'foreign policies' of nation states."

They add: "...the idea that the exposure of and the campaign against a particular set of national leaders will, of itself, and in all circumstances, be the best way to assist workers everywhere is absurd. 'At home' today, for practical class purposes, does not mean France, Britain... or wherever: it means a Europe of which our sisters and brothers in Kosova...are as much a part as we are."

So the Marxist principle that we attack our own imperialist governments when they are waging an imperialist war, is to go out the window—because it is declared to be an absurd old shibboleth. "New meanings must be attached to old moralities."

It is well worth asking, too, how socialists are to forge an alliance with Serb workers in future unless they take a firm stand against NATO aggression at all times.

The authors conclude there is no point in attacking any one imperialist nation, because, these days, they are all working together. Surely the converse could also apply—that in attacking one, you weaken the whole lot? In any case, the campaign during the Kosova war was against NATO, which jointly rep-

resents the most powerful imperialist nations, as well as our "own" government in the UK. And globalisation has not yet overcome the contradictions inherent in capitalism which simultaneously drive those nations apart, as well as bringing them together.

Surely a greater burden of proof is required before we abandon the principle that "the main enemy is at home" than that advanced by Brotherstone and CS: they give as a "practical illustration" that "Europe is now united through its peoples' domination by...international capital" the fact that Balkans war criminal Arkan is thought to have embezzled the exchange fee for a footballer transferred to France from Serbia. Doesn't the struggle to liberate humanity require more serious attention than that? (Page 4).

They go back to their explanation of the MFS's position on NATO on page 6. "...the military campaign of March-June 1999 was barbaric and cynical, motivated by a particular view of the interests of capital, certainly not by socialist humanitarianism. But only those socialists trapped in a conception of socialism as 'correct theory' standing over and above real human experience will make this their theoretical and political starting-point."

and: "We could not start from a knee-jerk 'left' reaction to the bombing campaign. Our previous practical and theoretical work had led us to the conclusion that solidarity work with Kosovar trade unionists must be at the centre of an internationalist policy for the working class...The political and theoretical starting point for MFS, therefore, remained, and remains, its commitment to the right of the people of Kosova...to self-determination."

This, at first sight, looks like a very holy sentiment — we lay our emphasis on independence for Kosova, the campaign against NATO is a "kneejerk" response, and must be secondary. But, as pointed out in Workers International Press (December 1999, page 7), to express support of a struggle for self-determination is the dearest of abstractions if a people are denied the only concrete way in which they can achieve a real independence—

through an armed struggle against the forces of the class enemy.

You cannot say your political and theoretical starting point is the right of a people to self-determination if you do not do your utmost to ensure the best possible conditions for the waging of an armed struggle against imperialism. The role of the imperialist nations and their agencies in the UN and NATO is, specifically, to disarm the people of Kosova, and specifically by so doing to prevent their struggle for independence. That is what Rambouillet was all about, that is what the bombing was for, and that is what the present NATO occupation of Kosova is doing.

The MFS document acknowledges the role that NATO has played, but to recognise it in words, and say you have no doubt that the Kosovar Albanians will come to realise its plans is not enough.

This cavalier attitude to the role of Marxism and its principles in the struggle against imperialism certainly does arise, as the document itself explains, out of the Movement for Socialism's "new" theoretical standpoint.

Their position is that the "structural crisis" of capitalism and the collapse of Stalinism means that all socialists need to do now is to build connections and networks between workers and peoples in struggle. According to them, once these networks reach some kind of critical mass, they will overthrow imperialism—so it isn't necessary to campaign against NATO now, because a united working class in the process of building its independence within capitalism, will come up against it and realise its nature some time in the future. Unfortunately, as the Paris Communards found out, the realisation may come a little too late.

Although the material base of Stalinism and social democracy no longer exist, they have left a legacy of great confusion in the international workers' movement. One example must be the mass boycotts carried out by Australian dockers, airline workers and others against the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. The boycotts arose out of a long campaign in Australia by the "left"—but the workers' demand in the boycotts was for a United Nations force to enter East Timor. The aim of the UN in East Timor of course, is to disarm the freedom fighters before

you can say 'Oil in the Timor Gap'.

The document is marked by a contempt for the history of the Trotskyist movement. It is seen as, "the era in which knee-jerk left sloganeering had a role to play" and marked by, "turning aside, suppressing consciousness of the tragedy and its ongoing impact, and moving on—in the sectarian manner many of us were all too familiar with in the past—to the next campaign."

