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Third Congress of Workers International

A big step forward

By

Dot Gibson

"A remarkable consequence of the collapse of Stalinism and, in parallel with that, of the bourgeois counter-attack against Marxism and Socialism/Communism, is the defection of a great number of organisations and militants, often those who fought against the Healyite or Lambertist deviations, who claimed (or still claim) to be Trotskyist and to belong to the Fourth International."

"It is not a matter, here, of those renegades who passed openly to the side of the bourgeoisie, making a shameful career in the reformist parties and their bourgeois governments, but of those who in the past fought for the reconstruction of the Fourth International but now, under the pressure of the bourgeoisie and of its reformist and ex-Stalinist parties, openly or in a concealed way put into question the Fourth International and its programme." (Draft Resolution for the Workers International Third Congress page 28)

EVEN in the preparatory stage of our Third Congress (now to be held on 24-25 June) we can see that it will mark a step forward in the fight to overcome the damage done by this tendency in the Workers International. For those who were in our ranks and who "put into question the Fourth International and its programme" used their positions to prevent democratic discussion. They refused to call a meeting of our international executive committee and refused to convene a congress.

In January 1999 the split with this liquidationist tendency was confirmed, and the long overdue work for our Third Congress started. On 20-21 May this year the international executive committee met in London to receive the organiser's report and make the final decisions on the agenda, reports and resolutions.

Comrades, who saw our three-year struggle against attempts to liquidate Workers International politically and organisationally, have responded positively to our draft resolution, and to the common work which we have undertaken with them in the workers' movement.

The International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign (ITUSC) was one of the casualties of the wrecking activities of the liquidationists. So it is particularly encouraging that trade unionists with whom we worked in the ITUSC, and with whom we have continued to collaborate, will be present to discuss new initiatives to re-establish this important fight to overcome

the separation and isolation of workers, pitched against each other by capital's relentless profit-seeking.

One of the most important parts of this work is the need to develop workers' common struggle in the Balkans. The break-up of the ITUSC seriously undermined this vital work. Our resolution on the former Yugoslavia will embody proposals to overcome this problem. We confidently expect to renew the political and financial campaign of solidarity towards the former Yugoslavia.

Also nearly brought to an end was the Liaison Committee which our party has with the Workers International League—Fourth International (LIT-CI). But now, as members of the Koorkom (Committee of Co-ordination) founded at a conference in Moscow in 1998, our two organisations fight together for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. The organiser and representatives of Koorkom groups will be at our Congress.

Over the last year our British Section has worked closely with the LIT-CI's British Section, the International Socialist League (ISL). The outcome, so far, of this work in Britain and our common plans for the future of our Joint Committee will feature at our Congress, and the ISL members will be present to take part.

While our IEC was meeting in London, our Namibian Section was meeting in Windhoek to discuss their final plans for their delegation of four to attend the Congress. At the heart of their work is the campaign for the All-Africa Workers, Students and Peasants Conference. This is no abstract campaign. Our comrades bring with them the rich experience of their struggle in the factories, in the landless movement and in the schools and university.

Last, but not least present at our Congress will be a comrade from Durban, South Africa. Unfortunately, we virtually lost contact with our comrades in Durban. Now there is the chance to renew the discussion and collaborative work with them. When our comrade made contact to say that a meeting of their group had decided he would represent them at our Congress, he said that he would want to discuss the question opening up all over the South African workers' movement and among the students: "what is socialism?" He said that many are concluding that the "socialism" they were promised by the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party during the anti-apartheid struggles is not real socialism as the workers understand it.

We welcome all the comrades to our Third Congress!



A new note of protest!

Dol drummers enlivened a picket outside New Scotland Yard protesting over London Metropolitan police handling of the investigation into the death of Lakhvinder "Ricky" Reel. The circumstances of the 20-year-old Asian student's death continue to be a mystery, despite promises by the Metropolitan Police following the Lawrence Inquiry that there would be swift action in such cases.

The well-attended picket was part of a nationwide day of action organised on 13 May by the Justice for Ricky Reel Campaign with the assistance of the UK National Civil Rights Movement.

Anti-racists and those who have monitored official attitudes to ethnic minorities report that the Blair "New Labour" government has done little of substance to redress a history of institutional racism in Britain. Inflammatory government rhetoric about asylum seekers and tough new laws governing asylum in the UK and the conditions of refugees have legitimated a steep increase in racist attacks. (See "Asylum seekers reject inhuman conditions", page 8)

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WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Recent experiences with high-tech and "dot.com" companies have exposed as a fraud the enthusiasm of many "socialist" and trade union leaders for the development of the "new economy"

by Bob Archer

WORLD leaders of imperialism like US President Clinton and British prime minister Blair have recently urged people to put their faith for the future in the "new economy".

The claim is that enterprising financial deals linked to the innovative use of new technology can overcome the contradictions of capitalism which are expressed in periodic crises and wars, bitter class struggles, growing inequality and social decay.

However, in one week in mid-April this year, the link between new technology and the money markets turned out to be both simpler and more tragic than Clinton or Blair and their thousands of paid propagandists painted them.

At the heart of the problem was the Nasdaq, the American stock exchange where shares in new, high-technology companies are bought and sold.

On Monday 10 April, Richard McCabe, a senior market analyst at Merrill Lynch, advised investors to sell off some of their shares in high-technology companies. The prices of such shares had been falling anyway, and McCabe concluded this was a lasting trend rather than a temporary problem.

On Tuesday 11 April, the mobile phone manufacturer Motorola warned that profits would be reduced during the second quarter of this year. The news led to falls in the prices of all "new economy" stocks.

But the big blow came on Wednesday 12 April, when an analyst at Goldman Sachs suggested that profits of Microsoft would be reduced in the third quarter of 2000.

The huge success of Microsoft and its founder, Bill Gates, is often paraded as "proof" that the "new economy" is the way forward. Above all, the company has made its enor-

'New economy' on roller-coaster ride

mous fortune selling a "weightless" product: computer programmes. However, Microsoft operates according to traditional capitalist principles, maintaining a ruthless stranglehold on the market it dominates.

So bitterly do other capitalists resent Microsoft's monopoly that it was recently forced by the US courts to make parts of its software available to competitors. This was the immediate cause of the forecast that profits would fall.

On 12 April Nasdaq suffered a fall of 7.06 per cent, the second biggest loss in its history (the biggest had been on 3 April). In five trading sessions Nasdaq values plummeted 25.3 percent. The biggest losses — 9.67 per cent — were logged on Friday 14 April.

Panic selling by investors also led to falls in share prices in the New York, London, Paris and Frankfurt stock exchanges.

Underlying the collapse in share prices was a series of admissions by high-tech companies that they did not believe profits would be as high as previously expected. The actual profits from their activities would certainly not satisfy the big institutions (and growing number of private share-dealers) who invested in them.

Arguments for the "New Economy" emphasise first of all that it is based on new technology, which investors hoped would reap high profits in the way that technological innovation has done in the past.

Many so-called experts have presented developments in computers and communications as if they were comparable with the invention of the printing press, railways, steam navigation or the motor car.

A linked idea was that the "New Economy" is not so much based on tangible, material productive processes. More and more, it is claimed, the creation of profits is "knowledge based". The manipulation and control of information is held to be gaining

in significance in the productive process as against the baser, physical aspects of production.

While knowledge and command of technique are indeed growing, this conception is based on a deliberate misrepresentation.

As "Workers International Press" wrote in February this year (no 21), warning against illusions in the "new economy", developments in technique and science can have momentous social consequences, but they cannot of themselves transcend the contradictions of capitalism, which are embedded in social relations. That requires a social revolution.

Nasdaq may appear to inhabit a more exalted and exotic financial realm than mere mortals, but profits can only arise from the socially necessary labour time of human beings expended in the production of useful goods and services that can be sold.

What capitalists are actually inventing at this stage are not so much new ways of creating surplus value as more and more sophisticated methods of parasitism.

Recently a great deal of money indeed has been invested in enterprises connected to the Internet. At the moment the main income has gone to providers of computers and associated software. However, many entrepreneurs foresaw massive profits from providing Internet services.

Huge sums were invested in companies like lastminute.com, selling tickets for various entertainments online, and boo.com, a company which sold fashion items over the Internet.

Banks queued up to provide such companies with start-up cash, and when they issued shares, institutional and private investors indulged in feeding frenzies which saw the companies' stock valuations soar through the ceiling. The clever founders became multi-millionaires overnight.

However, as one bourgeois newspaper sourly noted after the collapse of boo.com in May:

"The only problem is that the site does not work and nobody buys anything. Last Wednesday the company, boo.com, announced that it was ceasing trading. Here was the proof that you need more than a silly name and a dot.com suffix to make a fortune ... There is no telling how many other companies might follow".

(*Independent on Sunday*, 21 May 2000).

Bourgeois commentators are quick to point out that there are indeed serious applications for new technology, especially in providing services to business and industrial customers.

New computer and communications technologies can simplify accounting and administration and even play a direct role in production, seeming to simplify and streamline the production process. However, even here what they actually represent is the past, dead, labour of many hands now placed at the disposal of a dwindling number of living operatives as extremely sophisticated tools.

Tools or machines used in production cannot do more than pass on the value placed in them by the labour which produced them. Any new value, the surplus value on which the capitalists rely on for their profits, can only come from the living labour of the workers actually engaged now in using them in production.

As the proportion of "dead" labour involved in production rises in comparison with the living labour of the worker, for example as technological progress enables fewer workers to process ever-larger quantities of raw materials, or the jobs of various workers are combined into the hands of one worker, the amount of surplus value, the new value added to the product, tends to fall.

Here is the source of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which was expressed so devas-

tatingly in the slump of Nasdaq share prices and the collapse of so many "dot.com" companies. The temporary recovery since April does not change this basic tendency. It merely destabilises the stock market even more, making it a chaos of hectic rises and falls in share prices which are increasingly beyond control. Financiers, too, are less and less confident and increasingly prone to a kind of nervous pessimism.

The "new economy" is a dead-end, because it represents only an intensification of the contradictions of imperialism.

However, rhetoric associated with it serves to blind and confuse the workers' movement, especially since it is propagated by the leaders of present or former "socialist" parties and the trade unions.

By making it seem as if the whole social landscape had changed, it disarms workers in the face of attacks on jobs, working conditions, wages and trade union rights and organisation.

Capitalist economy can appear to progress because such leaders have systematically blunted and disrupted the workers' fighting organisations, their trade unions and political parties.

Because of the illusions and confusion spread by such "leaders", capitalism survives crises such as the one that swept out of south-east Asia in 1997-1998. Even after the price collapse of mid-April, the Nasdaq bounced

back recently, recording some of its biggest increases ever. This is not testimony to the inherent strength of capitalism: it is evidence of the weakness of working-class organisation resulting from betrayal.

Masked by the chatter about the "new economy" (before that it was "post-Fordism") is a sustained attack on workers' rights to a steady job with stable conditions and trade union agreements. That goes hand-in-hand with unremitting efforts to efface class solidarity in the face of attacks and foster more and more individualism. The "new economy" argument is also used to try draw workers in as shareholders in their "own" companies (at the expense of their real wages, of course). This ploy has often been used before, but it is now pushed ahead very vigorously by many employers.

Workers are disarmed by so-called leaders who spread such ideas. This situation provides yet more clear evidence that a new international leadership of the working class is needed through which workers can assert their rights and organise themselves to defend their jobs, wages and living conditions as a class.

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International if fully committed to assisting in the task of creating such a leadership alongside those workers who have found it to be necessary out of their own experience.

The reality behind the rhetoric

A recent report from the Organisation For Economic Co-operation and Development has poured scorn on the idea that there will be a computer-driven global economic revolution.

The report says there is very little evidence of any successes by the "new economy" outside of the United States.

It warns that simply buying lots of computers is not going to help other countries to emulate the progress of the US economy.

The report indicates that information technology has indeed promoted a growth in productivity in the US, but mainly in the industries manufacturing computers to sell to others. There is not yet overwhelming evidence of productivity increases led by information and communication technology (ICT) in other industries.

And the report continues: "Evidence that greater use of

information and communication technology has raised productivity growth rates outside of the United States significantly is limited".

The nordic countries use computers as extensively as, or even more extensively than, the US, and it appears that productivity is growing in those countries. However, there is not necessarily a direct connection between the two.

The OECD twice-yearly Economic Outlook says there is a danger that feverish investment in the "new economy" could actually damage stable economic growth.

However, it encouraged governments to invest in education and to foster individual enterprise and competition in order to reap the full benefits of developments in ICT. This would seem odd if the main thrust of the report is to say that such benefits are limited.