This distortion of history and the dismissal of the struggles over ideology and the development of Marxist theory are necessary by Brotherstone and CS as they attempt to present everything as "new", without any connection to the past.

This jettisoning of the gains of Marxism is nowhere more obvious than when they attempt to answer their own question, "How is the right to self-determination of the Kosovars to be exercised?" In their answer they dismiss the long battle of Trotsky and his co-thinkers to establish that, in the epoch of imperialism, the petty bourgeois could not lead a successful struggle for self-determination and that the democratic tasks lead directly to the dictatorship of the working class.

"This is not a moment for those whose concern is to justify again the principles, however fine, by which they have lived their own political lives." What is it time for? "It is time to understand afresh that the test of theoretical thinking is its ability to come to grips with a new political world." Well, yes. But around what principles and policies? Do we start like political virgins, without any concrete ideas or experiences to be tested in struggle?

It is a characteristic of the document—and of the policies of the Movement for Socialism—that it is riddled with these vague, meaningless abstractions. It also carries a number of false premises. Firstly—either you carry out solidarity work with the Kosovar workers, or you make a stand against NATO and its bombing campaign. According to them, you cannot do both—and if you took a position against NATO, then you automatically made it a pre-condition of working with others that they also oppose NATO.

And, they maintain, if you joined the anti-NATO campaign,

then it was impossible to raise the organising of solidarity work with Kosova trades unionists. But that is exactly what we in the Workers International, and some others did. Not only did we march on the anti-NATO Marches with a banner, placards, and leaflets calling for independence for Kosova, we also worked with the Kosovar Albanians in London very clearly on the basis that we opposed NATO, but in no way making their agreement with that position a pre-condition for our collaboration with them.

Nevertheless, when pressure was brought to bear to stop the Workers' International from marching under its own slogans of "Milosevic and NATO—hands off Kosova", unlike the MFS we did not capitulate and left the march, but joined the Kosovar Albanians at their rally.

Workers Aid for Bosnia itself was founded on the political slogans: "End the (imperialist) arms embargo", "United Nations out of Bosnia". It was never made a precondition for working with others that they had to agree with every aspect of Workers Aid's principles. There was a split in Workers Aid over the issue of the United Nations, but that split came about when a group (who would mostly define themselves as Marxist) lost a vote on the question, and walked out to set up their own campaign. There is no way they would have been thrown out of Workers Aid for having a dissenting opinion.

As Brotherstone and CS say in their document, it is perfectly understandable why the Kosovars welcomed the NATO bombing, and the subsequent presence of NATO. In a situation where the international working class did not mobilise in their defence, they could see no other salvation. It is also perfectly understandable why the imperialist propaganda machine told us the bombing campaign was a good thing.

It is an entirely different matter when people who call themselves Marxists deem the identification and struggle against the class enemy to be a matter of secondary importance. That is the role of Marxists, above all their party, in the present situation of mass confusion and lack of leadership in the working class—to assist in re-establishing these most fundamental principles—otherwise the battle may well be lost.



## Bronwen Handyside reviews two recent books

# Immersed in the truth of the Bosnia war

**“The Killing Days: my journey through the Bosnian War” by Kemal Pervanic. Published by Blake 1999. £16.99 (available at major bookshops, and through [www.bosnia.co.uk](http://www.bosnia.co.uk))**



AMONG the most frightful aspects of the Bosnian war was the faithful re-creation of the concentration camps most of the world hoped had been left behind in 1945 with the Nazis. Many thousands of Bosnians passed through these places of horror, but this is the only first-hand account so far to emerge from a survivor.

Kemal Pervanic comes from a small village called Kevljani, in the Prijedor district of north-western Bosnia. He says of his community: “It’s true we had different religious beliefs, different customs, but we had many more things in common that kept us together than differences that would keep us apart. ‘Ancient hatreds’, so often served up to the public in the West as ‘the real reason’ for this ‘primitive Balkan slaughter’, never existed.

In 1992 24-year old Kemal, his brother, and most of the rest of his neighbours had to surrender to the overwhelming Chetnik force attacking their village. He and his brother then endured seven months in the notorious Omarska and the less well-known Manjaca camps.

He is very clear that he survived in order to bear witness to

the crimes he witnessed. He kept himself going by reasoning: “There’s a point when every conflict comes to an end . . . and somebody always survives. Every conflict has its survivors who live to tell their story, and I will survive this one.”

His book stands in the tradition of Primo Levi’s, who wrote of the Holocaust survivors: “only they, by their unique experience, are immersed in the truth.”