Economic warning signs

Funny money

THE last few weeks have seen the collapse of some of the firms which were launched only a few months ago to cash in on the Internet. Very often, it was never clear where an income stream for these companies was going to come from.

It was supposed that they would be able to charge for providing services, such as booking tickets for travel and entertainment. Some simply provide free Internet services in the hope of building up a list of subscribers which may prove lucrative in some way in the future.

Despite these very shaky foundations, the 15 biggest companies in the field in the UK have very considerable financial backing — nearly £1 billion according to reports.

They scooped up the money when they sold their own shares on the stock market. The cash would be enough to keep them going for about four years even if business does not pick up. This news is used to reassure the public about the future of such businesses.

Two things need saying about this enormous sum being poured down the drain by capitalists.

The first and obvious point is to ask how many schools, hospitals and houses it could build.

The second point is that this is money which cannot find any profitable outlet under capitalism. The tendency of the rate of profit to fall leads to overproduction of capital which searches for greater and greater frenzy for profitable opportunities for investment.

Margins of error

ONE of the mechanisms at work in the 1929 Wall Street Crash was the mass of small investors who dabbled in the stock market "on margin". The idea was they only paid a small deposit on share deals, waited for a profitable sale, and settled up once they had the cash in hand.

On a rising market this multiplied the share "boom". However, investors can come unstuck, and if they find they have made a loss at the end of the month they may have to sell everything they possess to meet their "obligations". If they can't pay up, their creditors go bankrupt as well.

So "margin trade" can multiply the effect of a crash. Of

course, this was not an basic cause of the Wall Street Crash, but it illustrates an aspect of parasitism and the excessive expansion of finance capital.

Attentive readers of the bourgeois press will have perceived a warning note in recent articles. In April the UK Financial Services Authority (FSA) issued a report warning of the danger of borrowing money to buy shares. They were worried because information from the US indicates that "investor debt" has shot up to \$278.5 billion in March, or \$1,000 per US citizen.

This is an increase of \$122 billion as against March 1999. I can do no better than quote the comment of the *London Times*:

"Some 40 per cent of last month's margin debt is owed by US households as more private individuals play the stock market in the hope of netting a dot.com fortune."

"But the recent volatility of the US markets, which sparked fears of a crash similar to Black Monday in 1987 wiped out the profits of many private investors, who have still to repay margin debts".

"...Margin trading is expected to become prevalent in the UK next year ..."

Meanwhile spare a thought for French businessman Gerard Pujol.

He asked the Union des Banques de Paris to invest his £60,000 savings on the stock market. The bank's dealer did not do as well as Mr. Pujol expected. Indeed, he lost all the money and another £1.9 million.

What really hurt Mr. Pujol's feelings was the fact that the bank that had lost his money insisted on getting the loss back — off him!

Mr. Pujol had used a French form of margin trading known as "reglement mensuel". *The Guardian* reports:

"Over a year this allowed Mr. Pujol's ambitious if inept stockbroker to build up a portfolio of shares in high-performing hi-tech companies worth £1.2 million — 20 times his original input.

"Things did seem to be going rather well", he said, "but I thought the guy knew what he was doing. Then the hi-tech stocks crashed, and that was that ... Banks can clearly do what they like."

United Families and Friends Campaign

Remembrance Procession

London, Saturday 28 October 2000

Join the relatives of those who have died in prison, police custody and in psychiatric hospitals in a procession led by families to remember our lived ones

Assemble 1pm

Nelson's Column, Trafalgar Square
March to Downing Street for picket
Family campaign placards and banners only

Please wear black

For further information contact:
UFFC on 0370 432 439

The Irish worker

by John Steel

Dublin, July 1981.
Mass demonstration
in support of the
hunger-strikers. How
was the Republican
leadership able to
channel off this
struggle with so little
opposition?



New magazine highlights growing opposition to new stormont

The publication of a new magazine, *Fourthwrite*, by the Irish Republican Writers' Group (IRWG) is to be welcomed. It is an indication that many of the forces opposed to the reconstruction of a six-county parliament at Stormont and the strategy of the Sinn Fein leadership are involving themselves in the necessary analysis and regroupment.

None of the hype from the spin-doctors in London, Dublin or Washington can disguise the fact that the new Stormont government will be an extremely unstable administration, beset by contradictions and stumbling from crisis to crisis.

British imperialism has only succeeded in postponing its problems. As has happened at every stage of the struggle for independence a new wave of youth will come forward driven by the basic antagonisms in a class society and seeking an understanding of the historical processes.

They will not be able to develop the strategy and tactics for victory if there has not been a struggle to comprehend the class basis of the theoretical and political programme that underpins Sinn Fein's collaboration.

More than anything it is essential to attempt to under-

stand how, on the backs of a thirty-year undefeated nationalist revolt involving tens of thousands of self-sacrificing men and women, the Republican leadership was so easily able to lead the movement into the Belfast Agreement with its endorsement of partition.

In this period of balance sheets and reassessment *Fourthwrite* has an important role to play. The IRWG states that the purpose of the magazine "is to facilitate discussion and analysis of republican ideas. Of primary interest are those ideas which deal with strategic matters and which address the question, 'what is to be done?'"

Although the editorial in its first issue makes the point that the IRWG, "includes both those who oppose the Belfast Agreement and those who support it", the lead article and most of the contributions leave no doubt as to the main thrust of the magazine.

Among its contributors are former IRA members deeply opposed to the Belfast Agreement and the moves "toward parliamentary engagement and ministerial responsibility". Their past experiences at the hands of the Republican leadership when they tried to

express dissenting views are undoubtedly reflected in the magazine's emphasis on being open to all opinions - even to the extent of printing an article by a prominent Unionist, Steven King.

But *Fourthwrite* is correct to underline the importance of allowing the expression of differing views. And it is clear who the editorial, headed "Republican Democracy" and ending with the words, "Let us be done with censorship", is aimed at.

One of the founder members of the IRWG and a contributor to *Fourthwrite* is former political prisoner Tommy McKearney who, along with other republican prisoners split from Sinn Fein in 1986 to form the League of Communist Republicans (LCR).

The LCR's pamphlet *From Long Kesh to a Socialist Ireland* gave an example of how the Sinn Fein leadership attempted to move against those who threaten its position: "Early in 1987 friends of the LCR attempted to organise a non-party political anti-Diplock [non-jury courts] campaign. An initial and quite successful meeting was held in Galbally, Co. Tyrone.

"Sinn Fein immediately moved against the group, threatening it as if it were a political usurpation rather than an effort to help political prisoners. a message circulated in the prison described those who initiated the move as 'counter-revolutionaries' and 'people offering assistance to the enemy'".

The question begs to be answered. If this was a typical example of how the Sinn Fein leadership reacted to opposition in 1987 what will they do now when they are in government and have the backing of the state apparatus?

This first issue of *Fourthwrite* has some interesting articles. Brendan Hughes, the former leader of the IRA in Belfast and OC of republican prisoners through the Blanket Protest in Long Kesh gives his views of the current political process in an interview with Anthony McIntyre.

"What is it (the Good Friday Agreement)? Have we agreed to the British staying in the six counties? If we listen to Francie Molloy [Sinn Fein executive member] that is what republicans have signed up to. The only advantage is that unionism has changed. The landed gentry has been smashed but only because

of the war, not the Good Friday Agreement. Overall, the facade has been cleaned up but the bone structure remains the same. The state we set out to smash still exists. Look at the RUC for example".

Hughes explains how when he came out of prison in 1986, having spent more than twelve years there, he got a job on a building site on the Falls Road in Belfast. He found himself working for peanuts and went to the Republican movement to ask them to "highlight the exploitative cowboy builders on the Falls Road who were squeezing the republican poor for profits.

"The movement censored me and refused to allow me to speak.....Some of the cowboy builders had influence with movement members. Whether true or not, there were many whispers doing the rounds that these members were taking backhanders and so on."

In another article Kevin Bean draws attention to the "growth of the Republican movement as a bureaucratic institution. The development of a system of interests that provides the basis for a political bureaucracy can be seen in the emergence of an apparatus of MP's, Assembly Members,

councillors, community activists and community organisations".

But in whose interests does this bureaucratic institution operate? Bean notes the "emergence of a new Catholic middle class; many of the new Sinn Fein middle rank leadership and Sinn Fein's new electoral support come from this group and they clearly have had an impact on republican thinking.

"With so many middle class Catholic careers dependent, directly or indirectly, on the state and its levels of public expenditure it would be unusual if this did not influence the political outlook of wide sections of the nationalist population".

These and other comments in *Fourthwrite* can only lead to a deeper, class analysis of republicanism. Once again the main areas of debate will be centred on whether the struggle is for a workers' republic or whether the northern state can be reformed by gradual, peaceful reforms inside capitalism until it withers away.

To obtain *Fourthwrite* (£1 per copy) or to contact the IRWG write to PO Box 31, Belfast BT12 7EE.

E-mail address: Mackers1@cableol.co.uk

Persecuted Roma fight back against racism

By Charlie Pottins

Europe's persecuted Roma (Gypsies) are fighting back against racism. Roma refugees demonstrated outside Czech embassies on May 13, accusing the Czech authorities of acquiescing in racist attacks. Hundreds of thousands of Roma were deprived of their civil rights in the Czech Republic after 1991, and many have been driven from their homes and jobs. Some 30 racist murders have gone unpunished.

The date chosen for the demonstrations was the anniversary of the liberation of the World War II Nazi concentration camp at Lety, where Czech collaborators tortured and murdered Roma.

At a House of Commons meeting days before the London demonstration, Ladislav Balasz, a Czech

Roma and former member of the Czech parliament, accused Czech police and judges of doing nothing to stop racist attacks, and said his own family had suffered. Gypsy Holocaust survivors wanted a memorial honouring the victims of Lety, Balasz said — official history had tried to bury the truth about the camp, and the site was being used as a pig farm.

Donald Kenrick, a writer on Roma history, said changes in eastern Europe had not brought the prosperity that people expected, and those in power had to blame somebody. Land privatisation meant people were being evicted, so land could be handed back to the old owners, even when these had left the country many years before. "Freedom of the press" was interpreted as free-

dom to publish incitement to race hatred, and police often sided with the racists.

Most Czech Roma had become settled, but now Roma farmers could not take their milk to the dairies, and Roma workers had been hounded from their jobs.

More prejudice and persecution confronts Roma refugees seeking asylum in countries like Britain. The Home Office response to well-authenticated reports of violence and murder was: "these things happen but they are harassment, not persecution", that racist skinheads are "not agents of persecution", Kenrick said.

"The stormtroopers who burned synagogues in 1938 were not 'agents of persecution' if you go by Jack Straw's rules".

After hysteria stirred up by Labour ministers and Tory media against "bogus asylum-seekers" and "Gypsy beggars", attacks on Roma refugees were reported in Manchester, Middlesbrough, Dover and Enfield over the May Day holiday weekend. When Transport and General Workers Union leader Bill Morris warned ministers against encouraging racism, New Labour's Baroness Jay accused him of trying to justify lorry drivers smuggling asylum seekers into the UK.

Recognising that battle has been joined, anti-racist campaigners including the Reel family from Southall, who had been holding their own demonstration against police failure to investigate their son's death properly, joined Roma in the London demonstration.

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Lessons of the London elections

THE 4 May local government and Greater London Assembly (GLA) elections revealed a significant shift in old political alliances. Labour's vote dropped but there was no big rise in Tory votes. Many voters gave their support to the Green Party, and there was a significant vote for left candidates.

In an article in the *Financial Times* on 6 May under the sub-headline "Yesterday's election results appear to have left Britain's traditional politicians swimming in uncharted waters..." Brian Groom said: "Behind the claims and counter-claims from political leaders, the real message from this week's elections in London and around Britain is more subtle. Britain is in the grip of a new form of politics."

The total left vote in the 14 districts which comprised the constituency section of the GLA was 47,086. The majority of this (46,530 votes — 2.93 per cent) went to the London Socialist Alliance (LSA). The other left groups and the CATP did not stand in the constituencies.

There was a total of 66,013 votes (3.9 per cent) for the left in the GLA members' section. This was split between the LSA, the London Underground workers' Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP), the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) led by Arthur Scargill, and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB).

Of these, the highest vote was for the LSA, with 27,073 (1.6 per cent), the CATP coming second with 17,401 (1.0 per cent). The SLP got 13,690 and the CPB 7,489 votes.

However in London a massive two thirds of voters abstained, and in many areas of Britain in local government elections three quarters of the electorate decided not to cast their vote.

What is happening in Britain, and how must socialists respond?

At the beginning of the last century a mass movement, led by the trade unions, created the British Labour Party to represent the interests of the working class. **Today the working class has no party.**

In the 1999 Euro elections and in the local government and London elections in May this year, realising they had no representation, millions of traditional Labour voters abstained. But this was no new phenomena.

For well over a decade a mood of resentment against the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy's refusal to stand up for the working class had been building up.

Despite the massive Thatcherite attacks on the lives of millions of people the Tories remained in office for 18 years, finally suffering a landslide defeat in the general election of 1997. But the paradox in that result was that although it was a Tory defeat, it was not a victory for "New Labour". Blair's government is going in the opposite direction to the fundamental process in Britain among working men and women.

Support for Ken Livingstone for mayor of London was an expression of deep movements in the consciousness of masses of people in British society. Standing as an independent and expelled from the Labour Party, he won the election, while the New Labour candidate came third, below the Tory.

Livingstone's candidature gave vent to the anger there is in London and indeed throughout Britain as a whole at the policies of Blair and his government.

New Labour is a party of big capital under whose rule every aspect of the people's life is measured on a cash-nexus basis, democratic rights are destroyed in favour of more and more bureaucratic state control geared to big business interests.

The bureaucratic rigging of the Welsh and London Labour Party ballots to decide their candidates gave a glimpse of what the future holds. The

Statement of the joint committee of the International Socialist League and the Workers International (Britain)

attack on Livingstone was an attempt to remove an obstacle to the free run of New Labour capitalist policies. Blair is now preparing to remove all democratic rights for members at the party conference in October.

Victimisation of trade union representatives which was rampant during the 18 years of Tory government, continues today as jobs and workshop organisation are under attack. New Labour upholds the Tory anti-union legislation which destroyed workers' democratic rights, won in bitter struggle in the first half of

Labour is willingly engaged in the imperialist domination of workers and poor people everywhere throughout the world.

In London the New Labour government's proposed privatisation of the underground system became the central question in the election. Everybody remembered how Labour parliamentarians in opposition had spoken out against the Tory government's tube privatisation plans. Now they cynically proclaimed their intention to break up the system and hand it over to the very same com-

the Labour Party.

But Livingstone did not respond to the lead of this important section of a major trade union. He told Labour Party members and trade unionists to remain loyal to Blair's party. He advised Londoners to vote for the Labour Party and the Green Party. Millions of workers did not bother to vote.

Nevertheless the London election released forces which shook up the political relationships and the brittle facade of apparent permanence of the New Labour monstrosity. It was the

which unite various sections who come into sharp struggle with anti-capitalist aims born out of the decay of the system. The crisis in society brings forward, not only problems of immediate struggle against attacks on the weakest, but general conditions in relation to democracy, culture, ecology, privilege, corruption, polarisation of wealth, control, power and the need for internationalism.

Part of this movement against capitalism is to be found in the so-called "red-green-black" alliance of young environmentalists. On 1 May, 50,000 of them took part in an anti-capitalist demonstration in central London.

Most have not only rejected the so-called traditional parties, but distance themselves from the socialist groups which, with some truth, they depict as sectarian and hierarchical. Many hold the dangerous illusion that it is possible to build an alternative "green, clean and democratic" way of life within today's society which will render capitalism irrelevant.

We do not agree. It is the capitalist combines which dominate society whose ruthless drive for profit controls scientific development and poses humanity with the choice: socialism or barbarism? The big task for all anti-capitalists is organising a force from working and oppressed people throughout the world able to remove control and power from capital.

The important responsibility of socialists is to encourage and organise the most widespread discussion for a programme of action throughout the vanguard of the working class and to deepen and unify all anti-capitalist movements to develop the confidence and independence necessary to turn protest and defensive actions into offensive socialist actions. Only along this road can the new party be built.

That is why we supported the decision of the London Underground workers to stand CATP candidates against New Labour in the GLA election. Before them came the striking Tameside care workers who stood as Defend Public Services candidates in local elections last year. When important sections of trade unionists make such a break saying to millions of workers — don't abstain! make your own stand! — then socialists must prick up their ears and listen.

Such a step forward by workers themselves begins to build confidence and independence in the whole working class. Such a movement is worth a thousand programmes! That is what the majority of the LSA refused to accept when they decided to stand against the tube workers claiming that the CATP was only presenting a "single issue".

The 11 tube-worker candidates were therefore opposed by the LSA, the SLP and the CPB, and also had to contend with the Liberal Democrats adding to their name on the ballot paper the words "against tube privatisation". But, without a party organisation, the CATP polled 17,400 votes. In addition Livingstone's election "referendum" proved once again that the overwhelming majority of Londoners are against tube privatisation. The CATP now proceeds, under the leadership of the RMT Divisional Council, to build the campaign throughout the capital.

Continued on Page 5



In London, the New Labour proposed privatisation of the underground became the central question. (left) the campaign banner adorns the plinth of Nelson's Column

the century.

With few exceptions, the trade union leaderships refused to fight against the anti-trade union laws. The majority of the TUC welcomed the disciplining of their more militant rank-and-file leaders. They duped millions of workers into the false belief that under a Labour government trade union rights would be restored. But New Labour attacks all democratic rights: formerly independent commissions and democratically-elected local government have been turned over to "quangos" where Blair-clones receive huge expenses;

- Thatcherite privatisation of publicly owned industries and services is extended to all aspects of our life, even education;
- the health service is being destroyed, deprived of human and financial resources, while the international pharmaceutical companies reap huge profits;
- asylum seekers are subjected to racist discrimination by the New Labour government, which returns many to certain imprisonment, torture and death in their homeland;
- racism continues, not only throughout the police force but in all government institutions;
- new laws described as "anti-terrorist" are designed to destroy the democratic rights of all anti-capitalist campaigners, and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Bill is a direct attack on the democratic right to freely communicate on the internet;
- as part of NATO and the UN, New

panies already reaping huge profits from Railtrack (the privatised main line railway).

Livingstone's campaign became the focus for the enormous anti-privatisation mood sweeping the capital. He proclaimed that the election would be a referendum on the government's plans. Behind him gathered the frustration and discontent of London's population at the exploitation by callous profit-makers of a fundamental need for transport.

Added to this were the feelings of workers and trade unionists experiencing at first hand the deterioration of conditions of work and safety under privatisation. This was the impetus which caused the underground workers to support Livingstone for mayor and to put up their own independent candidates for the Greater London Assembly.

They had already taken strike action on three occasions against the government's plans and had set up the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation to broaden the fight throughout the capital. When the RMT union's London Underground Regional Council decided to take the fight into the election there was no shortage of tube workers prepared to stand.

It is movements like this that can help the important line of march which is needed for the working class and its trade unions today. These RMT members turned frustration and discontent into a positive step forward for working-class independence against New Labour. They, and many workers in other unions, no doubt will be calling on their annual conferences to end affiliation to

beginning of a movement of a large number of people to political independence in London.

Significantly it was watched sympathetically throughout the country. This encourages and rekindles the sparks of confidence in mass movement and change. For almost a decade the question of a new workers' party and how it could come about has been discussed among left wingers and activists in the labour movement. In today's conditions this has become a burning issue for large sections of the working class.

Just as the original Labour Party was formed as a political expression of the working class after the big upsurge of union organisation at the end of the nineteenth century, today the new party must come out of the disenfranchised. However overwhelming is the need for a new mass workers' party, it cannot be imposed from above by a few socialists, however dedicated.

Nevertheless the socialists have an important place in such a party which must have free and open discussion and the right to tendencies. Socialists must learn that the building of such a party comes from establishing unity with the deprived, and respect for those in struggle at whatever level seeking alliances against capitalism and its effects.

The new party must be one that has won the majority of the working class with the necessary discipline in common actions based on conviction which can only come from the actual struggle and experience of building this new and independent workers' party.

Together we must find the demands

London: High Court forces safety investigation

THE British High court has ordered the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to undertake an investigation into the death of 20 year old Mohammed Omar Akhter who was killed on 12 August 1997. Immediately prior to the decision, in an extraordinary climbdown, the HSE agreed that they would investigate the death.

This decision came after a 2 year long campaign on behalf of the Manchester-based family to get a criminal investigation into the death. They first officially contacted the HSE in July 1998 to ask them to investigate. Since then the HSE has repeatedly refused to intervene.

"The refusal of the HSE to investigate the conduct of Moores Timber Merchant was a gross dereliction of their duty. Serious crimes, including manslaughter could have taken place. It brings into question the HSE's commitment to bringing companies that cause death and injury to account," said David Bergman, Director of the Centre for Corporate Accountability.

"Families of those who die from work related activities have a right to feel that no stone is left unturned in the investigation. A failure to even investigate is extraordinary."

20 year old Mohammed Omar Akhter was killed when a forklift truck, driving out of Moores Timber Merchants in Manchester struck the car in which he was driving. The forks of the Fork Lift Truck pierced the windscreen and sliced into his neck. He died the next day.

After the death, although it was the enforcing authority, the HSE refused to investigate the conduct of Moores Timber Merchants and determine whether any health and safety offences

had been committed by the company or one of its company officers. The HSE's refusal also meant that there could be no manslaughter investigation since, at the time, the police would only carry out such an investigation if the case was referred onto them by the HSE.

The Health and Safety Executive told that the court that the new investigation would be carried out by a senior officer of the HSE, with no previous connection with the case. The HSE also agreed that it would be carried out with the involvement of the police and Trafford Borough Council and that it would comply with its own guidance and protocols which require its inspectors to consider offences of manslaughter, as well as the commission of health and safety offences.

The Court heard that the HSE was informed of the death by Trafford Borough Council within forty minutes of the death taking place. The HSE took no action. Subsequent to that Trafford Borough Council sent a 90 page bundle of evidence relating to the health and safety record of Moores Timber Merchants. This included a letter from the Council to the company on 19 May 1997 — just a few months before the death — setting out how the company had "contravened" health and safety law in a number of ways and instructing it to make improvements. The HSE still took no action.

Ms Barbara Hewson, barrister for the family, told the court, that their failure to investigate this case was "incredible", "grotesque" and a "total dereliction of their duty".

The court that heard that in its evidence to the Select Committee on Environment Transport and the



RELATIVES of student Simon Jones joined a march on Workers' Memorial Day (28 April) to demand "the government's safety record must change to protect workers". Simon was killed on his first day as a casual worker at a dock on England's south coast. Workers' rights and safety conditions on the docks have been broken up by a series of attacks on trade union organisation started by Thatcher and continued by Blair. The destruction of students' grants by the same governments have forced inexperienced young people to take on a variety of unsuitable part-time and casual jobs. The Workers' Memorial Day March to the offices of the UK Health and Safety Executive was organised by the Construction Safety Campaign and was a spirited demonstration supported by delegations from around the country despite appalling weather.

Regions, the HSE had said that it "investigated all deaths".

The only investigation into this death was undertaken by the Road Traffic Police. As a result, the driver of the Fork Lift Truck and his employer, Moores Timber Merchants, were convicted for failing to have a driving license. They both received a six month conditional discharge.

In February, the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and the Region criticised the HSE, saying its

investigation policy was being "totally inadequate" (the HSE only investigates ten per cent of major injuries reported to it) and for its "low level of prosecutions" (it only prosecutes companies after twenty per cent of workplace deaths and after one per cent of major injuries reported to it). Between 1996-1998, it failed to prosecute a single manager or director in relation to over 500 workplace deaths and 47,000 major injuries reported to it.

For more information contact: david.bergman@corporateaccountability.org or Centre for Corporate Accountability 40 Leverton Street, London NW5 2PG Tel: 0171 209 9143

See web site at: www.corporateaccountability.org

Lessons of the London Election

Continued from page 4

The LSA — an alliance of socialist groups and individuals — with an overall almost 3 per cent of the constituency votes, emerged from the election above the SLP and the CPB, as the left grouping with the biggest support.

It is not surprising that the (former Stalinist) CPB is in mortal decline. Arthur Scargill's SLP however was once seen by many vanguard workers as a real alternative to right-wing Labour. In a paper published in November 1995 he stated that "a Socialist Labour Party would be able to galvanise mass opposition to injustice, inequality and environmental destruction and build the fight for a Socialist Britain".

But the SLP is reformist in politics, nationalist in outlook and bureaucratic in character. There are now far more socialists who have been expelled or have resigned from that party in disgust than any who remain inside it.

So what is the way forward for the LSA?

At this point the LSA is predominantly an alliance of socialist groups. It would be a big mistake for it to think and act as if it is already the new party the working class itself needs to build.

It would also be a fatal error if any of the groups within it try to use it as a front for their own purposes. It is reported that during the election campaign 3,000 people gave their names to the LSA as possible members. It should be integrated into the national Socialist Alliance which has individual membership as well as the affiliations of socialist groups.