Kemal describes the unspeakable atrocities performed on a daily basis. He tells of the terror of living each day without knowing whether it will be your last, of keeping your head down in case you catch a guard’s eye, of seeing men called out who never return, of hearing their tortured screams, and the shots that kill them.

He tells the story of brave Azur Jakupovic, who with a group of mates, armed himself to fight against the Chetnik advance, but was discovered and taken to Omarska. The guards dealt particularly savagely with anyone known to have had weapons. Pervanic tells how “Azur was tortured day after day and night after night. Each time the Chetniks made sure that



Top left and below, prisoners in Omarska. Top right Kemal Pervanic

some life remained in him for the following day.” The torturers stuck rusty wires into a leg wound. “His screams reverberated throughout the camp. He sounded like a trapped, wounded animal that could not die.” He was eventually beaten to death, but Kemal tells us on his last day: “What the Chetniks carried out in a blanket was not Azur any more. He was alive — but he only had one eye. That eye was still shining with defiance against those who were seeking to annihilate us simply for who we were. He still found enough strength to spit at them.”

Kemal and his brother managed to keep their humanity alive. They looked after others as best they could, sharing what little food, cigarettes, and floor-space they had in the overcrowded rooms of the mining complex which was Omarska. They kept their sense of humour in the darkest days. And they never betrayed anybody—despite the fear, the beatings, and the interrogations under unbearable pressure. Even when he could have given names so that no-one else could have found out, Kemal refused—but he also refuses to despise those who cracked under the pressure.

Above all, in the book, he names the names of the war criminals—his former neighbours, schoolmates, local cafe owners, members of the local police force, a former teacher. He names them, he tells us where they were born, and what their occupations were. They were the frightened, backward, brutal elements unleashed by Serbian nationalism and the western government’s complicity with it. Like Arkan’s laughably named “Tigers”, their ferocity increased in proportion with the helplessness of their victims, and their main activity

besides torturing their victims, was robbing them. The arms embargo imposed by the western governments gave them the helpless to feed on.

In bearing witness Kemal confounds all those who want him, and the world, to forget what happened—to Azur Jakupovic “an ordinary bloke” and the hundreds of thousands of others who suffered along with him during the Bosnian war. Kemal is “immersed in the truth” and his unflinching testimony cuts through the lies and justifications of all those who want to cover up what happened.

Those who carried out the torture and slaughter want their crimes to be forgotten. The leaders of the imperialist nations want the war crimes to be forgotten (after the conviction of a few token perpetrators by the War Crimes Tribunal) and their arms embargo which set the scene for these horrors to be seen as a high-minded attempt to “stop the killing”. And millions of ordinary people (Bosnians and others) helpless in the face of unspeakable horrors it seems impossible to prevent, feel that they also can only try to forget what happened.

But in telling his story, Kemal, like the relatives of those who died at Srebrenica, and hundreds of thousands of “ordinary” Bosnians are saying to the world: “This happened. These people did it. You cannot cover it up. How can you help us find justice.?”

To read this book is painful and difficult, but it must be read.

Kemal now lives in London, and works as a welfare adviser at the Bosnia-Herzegovina Refugee Association of London. He wrote his book in English, and now plans a Bosnian translation.

## The “Hello” magazine approach to Karl Marx

**“Karl Marx” by Francis Wheen. Fourth Estate 1999. £20.**

Francis Wheen’s stated intention in this book was to free Marx from the distortions imposed on him and his writings by both his friends and his enemies, and to do this by approaching him as a man. As he says in his introduction: “What neither his enemies nor his disciples are willing to acknowledge is the most obvious yet startling of all his qualities: that this mythical ogre and saint was a human being.”

Unfortunately he succeeds only in trivialising Marx, by using a kind of superior Hello Magazine approach to his life.

Throughout the book he writes as a moralistic, jobbing journalist. He criticises Marx because he co-wrote the Communist Manifesto, which

preached against private property—and yet he accepted a legacy from his father. Marx never had a “proper” job in his life, and his application to be a railway clerk was rejected because of his terrible handwriting. He sponged on a regular basis off his friend Engels, who stole money from the petty cash tin to maintain him. He may or may not have fathered an illegitimate child. He did not meet his deadlines, (greatest crime of all to a working journalist) unlike Engels. He wrote pamphlets and books longer than he originally promised. He constantly attacked minor figures on the European political scene.

The reader has to suppress the overwhelming urge at each of Wheen’s revelations to say, “and so what?”

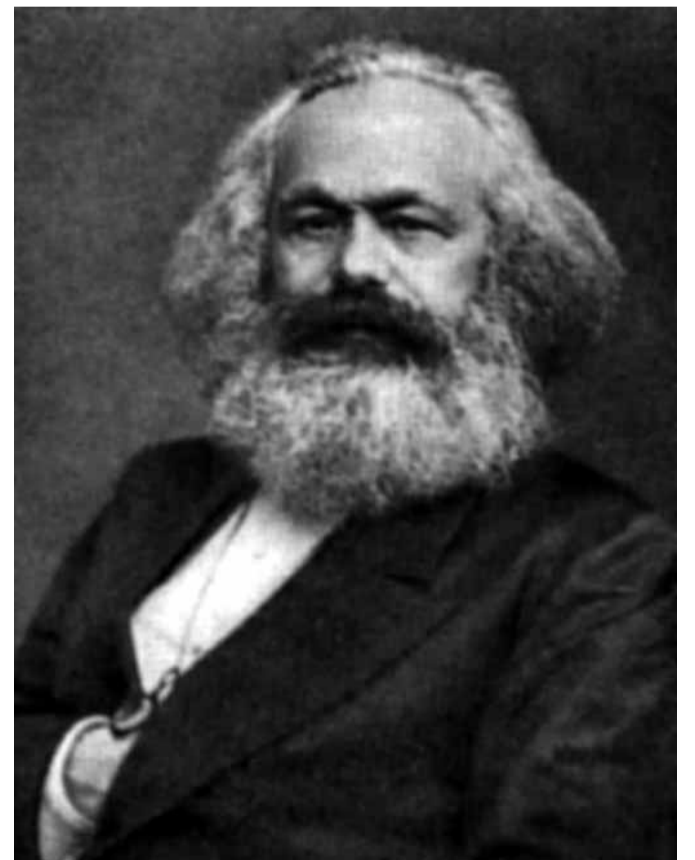
Submerged in a torrent of

details—Marx was afflicted with boils, he wrote begging letters, he worked all night and slept during the day, he made numerous attacks on various obscure political figures—it is almost impossible to get a sense of what Marx was, and is.

For example, Wheen is incapable of understanding Marx’s profound deduction from the destruction of the Paris Commune—that workers cannot take over the existing state apparatus, but must smash it. And he cannot make the connection between that conclusion of Marx, and the fact that he swiftly became the most hated and reviled man in Europe. No reader coming fresh to the book would be able to understand why the bourgeoisie had Marx persecuted and thrown out of country after country.

Wheen suffers from a disease of the age—the conviction that it is possible to find the “real” meaning of a life in a myriad personal details—particularly of a sex life. He is convinced that the more details he uncovers, the more true is his understanding—that if he really knew that Marx was the father of his housekeeper’s son, then he would be that much closer to understanding the real man.

But Marx himself discovered the “true” significance of a human life—what part it plays in moving humanity forward from its class ridden past, into a future freed from the curse of private property. Marx’s towering achievement was to discover the laws that govern capitalist society. Next to that, the whole of his personal life must be deemed to be of secondary interest.



Karl Marx



## Australia

# Miners face government backed union bashing

By Charlie Pottins

TRADE unionists in Australia are fighting union-busting policies adopted by two big mining corporations backed by the government. Hundreds joined a demonstration in Melbourne last month, outside the headquarters of Broken Hill Propriety (BHP), the mining, metals and oil company, which has tried to throw aside collective bargaining.

Some 1,000 BHP iron workers in the Pilbara, Western Australia were told they must accept individual staff contracts, sent to their homes on November 11. The company said it was no longer prepared to negotiate a new collective agreement, and workers must either sign the contracts or stay with the expired agreement - in other words, forgo any rises in pay, superannuation or sick pay.

Under the individual agreements, BHP would be able to impose changes in working conditions and pay scales without having to negotiate with unions. The company offered workers a bonus of three months back-pay if they signed before December 3.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) secretary-elect Greg Combet, said the BHP iron ore division had moved sharply away from its successful cooperative approach to industrial relations, and was aping the hard-nosed tactics that characterised its competitor, Rio Tinto.

"Not only is BHP now displaying great disregard for the right of employees to bargain collectively," Combet pointed out, "it is adopting discriminatory practices against one section of its workforce. BHP is offering these Pilbara workers 14 percent superannuation only if they sign an individual contract, and yet BHP already pays its steel workers the same amount under a collective agreement negotiated with the unions. If BHP Steel can work out a collective agreement," Combet asked, "why can't BHP Iron Ore do the same?"