The LSA must not substitute itself for the working class. If it is truly committed to a new mass

independent workers' party, its most important alliance is still to come — with the working class itself.

We believe that this was not understood when the LSA failed to support the RMT Divisional Council and the CATP, and we will continue to fight for a positive response to the leadership given by workers coming forward independently against New Labour.

Joining with vanguard workers in the trade unions, dissident Labour Party members, and the thousands of campaigns which take up the fight alongside and on behalf of the weakest and most oppressed in society, the Socialist Alliance can be an important element towards building the new mass workers' socialist party.

That is why the LSA must remain a campaigning group in every sense, taking every opportunity to expose and mobilise against New Labour, including standing independently in every possible election.

This can be done by building local groups under the title: "Socialist Alliance for a New Workers Party". These would unite socialist groups, vanguard workers and campaigning organisations in the widest discussion and broad active campaign to clarify and elaborate a programme as the basis for the new mass workers' party.

20th May 2000

International Socialist League: PO Box 9, Eccles SO, Salford, M30 7FX Tel: 0151 254 2732 email: mralph@btinternet.com Publication: Workers Voice

Workers International (British Section): PO Box 735, London, SW8 4SZ. Tel: 020 7627 8666 email: wirfi@appleonline.n Publication: Workers International Press



50,000 environmentalists in the so-called red-green-black alliance demonstrated against capitalism on May day in London

An initiative — the All-African Conference of Workers, Students and Peasants — was launched in November 1998 in Durban. It was slowed down due to sectarian intrigues. The Socialist Alliance in Namibia has however conducted an election campaign as part of this initiative and has invited the Workers International Vanguard League of South Africa to help organise a series of pre-conferences in the region.

The “land-grab” in Zimbabwe has raised revolutionary questions to new imminence and urgency in the region and the incapacity of the Movement for Democratic Change to give leadership has accentuated the necessity of a Marxist party in each and every country. The following article is intended to provide a renewed impetus to our renewed initiative for 2000.

By Hewat Beukes

PRESIDENT Robert Mugabe began to raise the land issue in 1999, insisting that white farmers should be dispossessed without compensation. At the beginning of 2000 he held a national referendum on the issue and lost decisively, signalling the beginning of the end for his 20-year-old reign.

However, what are reported as war veterans seized this opportunity of official endorsement to seize white-owned land in Zimbabwe, which remained the main democratic question there as in the rest of Africa.

The imperialists were shocked out of their complacency since it threatened the rule of the comprador states.

The “land-grab” in Zimbabwe has sent jitters throughout the states and ruling classes of sub-Saharan Africa because the private property principle was the central pillar of the system and now it had been trampled into the ground by the “land-grabbers”. A fundamental taboo had been broken.

In other countries the landless were sitting up and starting to wonder whether land possession really was an unattainable dream after all. Fear was struck into the hearts not only of the white property owners, but also of the new black property owners.

In South Africa, the trade union movement was the first to condemn the breakdown of “law and order” in Zimbabwe. The ANC tentatively followed, prodded on by the parliamentary opposition.

In Namibia, the government issued an invitation to individuals, political parties and everyone else to submit programmes on all questions to the Planning Commission, also on land, that would cover us until 2030.

However the “land-grab” was not based on the principle of “the land to those who toil it”, but on the fundamentally reactionary basis of ancestral land back to its “true” owners. For this reason the farm labourers on the white-owned farms were treated like collaborators.

This paves the way for middle class opportunists to take advantage of the situation using their status as blacks.

The planless take-over of farms will in all likelihood cause massive disruption in agricultural production, which accounts for more than 25 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and is the sole livelihood of two thirds of the population. It may also be the last nail in the coffin for Mugabe both literally and figuratively.

Robert Mugabe took power in 1980 under the infamous Lancaster House agreement which guaranteed the protection of private property. One per cent of the population owned more than half the country which also contained all the best farming land. But the agreements ensured that farmers could only be separated from the land on a “willing seller, willing buyer” basis.

The land debacle began with the country’s colonisation. The white population dwindled from more than 225,000 in the early 1970s to 101,000 by the middle 1990s. They are said to number

about 70,000 now. But 4,000 white farmers still own almost half the country.

Both Robert Mugabe and the late Joshua Nkomo of ZAPU protested about the entrenched terms and clauses in the Lancaster House Agreement which would make it “impossible” to carry out land reform. They were given assurances by Britain that she would raise the necessary funds for effective land reform. But since independence Britain has only raised US\$70 million and has effectively reneged on her word.

It became clear what land reform meant to Mugabe and Nkomo when this sum was used to secure farms for themselves and their henchmen. (Some of these farms are reportedly also under occupation by the “land-grabbers”.)

This played into the hands of Britain’s forgetfulness. They had initially raised expectations of US\$2 billion for land reform. Immediately after independence, Mugabe started to beef-up his army. He spent enormous sums on weapons and in 1983–84 sent its Fifth Brigade into Matebeleland on a genocidal campaign which killed many people.

The ‘land-grab’ was not based on the principle of ‘the land to those who toil it’

Estimates range from more than 1,000 to over 30,000.

This was to suppress land demands and other political issues. He also did it to consolidate his almost dictatorial powers. Zimbabweans relate many stories of how persons disappeared who questioned intense corruption in the civil service and the army. No political dissidence was brooked.

Since the beginning the regime has espoused an ideology that was not only distrustful but openly and implicitly hostile to the industrial working class. The official media would castigate the working class for self-seeking bourgeois individualism and selfishness, and extol the virtuous peasantry who had sacrificed everything for liberation.

In one of the central squares in Harare, a huge statue of a powerful and angry peasant with sickle in hand stares down fiercely and derisively at passers-by. Mugabe’s party, the ZANU PF, like all its other counterparts in Africa, depended on the tribal peasant hierarchy for its power. (These are the most reactionary and retrograde sections of African society. Yet, these are the sections onto which imperialism latches to secure its dominance.)

The room implicated the Zimbabwe land grab

Mugabe’s main problem however is that Zimbabwe has one of the most diversified economies in Africa. Its industrial sector includes mechanical engineering, textiles, foodstuffs, mining, etc. and accounts for a significant proportion of GDP. Manufacturing alone accounts for about 30 per cent of GDP.

City dwellers make up about 37 per cent of a population estimated at 11 million. The industrial proletariat number

started to flounder politically like a drowning bird. He began by trying to resurrect archaic diversionary methods similar to mediaeval Roman Catholicism.

He and his party firstly launched a vitriolic campaign against gays and lesbians. However the President, Canaan Banana, was caught out for raping his bodyguards.

Then in 1998-99 Mugabe launched into the Congo civil war of Laurent Kabilla, reportedly committing more than 2,000 soldiers to a war that could not be won. Mugabe did this in the teeth of rampant inflation running at 60 per cent per year and a Zimbabwean dollar which had fallen more than 300 per cent since 1995.

These conditions had severely disabled Zimbabwean industry and those who were living in abject poverty had increased to 60 per cent compared to 40 per cent of the population at independence.

Zimbabweans protested vehemently against their involvement in the war. Deep cracks begun to appear in the edifice of the state. A few soldiers refused to go to the Congo and were jailed. Army officers reaffirmed these soldiers’ right to refuse, because it was not a war in which Zimbabwe’s sovereignty was threatened.

In the meantime opposition to ZANU/PF and President Mugabe had grown to full strength. The Congress of Trade Unions had disaffiliated from the government and had also formed the Movement for Democratic Change, which emerged as the first serious threat to Mugabe’s 20-year rule.

However, the essentially social democratic and neo-liberal politics of the new opposition, which also seems to treat bourgeois private property as sacrosanct, allowed Mugabe to grab at the burning question of land which he expected might fetch him renewed popularity, especially with the numerically-strong peasant masses.

When the masses called his bluff and seized white farms, the bourgeois regime turned the entire bourgeois state machinery into a knot, which in turn threw the entire sub-region into a crisis of the legitimacy of the bourgeois state.

Mugabe was put in a fix when the Supreme Court ruled that the occupiers of white-owned farmlands should be evicted. The police made a counter-application that if they removed the squatters, it would cause civil war. They

‘In other countries the landless were sitting up and starting to wonder whether land possession was a hopeless dream after all’. These homeless protestors in Namibia have already made great progress in solving their plight through self-organisation and determination

further argued that they did not have the capacity to carry out the order. The Court rejected this claim and ruled that the police did indeed have the capacity.

Mugabe ordered that the court order should be rejected. The police did nothing. This meant that the bourgeois state was incapacitated and the “rule of law” under which the bourgeois order is sanctified and protected was no more.

The implications of this have put the entire sub-region into a crisis of international proportions. While the build-up and explosion of the land crisis in Zimbabwe exposed the capitalist class as essentially empiricist in outlook, whose profit objective hardly prepares it for long-term analysis and planning, it also again revealed the imperialist system as a structured system with each part and each country inseparably linked to the others.

Malfunction in one part can set off a crisis in the whole structure. The imperialists therefore could not take the

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Zimbabwean "land-grab" lightly and consequently scrambled desperately to bring matters back to normal.

In any event the imperialist countries, including South Africa, had vested interests in the Zimbabwean economy itself.

On Good Friday, the presidents of South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique met with President Mugabe at the Victoria Falls in the north-western corner of Zimbabwe. The Johannesburg *Sunday Times* reported that they had met to instruct Mugabe to re-establish order in the country.

In the subsequent press conference he was not allowed to say anything while they feigned public support for him and confidence that he was the man to maintain "rule of law".

These talks followed telephonic negotiations between Thabo Mbeki, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair

and other European leaders for the re-establishment of law and order and the protection of private property. They reportedly agreed to release funds for "legitimate" land reform.

They tied Mugabe to the following agreements:

- the removal of squatters from white-owned land and the re-establishment of "rule of law";
- free and fair elections.

The police immediately moved in to remove an estimated 10,000 squatters from 500 white-owned farms.

Nevertheless it is reported that ZANU/PF youths and war veterans are now persecuting farm labourers in the mould of the "Cultural Revolution". Their houses are being burnt down and they are forced to repent political sins such as supporting the Movement for Democratic Change.

The class nature of the demand for the return of ancestral land is becoming clear. It is petit-bourgeois through and through and is intended to change only the colour of the face of the farm owner.

It has nothing to do with a radical solution to the land question which will benefit the rural working class and poor peasantry.

If the imperialists do indeed pump one or two billion, or even a few hundred million dollars into Zimbabwe for a so-called land reform it will undoubtedly not go for collectives and co-operatives, but for expanding a black landed middle class. But such measures can only be very transitory since such a change will imply a new land-grab on a class basis.

This is the sting in the tail. The "land-grabbers" in Zimbabwe have illustrated to the rest of Africa that land can indeed be taken from those who do not want to share it.

Letter from the National Garment Workers Federation Bangladesh

Bangladesh workers win agreement

Garment workers in Bangladesh have won a significant agreement with an employer after a bitter struggle in which garment workers and been arrested in confrontations with the police.

Greetings!

Please be informed that a Memorandum Of Understanding was signed between M/S Ring Shine Textile Limited in EPZ and garment workers' trade unions at 11pm on 11 May.

Director Mr. Hsiao Hai He, senior manager Mr. Syed Parvez Mohsin and co-ordinating manager M. Afzalur Rahman signed on behalf of Ring Shine Textile Limited.

Amirul Haque Amin, General Secretary of National Garments Workers' Federation and Advisor of Bangladesh EPZ Workers Welfare Association, Advocate Delwar Hossain Khan, President of Bangladesh Jono Sadhin Garments Sramik Federation, Mr. Touhidur Rahman, Secretary General of Bangladesh Apparel Workers' Federation, Abul Hossain, President of Bangladesh Garment Workers' Employees' Federation and Salauddin Shapan, president of Bangladesh Biplobi Garments Sramik Federation signed on behalf of Bangladesh Garment Workers' Unity Council (an alliance of garment workers' federations)

According to The Memorandum of Understanding:

1. The Ring Shine Textile Limited Authority will pay as compensation tk 200000/ per dead worker.
 2. All treatment cost for injured workers will be borne by the management.
 3. Authority will withdraw all legal cases.
 4. Authority will take all necessary steps to release the arrested workers.
 5. Bangladesh Garment Workers' Unity Council will co-operate for peaceful production and situation.
 6. Management will pay monthly wages and overtime payment by the 7th of every following month.
 7. Management will pay the monthly wages and other payment according to the BEPZA rules.
 8. Authority will pay 2 festival bonuses each year.
 9. Authority will pay maternity benefit and leave for the women workers.
- N.B. This is the first Memorandum of Understanding to be agreed in the EPZ of Bangladesh. The Ring Shine factory is now in operation.

In solidarity

Amirul Haque Amin
General Secretary, National Garment Workers' Federation
Advisor, Bangladesh EPZ Workers' Welfare Association

A letter from the Labour Party Pakistan

Leading LPP member arrested

Rawalpindi police arrested the well-known railway workers' leader and president of Labour Unity Rawalpindi, Bashir Botter, on 26th May. The police are searching for eight more railway workers including LPP Punjab vice-chairperson, Abida Bashir Botter. Abida is not a railway worker. Her only crime is that she is Bashir Botter's wife.

Bashir Botter was earlier sacked by the railway administration on the charge of organising illegal strikes and demonstrations.

The police have charged him under sections 506, 147 and 109 of the Pakistan Penal Code, section 49 of Defense of Pakistan Rule, and sections 120 and 121 of the Railways Act. The Pakistan Penal Code sections involve intimidation, rioting and aiding and abetting. The sections of the Railways Act deal with acts prejudicial to a peaceful atmosphere on railway premises.

These nine accused are paying the price for organising a movement of railway workers and their families against the demolition of homes that have been built in front of railway workers quarters, the cancellation of piecework and withdrawal of some of the facilities that railway workers enjoyed in the past.

A peaceful demonstration was held on 22 May in front of the administration office of the Railway Carriage factory organised by Labour Unity. Labour Unity is an alliance of several trade unions and community-based organisations supported by the Labour Party of Pakistan and other progressive political parties.

Over a thousand men, women and children participated in the demonstration. The main demands were restoration of piecework and withdrawal of the demolition notices affecting railway workers' houses. Demonstrators demanded Bashir Botter's reinstatement in his job. They also raised slogans about real accountability on the part of the railway administration.

The demonstration forced the railway administration to come to the rally and announce the acceptance of the main demands. The deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer Mr. Asad Ehsan

addressed the demonstrators on behalf of the railway administration. He assured them the houses would not be demolished. He also announced the restoration of piecework.

But contrary to his claims the railway administration registered a criminal case against Bashir Botter, his wife and other leaders of Labour Unity. Bashir Botter was arrested at 9pm on 26 May his way home.

He was taken to woods in the Texila area, about 30 kilometers from Rawalpindi and asked to run away. This was a tactic to shoot him or to harass him. He refused to escape from police custody. It is a normal practice of police in Pakistan that anyone who escapes from police custody is shot at immediately.

The next day he was brought before a magistrate and his lawyers Aftab Ahmed Abbasi and Jehangir Awan (both LPP leaders) appeared in court and asked for bail as all the offences mentioned were bailable. But surprisingly the police asked for and were granted two days remand in custody. No remand in custody should be granted to police in bailable cases. The police asked for a remand in custody on the grounds that they needed to arrest Bashir Botter's wife. Aftab Abbasi argued that physical remand could only be granted in non-bailable cases when some offensive weapon or other thing relating to the offence needed to be recovered, but his argument was rejected.

Already on 15th May, an army officer placed in charge of security on the railway had ordered Bashir Botter to be shot on sight if he appeared on railway factory premises. The senior security man refused to do so and the Army major also threatened him with the sack.

Most Pakistani trade unions and political parties have demanded the immediate release of Bashir Botter and the withdrawal of the cases against the workers.

Please make appeals and send protest messages to the following email address: ce@pak.gov.pk

Fraternally,
Farooq Tariq
General Secretary
Labour Party Pakistan

Bail victory for asylum seekers

'Dispersed' refugees reject inhuman policies

Compiled by reports
from IFIR and NCAD

Seven Asylum seekers living at Angel Heights Hostel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne were jailed on 10 May after a number of incidents following their complaints about the notorious conditions they live in within the hostel. Six of the accused are Iraqi Kurds and one is Iranian.

A campaign spearheaded by the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees — Britain and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns obtained the release of the seven asylum seekers on bail.

The conflict arose as a result of the Labour government's punitive legislation against asylum-seekers and refugees.

The refugees had been "dispersed" by Kent County Council to Angel Heights hostel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Kent County Council were paying the cost of their accommodation.

On Wednesday 10th May 2000, asylum seekers at the hostel staged a protest. Management at the hostel claimed 40 windows had broken and furniture and crockery destroyed. This was denied by the asylum-seekers, who said only one table had been broken.

Residents at the hostel have repeatedly protested against their living conditions and the inhumane treatment they receive from the hostel management. They even resorted to two days of hunger strike in March 2000. Asylum seekers at Angel

Heights are not allowed to have visitors and live under curfew. There have been constant complaints about the food.

There have been deliberate attempts in the area to stir up prejudice against hostel inmates. One teenage girl's claim to have been abducted by residents in the hostel was given sensational coverage in the local press, but later turned out to be untrue.

When the asylum seekers initially complained about their living conditions they were advised to elect representatives to liaise about the problems. However, one representative was then asked to let all asylum seekers know their meagre weekly allowance was to be cut from £7 per week to just £5.

The justification for this was that there had been damage to the hostel in the past.

No one knew who was supposed to have caused the breakages but all of the refugees were to be charged regardless. The refugees' representative who was asked to tell the others about the decrease in their money, was upset by this and was alleged to have threatened members of staff — an allegation he denies.

He was then given a warning letter. But because of the language barrier this was misunderstood to be an eviction notice, which caused further intense anger. As a result the police were called.

While this was happening, another group of the refugees were outside the hostel with another of their elected leaders. A staff member asked a repre-

sentative to request that the refugees go back inside, which he attempted to do. However, a member of the police wrongly interpreted this to be inciting violence! This then led to the seven asylum seekers being arrested.

Jack Straw wrote to Newcastle City Council leader Tony Flynn and told him that the Home Office would not intervene in the case and would not relocate the seven asylum seekers.

They were held in Durham jail and Casterington young offenders institution. Under normal circumstances these men would have quickly been released on bail. However, the police would not until 2 June allow them to be bailed to friends' houses, even though none of the arrested asylum seekers had any previous convictions.

A statement by the International Federation of Iraqi refugees — Britain condemned the Labour government's disgraceful and inhuman policies against asylum seekers and pointed out that the events in Newcastle were not isolated cases. "Hundreds of asylum seekers, who have fled repression and torture and the lack of the most basic rights and freedoms, have sought refuge in the UK only to be kept in appalling conditions.

In the last month in Margate alone there have been a number of attacks. On Sunday 20 May at 11.30 two Kurdish asylum seekers, Awat Kidder and Reabawir Ahmad, were beaten



Barduz (left, standing) of the International Federation of Iranian Refugees denounced the Labour government for "taking away the human rights of a section of the community" through the operation of the Asylum Act. He was joined by Dashti Jamal (seated, centre) of the international Federation of Iraqi Refugees in UK and many others on the platform of a public meeting organised on 1 June in London by the National Civil Rights Campaign. The meeting brought campaigners against institutional racism in the police and British prisons, like lawyers Gareth Pierce and Daniel Machover, together with refugee organisations with horrendous experiences arising from "dispersal" policies and ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities and hostel personnel, often affecting refugees who are victims of torture and political oppression at home.

up and Reabawir Ahmad suffered a broken arm and is still in hospital.

Shler Hassun, a Kurdish woman, was stabbed by a group of racists. Hamid, an Iranian, was attacked by six racists in the centre of Margate on 18 May.

"These are just a few of the many attacks that asylum seekers are subject to. The same pattern is repeated in Coventry, Dover,

Manchester and elsewhere. The Labour government with its racist and repressive asylum policies bears responsibility for these attacks.

"We demand an end to forced dispersal, restitution of cash benefits and most importantly a clear statement condemning these racist attacks. We demand an end to the verbal attacks by the government and by the Conservative party

which legitimate the violent attacks on vulnerable people.

For updates and campaign events contact:

IFIR-B on 0961 441357,
email: shand@shamal.com-
pusherve.co.uk and **NCADC** on
0121-554-6947, **fax** 0870-055-
4570 or **email**
ncadc@ncadc.deon.co.uk
website:
http://www.ncadc.demon.co.uk

Naked detainee stumps UK immigration goons

From the National
Coalition of Anti-Deportation
Campaigns

On 5 April, NCADC sent out an appeal for Charles Obinna, ("My Life is Hanging on a Cobweb Thread").

Charles Obinna fled Nigeria on the 23rd November 1999. He felt his life was in grave danger from the "Ogboni" a secret cult in which his father was involved. Charles had refused to be initiated into the cult and this placed him and his two sons in grave danger if Charles continued to resist. The only way that Charles could prevent the initiation and keep his wife Bisi and their two sons Jude and Roland safe was to flee Nigeria.

Charles arrived in the UK on

the 24th November 1999, applied for asylum and was immediately detained. He spent his first 3 days in the UK in police cells at Stanstead airport, then was moved to Harmondsworth for 2 weeks. On the 13th December he was moved to Haslar detention/prison where he stayed until an attempt to repatriate him on Saturday 3 June.

Charles without warning was taken from Haslar to Stanstead airport to be put on a KLM flight on Sunday Morning 4th June at 6.30am.

Charles wasn't put on the plane due to a technical hitch. When NCADC asked what the hitch was, immigration at Stanstead at first would not explain. NCADC persisted in

asking immigration for an explanation as to what the problem was, they eventually reluctantly said the technical hitch was caused by Charles removing all his clothes before the flight was due to take off. This action has brought Charles a delay till Wednesday 7th June.

This is part of Charles' April appeal for support:

"My Life is Hanging on a Cobweb Thread

I have come a long way for hope of life but now find my life hanging on a cobweb thread. You need that thread to sustain your life, pull on it too hard, it breaks and you are down the drain.

I can't go back to Nigeria because death looms on my head. I now find myself in a new world

where everything is deception and beyond credibility.

Trouble is, everything today is just the same as yesterday and there is no hope that tomorrow will be any different. Life, if any at all, is so static, its effect is mind destroying.

You wake up within the same walls, facing the same unpromising door and always beyond that door the same system you hate so much.

Each day you eat the same food, walk the same hallways, see the same people. The tannoy announcement will grate your ears with the same irritating messages.

You obey the same rules - are reluctantly part of the same system, you'll be locked up by the same people at the same time.

Every step of life here is so confined and regulated, every movement monitored.

Not even my name is exempt. My parents baptised me Charles Obinna, the Prison service have changed that to Charles Obinna EV 4292.

Once locked up you gradually lose that passion of your past and neither do you hope for the future because your destiny is in the hands of someone else. Gradually you find it difficult to identify who you are and you begin to believe lunatic things or start to reject society.

There is no time limit to my imprisonment in Haslar detention/prison, yet I was not sent here by any UK court. Convicted criminals have more rights than me. They know when they will be released — I don't.

I hate giving in to the system as much as I hate the system itself, so it becomes an uncomfortable battle between the irresistible forces of the system and myself and since here there is no time limit I believe the cobweb thread will break.

Charles Obinna,
Asylum Seeker
Haslar Detention/Prison,
April 2000"

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Russian anti-fascists want aid for Chechnya

RUSSIAN workers and students opposed to their rulers' war on the people of Chechnya have begun trying to organise relief for the victims. The aid call has come from two left-wing groups, the Praksis centre and the anti-fascist newspaper *Chelovechnost* (Humanity), who say the "imperialist" Putin regime is waging nothing less than genocide.

The anti-war campaigners say they have learnt from the international campaign of Workers Aid for Bosnia.

Working people in Russia are suffering hardship and short of essentials themselves, but they warn that things will get worse if the regime is not challenged. Not only are workers paying the costs, and providing the conscripts for this war, but it is bringing with it the menace of fascist dictatorship.

"The ruling circles who today sanction mass murder of civilians, tortures and beatings in concentration camps and the 'disappearance' of people the regime disapproves of, could tomorrow use the same methods against movements of social protest," their statement warns.

"The war against the Chechen people is an imperialist war for oil, and at the same time the national card is being played," says Chelovechnost editor Vladimir Korkov, linking corruption and poverty with the rise of racism in Russia now.

"The regime needs someone to blame, and they chose to blame 'the Blacks' -which is what the racists call the people from the Caucasus."

"The Chechen people must be allowed to decide their own future; and the whole Russian leadership should be brought to

justice!", Korkov told a London meeting last month. "The lying, crap regime of Putin will never carry out just measures because behind this government stand the financial oligarchs for whom the business of oil is more important than the lives of people."

Korkov, who was in Britain to raise support, said demonstrations and pickets in Moscow were important, but what was needed was to overcome the contradictions between various left groups and develop an international movement of real solidarity (solidarity), to send effective help to the Chechen people, to the refugees "living in carts and stables".