Ominously, ACTU bureaucrat Combet went on to offer union co-operation to BHP in increasing exploitation: "The Unions and their members in the Pilbara are more than willing to talk about efficiencies and flexibility to boost BHP's domestic and international competitiveness in iron ore."

The employers are likely to treat this offer as a sign of weakness. BHP's attack on the iron ore workers is part of a premeditated offensive. The individual staff contract offer came just weeks after conservative lawyers and journalists published articles in the Australian financial press urging the company to drop "its union culture". If the company gets away with attacking the ore workers, who

are in a remote part of the country, this would be the rehearsal for taking on other sections, such as coal miners and steelworkers.

The London-based mining empire Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) has been involved in a number of disputes in Australia over its attempts to take away workers' union rights.

Trade union complaints received backing from an unusual source on 10 December, when a senior inter-governmental committee of the OECD in Paris ruled that RTZ was in breach of OECD guidelines requiring multinational companies to respect the right of employees to collective bargaining. The OECD's Committee on Investment and Multinational Enterprises was dealing with a formal complaint lodged by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in April 1998.

The Australian government rejected the ACTU's complaint in February 1999, claiming that Rio Tinto compliance with Australian law was sufficient to comply with the Guidelines. It also argued that Rio Tinto was not really a multinational enterprise, even though it has over 60 operations in some 40 countries and all senior management are based at its London head office. The government refused to deal with the substance of the complaints.

The ACTU therefore took the matter directly to the OECD, which has ruled the Australian government is wrong on both counts. John Maitland, National Secretary of Australian mining union, CFMEU, described the result as a victory for unions and a major international embarrassment to the Australian government.

"On the advice of Rio Tinto and [Australian industrial relations minister] Peter Reith, the Australian government thought it could escape its obligations to apply OECD standards for trade union rights through the spurious use of technicalities," Maitland said. "Instead, the OECD effectively said 'no way'."

"The outstanding question now," Maitland insisted, "is whether the coalition government is going to stick with their big business mates in flouting OECD standards. Or are they going to finally live up their responsibilities as a member government of the OECD?"

RTZ is being exposed around the world, with allegations in the United Kingdom over serious pollution at the company's former Capper Pass tin smelter, litigation by environmental and indigenous groups in Canada over its Diavik diamond mine, and more trouble likely for its operations in Indonesian-held West Papua.

Australian miners' leader Maitland is also president of the 20-million-strong International Federation of Chemical, Energy,

Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), and the Australian union hosts an ICEM conference in February of unions from RTZ's worldwide operations. The ICEM says it will link with environmental and human rights campaigners demanding that RTZ respect the environment and the rights of trade unionists and indigenous peoples.

The Australian government has spent the last few years trying to break the strength of the Australian working class and its unions. Two sets of anti-union laws (Workplace Relations Acts) are on the statute books, there have been extensive privatisations of state-run industries and activities and there has been a big reform of the tax system with progressive income taxes being cut in favour of a Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Welfare rights are under unprecedented attack and employers have made some progress in increasing the flexibility of hours and conditions on many jobs.

However, despite attempts to smash up the dockers' union MUA and deny miners' redundancy rights at Oakdale colliery in New South Wales, the government has not yet inflicted a major defeat on the Australian working class. (See WIP no 16, September 1999).

Militant trade unionists are wrestling with how to organise a united working class movement which can build up public sup-



Like these trade unionists who turned out to support the dockers, workers in Australia have had to face a series of attacks by the government and the employers determined to destroy union rights. After two Workplace Relations Acts, the government must now try to smash up a significant section of organised workers. The outcome of this struggle is decisive for all workers in Australia

port to fight off the Howard government.

Promises by ACTU president Jennie George and Labour Party leader Kim Beasley have not led to a concerted campaign. The Australian working class needs

its own independent class movement able to challenge the government.

The Pilbara is a remote region of Australia. The workers there need to know that they are not alone as they face BHP's attempt

to end collective bargaining.

Messages of solidarity and support can be sent to the Pilbara workers at: </P> fax: + 61 8 9177 8107

email: to:troyburton@hotmail.com

## In a few months we are holding our third congress

The experience of every struggle for workers' rights and for the rights of all those oppressed by capital is that they are obstructed and endangered by the lack of a political leadership of the working class.

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development of such a political class leadership.

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