"When we started this campaign we learned a lot from the Workers Aid who started the convoys to Bosnia, and helped build bridges between working

people, in Serbia and Bosnia and western Europe."

The campaigners had begun collecting from ordinary working people to send a convoy, and particularly needed to send medical supplies. They were also urging the international workers movement and all who held an internationalist and humanitarian outlook to rally support for the aid campaign.

Responding to questions from his audience, Korkov said much of the so-called "Left" in Russia was "reactionary"; "The Communist Party of the Russian Federation led by Zhuganov, are not only apologists for the Putin regime, they criticise from the right!" On May Day these so-called "communists" had marched with portraits of Stalin and anti-semitic slogans, alongside Nazis, monarchists carrying the Czarist flag, and cos-

sacks in uniform.

As for the trade unions, after a long period in which they were part of the state machine, there were independent trade unions, but these lacked political perspective. "You would probably have to go back to Czarist times to find real class-struggle trade unionism", Korkov thought, and this tradition had been suppressed. "You cannot build internationalism and oppose the war just from an economist struggle over wages, he told a questioner."

Workers International Press salutes the courage of these young Russian fighters against fascism and war.

Much remains to be discussed and clarified between us. Above all Workers International launched Workers Aid for Bosnia precisely because only the working class can consis-

tently fight for internationalism. For workers to struggle for democratic trade union rights, they must take their stand alongside the struggle of oppressed nationalities.

We also need to discuss whether it is correct to characterise the Russian government as imperialist. Would it not be better to say that it operates as a gendarme on behalf of imperialism (while still scheming to secure its own share of the spoils)? That is why Putin has been feted by the likes of Tony Blair.

But we look forward to clarifying these theoretical questions while marching together with the Russian comrades against this war. And we join them now in urging full international working class support for aid to the people of Chechnya!

Russia

Down with new Labour Code!

To all the worlds progressive organisations

From the Coordinating Committee of the All-Russian Campaign in Defense of the Labor Code

Dear comrades,

THE Russian Government and President Putin plan to hurry through the State Duma a new barbarous anti-worker Labour Code which will leave our working class without legal methods of struggle against the arbitrariness of new proprietors and state authorities.

The governmental Draft Labour Code emancipates the employer from the need to seek the trade union's consent for terminating workers' employment, its approval of work schedules and labour norms. This Draft Labour Code effectively abolishes the 8-hour work day and legal protection of trade-union activists from bosses' vengeance, legalises unlimited overtime work without overtime pay, weakens the protection of working mothers with small children.

The labour code that the executive committee of the ruling class prepares to impose on Russian workers throws them legally back to the times of Tsarist Empire. The newly elected President Putin has already announced at the meeting with the deputies of the State Duma that the government's Draft Labour Code would be sent to the Duma in the near future and confidently predicted that it would be adopted.

If adopted, this Labor Code will destroy the legal foundations of trade union activities on the job and all legal avenues for defending the rights of workers. Independent workers' organisations — the Alliance of Trade Unions "Defence" and others — capable of combating the bourgeoisie will be liquidated. This defeat of Russian workers may have grave consequences for the outcome of the working class struggles all over the world.

The Alliance of Trade Unions "Defence" has been fighting this labour code bill for the last four years and so far we managed to prevent it from being passed. But now this fight is going to be much harder for us, because the new State Duma is more reactionary than the previous one.

We are preparing All-Russian action in defence of the present Labour Code. On April 4, the Coordinating Committee of the All-Russian Campaign in Defense of the Labour Code was established in Moscow.

On May 17, the Committee plans organized the Day of United Actions with the following demands:

No — to the Government's Labour Code, short-time contracts, and the arbitrariness of "owners" and authority!

Yes — to the Control of Workers Collectives in the Enterprise!

In this struggle, we count very much on international support from left and progressive forces in general. This support may include the coverage of this assault on the rights of the working class people in mass media and the Internet, sending faxes and cables to the Russian government and the State Duma deputies, picketing Russian embassies and consulates.

If the government meets with a serious internal and international resistance to its anti-

labour legislation there is a good chance we can fend off this vicious attack by the Russian bourgeoisie.

We ask foreign comrades, trade unions, left and progressive organisations for solidarity in this struggle.

At stake is the last remaining conquest of the October Revolution.

- **No to code of slavery! Yes to code of labor!**
- **Get in contact with us!**
- **Coordination committee of the all-russian action on defense of existing labour code:**

A. Zaikina, Chairwoman of Trade-Union Committee (Vyborg ZBK)

V. Tonny, vice-chairman of Trade-Union Committee of Joint-Stock Company "Leningrad Metal Factory"

A. Guan-Tin-Fa, chairman of Workers Council of "Yasnogorsk Machine-Building Plant"

O. Shein, Co-chairman of the Alliance of Workers Trade Unions "Defence of Labour"

V. Gamov, Co-chairman of the Alliance of Workers Trade Unions "Defence of Labour" (Institute of Experimental Physics, Sarov)

M. Popov, Russian Workers' and Peasants' Party, Fund of Workers Academy

S. Baiborodova, Co-Chairwoman of the Alliance of Workers Trade Unions "Defence" (Samara Region Chapter).

V. Shishkarev, adjuster from Likhachev Car Plant, member of Moscow Workers Council.

T. Vedernikova, Chairwoman of the of the "Colour Printworks" union branch.

I. Kuznezov, member of the Executive Secretary of Siberian Confederation of Labour.

D. Symakin, Co-Chairman of the Alliance "Defence" (SpezGBI, Astrakhan).

A. Lashin, member of Soviet of Inter-regional Union of the workers.

V. Shamir, Vice-Chairman of the Trade Union "Defence" (Lykinsky Bus Factory).

D. Igoshin, Chairman of Workers Council (factory "Red Sormovo").

S. Sychyov, Chairman of the "Defence — Center" branch at the Moscow Ball-Bearing Plant.

A. Nikolaev, Chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Congress of Councils of Workers, Peasants, Specialist, and White-Collar Workers.

V. Karachyov, Chairman of the "Defence" branch at "Assembler", Kirov.

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The Campaign's website:

<http://www.geocities.com/rossk>

[ommuna/kzot/eng.html](http://www.geocities.com/rossk)



Activists of International Solidarity with Workers in Russia demonstrated outside London's Queen Elizabeth Conference Hall in April while, inside, Russian politicians met with executives of leading multinationals. No doubt plans to curb Russian workers' right were an important element in the discussions

Days of protest in Russia

This report is based on material provided by International Solidarity with Workers in Russia (ISWoR-MCNP). For more up-to-date information contact ISWoR@aol.com

On 17 May 2000 approximately 300,000 workers across Russia participated in protests against the government's proposal to introduce a draconian new Labour Code.

Areas with the largest turnouts included Kaliningrad (150,000 workers), Astrakhan (10 000), Novosibirsk (8000), Nizhne Novgorod where 8000 workers at one factory participated, Samara 4000, Moscow area 4000, Omsk 2000, republic of Komi 1, 2000 (including 1000 at a rally at Europe's largest mine).

Certain groups of workers distinguished themselves, for example the dockers, 15,000 of whom participated in the ports of Vladivostok, Vostochni, Nakhodka, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Magadan, Archangelsk, Murmansk and Novorossiisk.

At Yasnogorsk machine plant, whose courageous workers became famous when their long militant occupation won unprecedented gains, 3500 workers took part in a stoppage.

Demonstrations were held in Kursk and Vladivostok despite a local ban.

Most of the credit was due to activists on the ground, especially those of the Zashchita and dockers unions, co-ordinated by a committee set up by Duma member **Oleg Shein** with the help of veterans of workers' struggles such as in Yasnogorsk and Vyborg, activists of the Movement for a Workers Party, etc..

Despite the widespread participation in the Day of Action, many workers who are not members of Zashchita or who have never before participated in industrial action felt that the battle against the new Labour Code was not relevant to them. This is because so many Russian workers have long been enduring the conditions to which the new Code gives an official stamp of approval — payment in kind, arbitrary sacking at the whim of the boss, casual work with no written contracts at all, long hours without any days off.

With the collapse of nearly 50per cent of Russian industry since privatisation was brought in, unemployment and non-payment of workers for up to 18 months or more is so common that many people are ready to

tolerate any conditions and hours just for the promise of a little cash. Against this background the day of action was a considerable success.

About 350 strikers and their supporters attended a meeting in Moscow near the "Automobile Factory" Underground station. The meeting passed a resolution protesting at the new labour code and supporting proposals from the independent unions "Zashchita" and "Sotsprof", the Siberian Confederation of Labour, the dockers' union and other progressive organisations to create a general staff for the organisation and co-ordination of action in protection of workers' rights. The resolution called on all workers' organisations, trade unions and activists to carry out resolute action against the government's plans and its bourgeois backers.

Opening the meeting, **V.M.Petrov** reminded the audience that the impulse to revise the labour code came from the International Monetary Fund.

Oleg Shein recalled that the history of attempts to revise or reform the labour code was actually the legalisation of lawlessness as far as working conditions were concerned. He was confident that even if they did liquidate workers' rights, businessmen would not have solved their problems, and people would be compelled to fight for their rights in more rigid forms. **Shein** condemned the official trade union federation (FNPR) for instructing local organisations not to take part in the day of action, but said many branches had actually joined in.

S.V.Hramov, chair of the "Sotsprof" union spoke briefly, emphasising that the day's actions proved that workers were neither cattle nor slaves.

T.Zaikina, a woman working in an educational complex, condemned support for the labour code from those who "call themselves communist and beat their breasts but carry out anti-national laws", referring to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation with **G.A.Zyuganov** in the leadership. There were cries of support and of protest from the audience and scuffles broke out.

There were further interruptions from supporters of **V.I.Anpilov's** "Labour Russia" when **Zaikina** condemned the massacres in the Chechen Republic.

V.I.Shishkarev representing

Zil car workers warned the audience not to take the eight-hour day for granted as it had been won in hard class-struggles. He said that Moldavian and Ukrainian workers who were exposed to the full rigours of capital were forced to work sixteen-hour days: "and the government aspires to put Russian working people in the same position".

A representative of the Vorkuta miners, **V.I.Potishnyj**, said that the bourgeoisie hoped to split the working-class movement, appeasing some groups, as it had done with the miners 10 years ago. With the loss of socialism, workers had lost all rights. **Potishnyj** vowed that the government would not be allowed to control the factories if there was "oppression of man by man".

An engineering worker belonging to "Sotsprof", **N. Ivanov**, said the planned labour code "does not simply destroy workers' rights but contradicts the national interests of the

country because only free citizens can do work of a high quality".

A railway union representative, **V.V.Veprev**, argued that under socialism "the labour code was a secret book, the worker who knew the labour code did not always suit the administration". Now members of the Duma are demanding the cancellation of those articles of the labour code which are not carried out by employers and the retention of those clauses that are carried out. "The new sections brought into the labour code devoted to railway workers and teachers introduce military discipline into these spheres too."

Other speakers included "**Zashchita**" co-ordinator **D.V.Jakushev**, the union chairman of the "Metallist" factory in Uralsk, the chair of the Moscow anti-fascist committee **O.Fedjukov**, **A.Nikolaev** representing RIK, a miner bringing greetings from a local branch of "Zashchita", **O.Babich** and others.

'Zashchitas' leaders tour

OLEG SHEIN, left-wing member of the Russian Duma for Astrakhan region, co-chair of the all-Russian trade union "Zashchita" (Defence), and a prominent figure in the campaign against the proposed anti-working class and anti-union labour code, is to make a speaking tour in western Europe during July. At 27, **Oleg Shein** is the youngest members to be elected to the Russian Duma, the lower house of parliament. Some of the key venues an dates so far arranged are: **Wednesday 12 July, 7.30pm, public meeting in the London House of Commons, chaired by Jeremy Corbyn MP. Friday 14 July (evening) public meeting in central London Saturday 16 July Liverpool Sunday 17 July Glasgow Monday 18 July Hull, evening public meeting organised by Hull Trades Council Wednesday 20 July participating in Espace Marx organised by the Ligue Communiste**

Revolutionnaire and the French Communist Party Thursday 20 till Saturday 29 July visits to Bordeaux, Madrid, Barcelona, Marseilles, northern Italy, Germany and Belgium.

The final meeting of the tour will be in Helsinki on 2 August.

International Solidarity with Workers in Russia needs help to organise the tour. A large sum of money needs to be collected and competent Russian interpreters will be needed at every stage. A model resolution for trade union branches supporting the tour is also available.

Contact ISWoR at: Box R — 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ, UK, (make cheques payable to Oleg Shein Euro-tour co-ordinators)

If you have something you would like to distribute on Russia Info-List or if you want to help practical solidarity work, contact ISWoR@aol.com

Some comments on :

Working class methods of struggle

by Balazs Nagy

All over the world, militant trade unionists are increasingly complaining about, and taking legal action over, what they call workplace "bullying". They are encouraged to do so by the leaders of their unions.

What they term bullying is actually the constant deterioration in working conditions, specifically all the different ways in which capitalists and their servants put on the pressure to intensify labour, including increased use of labour time, "rationalisation" of working conditions, and so forth.

A typical response often involves individual cases taken up by workers or employees who have been pressurised, harassed and bullied in the workplace. Such instances often end up as court or industrial tribunal cases.

The bourgeois press, too, carries more and more reports of "bullying" in the workplace. Hypocritical indignation on the part of the bourgeoisie, mixed with genuine anger in some journalists and intellectuals, has grown enormously. The supposedly "left" French bourgeois newspaper *Le Monde* is no longer content merely to report such cases. It recently devoted a whole page to an article on the subject (31 March 2000). There have even been books and pamphlets attacking stress and harassment in the workplace.

The bourgeoisie's desperate need to increase its profits does indeed compel it to push up the rate of surplus value and resort to increasing exploitation in general in all kinds of ways. There are various ways of achieving the intensification of labour that is so characteristic of present-day capitalism.

And now, in order to forestall the development of a mass movement against the rapid deterioration in working conditions, the bourgeoisie, with the help of its countless ideologues, sociologists, journalists and others, as well as many union leaderships, try to present the enormous pressure imposed on workers as person-

al bullying of certain individuals by certain bosses.

Bourgeois philosophy in its decline has always glorified individualism as a means of struggle in place of common action. This conception is typical of its view of history as well as the myriad forms in which the social struggle is presented in bourgeois propaganda. The perpetual exaltation of the individual hero is a permanent feature of its historical writings as of all its propaganda and of what is commonly called mass literature: detective stories, films and so forth. The cult of bourgeois leaders like Churchill and de Gaulle as war heroes is just as characteristic of bourgeois historiography as the individual hero of the cowboy or detective story fighting crooked local capitalists and corrupt politicians. Here the working masses completely disappear or are relegated to the sidelines.

However, terrorist actions — those extreme examples of individual struggle and enraged individualism separated from the masses — have not made much headway in the workers' movement. Blanquism and narodnikism in the past, like the "modern" forms of terrorism, have always been isolated and remained outside or at the margins of the class movement.

However, over recent decades the workers' movement itself has been contaminated by more widespread use of individual actions as a method of struggle, often on the part of workers or their unions. At first some groups of workers in Latin America were induced by their union leaders to organise hunger-strikes, very often in churches, which left the mass of workers completely passive or at most evoked silent sympathy on their part. This method became more and more widespread around the world and was often reduced merely to one striker, the union activist alone. Nobody has seriously criticised this method, least of all the unions, whose leaders have very often been the main instigators.

Of course it is entirely understandable that, deprived of their organisation, desperate

workers have recourse to this or that individual method, although it is not to be recommended. This is a real tragedy. In Rumania recently four redundant miners and three miners' wives set fire to themselves, while others threatened to throw themselves under trains. This happened in the Jiu Valley, where their union leader Miron Cozma was sentenced to eighteen years in prison with the silent complicity of the whole international workers' bureaucracy. With the once-powerful miners' union dismantled, a whole series of mines was closed and the workers movement and the strong miners' communities there were totally destroyed. Let me repeat: not a single union leader in the world, not a single union, let alone the international centre in Brussels, lifted a finger to defend the miners! Just as they did not say a word in defence of Chechnya.

So we have these and other hopeless individual actions provoked by the destruction of workers' organisations and also by the treachery of a completely rotten and degenerate workers' bureaucracy internationally and in each different country. And that is why it would be wrong to criticise workers fighting out of sheer desperation. Their "individualism" has nothing to do with the individualist method mentioned above, inspired by the bourgeoisie and transmitted into the workers' movement by the union leaders.

Of course, workers and their unions do use the method of the hunger strike under certain conditions, when they cannot see any other possible way of fighting. In Kosovo, for example, the Treпча miners and their union have considered going on hunger strike against the UN military occupation which will not allow them to enter their mines. It is understandable that these miners should resort to this method in this case because they cannot see any other way of fighting. Yet even here, while completely supporting these miners, we have to say that this method can only wear out and exhaust the workers themselves and



LIVERPOOL dockers (seen here with supporters at a rally in the centre of Liverpool) organised solidarity around the world for their principled stand in defence of working class rights

can hardly help to mobilise broader masses.

But those who talk more and more about personal bullying, instead of pointing out the general deterioration in working conditions and emphasising the need to fight back against it and the intensification of labour which causes it, choose the highly personal and individual method of taking these "individual" cases to court. It goes without saying that I am not, nor can the workers' movement in principle be, opposed to using the law and the courts to fight through the personal claims of injured workers and militants. Of course not! On the contrary, workers must be kept informed of their rights under the law, and the courts must be used to defend workers, union activists and union leaders.

But this is quite different from a general method which tries to replace a collective fight by workers with an individual act, or a personal prosecution, or reduce it to a legal action which leaves the working masses as passive bystanders.

Marxism represents a definite break with bourgeois conceptions — and other ideologies and practices influenced by them in the shape of various petty-bourgeois tendencies — through its insistence on the class struggle: the working class in alliance with all other exploited masses against the capitalist

class and its society and institutions. It rejects individualism and individual actions as a method of fighting and opposes to them the method of class mobilisation of the exploited masses. Only this mass movement of the class on the basis of its own material living and working conditions and its own experience can successfully oppose the growing exploitation and the worsening in working conditions. Moreover, only by using this method can such a mobilisation help to raising the working class to meet its role as actor and creator of history. Individual action as a method of fighting battles separated from and substituting for mass mobilisations implies that capitalism can be corrected and so-called "excesses" can be got rid of. This is really the ideology of all "socialist", social-democratic, Labourite and ex-Stalinist political leaderships and the trade union leaders they influence. In line with their more and more bourgeois politics they more and more openly take the road of giving up, even formally, working-class methods of struggle.

We Trotskyists, on the other hand, organised in the Workers' International, are resolutely opposed to this bourgeois method. At the very core of our Transitional Programme stands precisely the unfolding process of mass mobilisation: how Marxists should "...help

the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution". The Transitional Programme cannot therefore be reduced to a catalogue of demands, as its whole legion of noisy detractors maintain. On the contrary, it is consistent with nature that a certain number of these "present demands" change with the variations and changes in objective and subjective reality which we naturally also observe in relation to our programme. However, what constitutes its Marxist essence cannot be changed: the successive stages in which the struggle of the masses is always developing from the most elementary demands to the highest act of the socialist revolution.

Such a programme conforms totally with Marx's view that the emancipation of the workers cannot but be the action of the workers themselves. Of course the working class also has its own individual heroes, but only on the basis of its class struggle, within that framework and intimately related to it. On this basis we are strongly opposed to individualism and individualist methods which are put forward now by bourgeois politicians, scholars and journalists and other propagandists and more and more used by the union bureaucracy.

Remember Srebrenica! — Never again, never forget!

By Bronwen Handyside

In July 1995 in Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, United Nations soldiers handed over 7-10,000 men and boys to be slaughtered by Serbian nationalist forces. The enclave was a UN declared "safe area", and the people had been persuaded to hand in all their weapons under the promise of UN protection.

The whole world knew at the time what would happen, and in fact American spy satellites recorded the digging of the mass graves the Chetniks threw them in.

Serb President Slobodan Milosevic and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic

designed the "ethnic cleansing" policy under which they were slaughtered.

Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic and dozens of lower-ranking criminals carried out the massacre.

But equally guilty are the governments of Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and America which imposed an arms embargo on Bosnia-Herzegovina, preventing the Bosnian people from defending themselves from a heavily armed genocidal enemy.

Through their agency, the UN, the imperialist nations further disarmed the people of Srebrenica, and delivered them as helpless victims to the Chetnik forces in

line with their policy of appeasement of Milosevic, and fear of an armed, independent Bosnian movement.

Today, five years after the massacre, most of the perpetrators, including those with the highest responsibility are still free.

Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of Bosnian war crime survivors are displaced in refugee camps and are prevented from returning to their homes by Serb nationalists. Only 70 bodies have been identified from the mass graves around Srebrenica, leaving thousands to live in the

tortured hope that their relatives are still alive.

The "Women of Srebrenica", relatives of the massacre victims have formed an organisation which demands:

● **The truth about Srebrenica, the identification of all those responsible, either actively or complicitly, for this tragedy, and the identification of the victims**

● **the arrest and trial of all suspects indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.**

● **That all victims of "ethnic cleansing" be able to return to their homes with sufficient measures to ensure their safety**

They will be demonstrating in Sarajevo in July this year, as they have done every year since 1995, for their demands.

The Bosnia Solidarity Campaign will demonstrate in London, on Saturday 15 July, from 11 am – 2 pm, outside the British Prime Minister's residence, in solidarity with the Women of Srebrenica.

A group of Bosnian children will hand in to 10 Downing Street a list of the names of those murdered at Srebrenica. We will also hand in a petition with the demands of the Women of Srebrenica, (supported by French, Swiss, British and American organisations).

Brazil union call

International seminar on international trade union strategies to combat the clawback of workers' rights

22 and 23 August 2000 in the Holiday Village of the Metal-Workers Trade Union of Sao José dos Campos in the town of Caraguatubá in Sao Paulo State.

Organised by the following trade unions, affiliated to the United Workers Federation (Central Única de los Trabajadores — CUT) of Brazil:

- Association of Teachers at Rio de Janeiro State University
- Democratic Trade Union Federation of Metal-Workers of Minas Gerais
- Metal-Workers Trade Union of the Campinas Region (Sao Paulo State)
- Metal-Workers Trade Union of the Sao José dos Campos Region (Sao Paulo State)

Conference Call

The trade unions and the federation named above, all of which are affiliated to the United Workers Federation (CUT) of Brazil, are organizing an International Seminar with the participation of representatives from workers organizations in different countries which share a vision of struggle against the strate-

gies of capital ("flexibilization of labour", clawback of rights, privatization, liberalization of trade, etc).

Our starting points in preparing the Seminar will be the following:

- There are innumerable trade union sectors (trade union federations, shop floor unions, enterprise committees, trade union oppositions) in all countries implementing strategies of a confrontation with capital, of rejecting the "partnership" between capital and labour, of resistance to attempts to claw back social and labour rights, and who are fighting privatization;

However, those sectors are currently scattered by the fact that they belong to different international trade union federations (ICFTU, WCL, WFTU and/or regional branches of these) or remain independent but without any alternative to these confederations.

Considering the current international situation of the trade union movement, the Seminar will have the following objectives:

- To bring about an interchange of experience

To confirm your attendance at the meeting, please contact us at the following e-mail address: inter_sindical@hotmail.com

International seminar on trade-union strategies

between representatives of organisations from different countries;

- To discuss the viability of joint actions;
- To work towards the formation of an international solidarity network on the basis of the concrete experience of the participants and their joint discussions;

We wish to make it clear that the proposal for a network put forward here does not put in question the international options of the various organisations involved. Its main goal is to provide one more trade union channel to various combative trade union sectors that are struggling in their separate countries against the strategies of capital, to make it easier to mount campaigns of solidarity with their struggles, to facilitate the exchange of rank-and-file experiences and forms of rapid and effective communication independently of their international affiliation

or lack of it.

The 7th National Congress of the CUT will be taking place in Brazil between 15 and 19 August. Those who also wish to participate in this event should send us a request so we can make the arrangements necessary for them to attend the Congress as international observers.

The Seminar will take place on 22 and 23 August (that is, after the 7th Congress of the CUT) in the Holiday Village of the Metal-Workers Trade Union of Sao José dos Campos in the town of Caraguatubá in Sao Paulo State.

The Programme of the Seminar (still under discussion) will include the following points:

- To deal with any questions that might arise, those interested are welcome to contact the following phone numbers:
 - (+55 - 19) 232 3644 Emanuel Melatto (Mané) of the Executive of the Metal-Workers Trade Union of the Campinas Region;
 - (+55 - 12) 346 5333

Luis Carlos Prates (Mancha) of the Executive of the Metal-Workers Trade Union of Sao José dos Campos; ● (+55 -21) 264 9314 Iná Meireles, a leader of the Association of

Teachers at Rio de Janeiro State University; ● (+55 -31) 226 4942 José Maria de Almeida of the Executive of the Democratic Trade Union Federation of Metal-Workers of Minas Gerais

Tuesday 22 August:

9.00 Opening: arranged by the organisers

10.00 Panel debate: Globalization, neo-liberalism and strategies of workers' organisations — a balance sheet. In the panel: James Petras, Professor, Ricardo Antunes, Professor of the sociology of work at Campinas State University (UNICAMP)

Plenary discussion

12.00 Lunch

14.00 Reports: from around the world about the state of the struggle against the clawing back of rights and casualisation. Participants from different countries will present reports on the national situation in their respective countries.

Wednesday 23 August

9.00 Proposals: concerning the viability of joint actions (content, methods, strategies). Presentation by the organisers of the network proposal — Group discussion.

12.00 Lunch

14.00 Conclusions: Plenary session, definition of proposals, undertakings and agreements.

17.00 Closure

Letter from a worker at Ford Dagenham:

What can workers actually do?

LAST MONTH, Ford announced the closure of the Paint Trim and Assembly (PTA) plant in Dagenham in 18 months' time. Half the plant — one shift — is to go this year, the rest in November 2001.

Actually 1,000 workers have already volunteered for redundancy. The management are offering £15,000 on top of statutory entitlement, so someone with only a few years' service could come out with, say, £20,000.

Half the shop stewards have volunteered for this, including senior stewards. The left-leaning convenor Steve Riley has been off work sick for quite a while and resigned the same week the closure was announced.

Riley is also secretary of the biggest branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&GWU) in the plant, which has not had a meeting for six months.

In general union organisation in the factory is in chaos. Each plant is looking after "its own". The Dagenham estate panel of shop stewards no longer meets. They have fallen out over such things as the race scandal and the truck drivers.

(Last autumn trade unionists on the site voted to take industrial action over racist abuse and attacks by some white workers. The issue was widely discussed in the media, particularly because TGWU general secretary Bill Morris took it up with senior Ford management. Before that there had been a struggle to break an unofficial colour-bar

affecting the prized lorry-driving jobs.)

The closure affects the whole area around the factory. The job-losses have a knock-on effect, with small local employers being hit. One example is the dock operator which supplies rolled steel for car bodies.

Workers suspect that Ford's strategy is to clear out all direct Ford employees from a plant which recently had £400 million invested in it and that it will be re-opened as a "contract" plant under a different name making Ford products under contract but paying lower wages and offering worse conditions.

This would fit in with Ford plans to become a marketing rather than a manufacturing company.

The rate of profit in car production is generally low, say 3 or 4 per cent return on huge investments of billions of dollars, whereas car dealers have a mark-up of 30 per cent without manufacturing anything. They just wheel cars in one door and out the other.

Jack Nasser, the Ford boss, who earns \$10 million a year, recently made a speech along those lines. He said they wanted to contract out assembly work.

Nasser made his name by shutting down the Ford plants in Australia.

There is a lot of talk about fighting the closure. However, the union leaders in general talk a lot of nonsense about what a good and compliant workforce we are. London's new mayor, Livingstone, only prattles on about the "overvalued" pound sterling. Perhaps he wants to

devalue our wages and fringe benefits to make us more "attractive" to bosses.

There are workers who want to fight the closure and are thinking about how.

The recent mass leafletting of the site by the British Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) only attracted about 4 Ford workers to a meeting despite all the SWP's bluster about "strike now, occupy!"

What can workers actually do? The truth is that at present there is not any great move inside Ford for a strike or occupation because of the severance terms offered and the burning desire of many workers to get out of this lousy company.

The worst hit are the suppliers. Three or four workers in the firms who supply Ford will probably lose their jobs for every Ford workers that goes.

At our department meeting I pointed out that (British prime minister Tony) Blair was notified by Ford of their intention some weeks before the workers were officially told. They are always the last to know, although it had been leaked to the press for weeks.

Blair just gave them the nod and said the government would give advice to workers who had lost their jobs.

I said that we were all in unions which paid money to the party in power and that we — the unions — should get together with the suppliers' unions, plus the community, the shop keepers and traders in the area that would also be hit, and organise a demonstration and



lobby of the government. We should involve Livingstone and the various union leaders who have spoken against the closure.

People at the meeting supported me but I doubt if the pro-

posal got any further than the shop steward. The union leaders in the engine plant are rotten and secretly happy that it is the PTA that has been hit.

The company says it will

invest more in the engine plant. They promise they will use it to make the Jaguar engine. The plant leadership do not realise this means the existing Jaguar plant could probably close.

KCTU general strike for:

- **Five day week !**
- **No sale of Daiwoo Motors!**
- **Legal Protection for casual workers!**

By Bob Archer

ON 31 May the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions launched a general strike involving 70,000 members organised in over a hundred local unions.

The militant union federation started the strike with a rally in Chongmyo Park in central Seoul. About 20,000 protesting workers thronged through the streets of the capital. In the evening they rallied at Myongdong Cathedral to chant their demands and wave banners.

KCTU president Dan Byung-ho said that the KCTU affiliates had launched the strike to achieve a cut in the working week from six days to five and to win a pay increase in double figures.

He said another aim of the strike was to pressure the government to abandon the plan to sell Daiwoo Motor Co. to a foreign buyer. Dan also urged employers and the government to allow unions a voice in corporate restructuring plans, which will cause widespread suffering among workers. He demanded better protection for casual and temporary workers.

The KCTU went to great lengths to comply with South Korea's complex labour legislation.

The KCTU had called on its member unions to file for mandatory mediation by May 20. By the end of May 219 unions involving a total of 174,000 members had filed for mediation.

Following the mandatory "cooling off" period, the unions organised strike ballots — the next step in legal compliance. By May 29, a total of 185 unions with a total membership of 138,000 members had held strike ballots and approved the plan to strike.

Members of the Korean Metal Workers Federation have played a key role in the general strike. Fifty local branches with a total membership of 60,000 voted to strike, as did some thirty branches of the National Health and Medical Industry Workers Union, involving some 15,000 members in hospitals.

Individual enterprise unions which struck as part of the KCTU general strike are those at some of the major enterprises in the private and public sectors.

The list of unions taking strike action included the Hyundai Motors Workers Union, Ssangyong Motors Workers Union, Korea Heavy Industry Workers Union, Seoul National University Hospital Branch and Ehwa Women's University Hospital Branch of the National Health and Medical Industry Workers Unions, Kumho Tyre Workers Unions, LG Chemical Workers Unions, Livestock Farmers Cooperative Staff Union, and the National Social Insurance Workers Union.

The KCTU won a major victory on the eve of the strike when the government caved in over recognition of the Korean Air Pilots Union. The government revoked a ban on union organisation among pilots and issued the necessary certificate. The union had completed a strike ballot on May 28. Out of the 1,247 members, 1,165 took part in to vote and an astounding 1,128 voted in support of strike action.

All the KCTU leaders — at the national centre, led by President Dan Byung-ho, at the KCTU affiliated federations, KCTU regional councils, and local enterprise unions — went into emergency overnight session from May 29 to oversee final preparations for the general strike.

At the same time, members of the Livestock Farmers Cooperative Staff Union from throughout the country converged on Seoul to take part in the strike.

On May 31, KCTU held public rallies in Seoul and 14 other major cities across the country.

On Sunday, June 4, the fifth day of the general strike, KCTU was to organise a national rally in which more than 50,000 were expected to participate.

The KCTU has on at least two occasions in the past used the threat of a general strike action to extract promises of a forty-hour week from the government, but these promises have turned out to be empty.

The primary object of the KCTU general strike is for the government to declare its own plan to prepare and initiate a change in the law to bring the statutory basic working hours to 40 hours a week.

The KCTU is also demanding restoration of the damage caused by the economic crisis

and abuses on the part of the employers, according to press statements by the confederation.

The economic crisis has given employers extraordinary powers to abuse the good will of workers. While workers and ordinary people responded to the crisis by accepting wage cuts and foregoing wage payments — which are indicated by the decline in the real and nominal wages over the period of the crisis, the employers have used the crisis as an opportunity to downgrade and destroy the integrity of collective bargaining agreements.

As a result, crucial provisions such as the right for consultation and mutual agreement before employers can introduce changes have been widely ignored by employers.

The employers have exploited uncertainty caused by the crisis to destroy unions and to beat back the decade of achievement of the trade union movement.

In response, the KCTU has demanded a restoration of effective collective bargaining.

Furthermore, the KCTU had called for restoration of the damage to the rights and welfare of workers wreaked in the period of the economic crisis.

The unions also call on the government to drop its plan to sell off Daewoo Motors to an overseas operator. The decision was part of the crisis management plan to sell off every possible asset to obtain foreign currency to restock depleted foreign currency reserves.

The KCTU has rejected the validity of this kind of crisis management plan as it inflicts long term damage to the Korean economy.

Nevertheless, the government has blindly pursued its plans to privatise public enterprises and to sell off as much as possible of anything that foreign buyers wish to buy.

Another spur-of-the-moment decision at the height of the crisis was to amalgamate the agricultural co-operatives and livestock farmers' co-operative. The decision was made in total disregard for the different roles played by the two cooperative systems. Government bureaucrats made the decision only on the basis of a superficial calculation looking at the bank service aspect of the two cooperatives. It was made as a part of general financial market



(Above) members of KCTU affiliated unions on the march. (Right) an earlier demonstration of Korean metalworkers' unions



restructuring rather than with a view to the development of the agriculture and livestock industry. The KCTU calls on the government to drop plans to forcibly amalgamate the two co-operatives.

Another strike demand is legal protection for casual workers and consolidation of social security and taxation. The economic crisis has brought to the fore a crucial negative development in the labour market. The crisis was seen as an opportunity for employers to replace regular employees with casual workers with the simple aim of exploiting cheap labour.

During the crisis the government directed all the public sector to reduce the workforce by thirty per cent in a one-size-fits-all panic measure. Many of those laid off were promptly re-hired as casual labour and carried on the same jobs as before as if nothing had changed.

But what had changed was their contract status and with it their wage levels, security, and benefits. Large number of enterprises have turned to the use of "atypical" (casual) employment to exploit cheap labour.

The crisis has also revealed the total inadequacy of the social security system in Korea.

and implemented taxation system.

The KCTU has called for consolidated institutional protection for workers in "atypical" jobs, so that the need for "flexibility" on the part of employers is not turned into a weapon to exploit workers. Furthermore, the KCTU has called for a general overhaul and restructuring of the tax system to finance a robust social security system which will administer genuine welfare redistribution, instilling a spirit and institution of social solidarity.

The government at first failed to respond to any of these basic demands of the KCTU. Once it became clear that a sizeable turn-out was expected, president Kim told a cabinet meeting the government would "positively study ways of introducing the five-day working week". Union leader Dan Byung-ho welcomed the remarks but urged Kim to work out a concrete timetable for implementation.

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S. Korea workers' party set up

THE Democratic Labour Party (DLP) of Korea has been set up with a programme demanding the defence of workers' rights, the protection of jobs and the shortening of working hours.

The party was set up earlier this year by activists in the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) who in 1996-1997 led the struggle against a new labour code which would have made it easier to sack workers.

The unions forced the Kim Young-sam government to retreat on the issue.

However, the Korean economy suffered badly in the crisis which swept through south-east Asia in 1997-1998. Many of the chaebol, the big combines which had been the motors of economic growth in previous decades and which had seemed to offer job security, went bankrupt and were snapped up by foreign buyers.

Korean workers have taken a political step forward to confront the problems that have arisen in the development of the crisis of imperialism. The DLP fielded upwards of fifty candidates in elections earlier this year, although it did not win any seats in parliament.

An immediate issue was the threat that Daiwoo Motors would be sold to a foreign manufacturer.

Even though Daiwoo insert-

ed a clause in the sale agreement guaranteeing jobs, car workers in a number of plants have taken strike action to prevent the sale.

Leading members of the DLP deny that opposition to the sale is nationalist-inspired. Kwon Young-gil told the French *Le Monde* newspaper (April 13):

"Such a sale would mean that Korea would simply become an assembly facility,

with above all job losses. We have seen what Renault did with Nissan. But a million people here earn their living in the automobile industry".

One car manufacturer who managed to avoid strike action is Samsung Motors. At their plant in Pusan there is no union, only an employer-worker liaison committee. Park Chung-sok, president of the KCTU in Ulsan, explained that the number of car workers at Samsung

has fallen from 6,000 to 2,000, the factory is at a standstill anyway, and the remaining workers are too demoralised to take strike action.

Park Chung-sok himself was an assembly-line worker at Hyundai Motors until he was sacked in 1999 for leading an "illegal" strike in defiance of anti-union laws. He reports that 10,000 Hyundai workers have lost their jobs in the last few years.