

# Workers International Press

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**Growing crisis and attacks on workers mean:**

## Building a working class leadership

Bob Archer

AN important opportunity to assess the progress of Workers International since its June 2000 Third Congress came early last month with a meeting of the International Executive Committee.

Every sign of a maturing economic crisis was evident as the committee met. The long sequence of "profit warnings" from US information and communication technology (ICT) firms has still not come to an end, and there appear to be considerable divisions within the US ruling class about how to deal with the situation. The Japanese economy continues to wallow in sullen deadlock. Reform initiatives demanded almost at knife-point by US capital will lead to big cuts in the living standards and jobs of Japanese workers. Meanwhile Indonesia continues to suffer social and political upheavals and the South Korean economy has undergone a series of shocks caused by attempts to inflict the kind of "bone-cutting" pain which US banks, working through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), demanded following the crisis of 1997-1999.

The European Union's new currency, the euro, trades at a huge and increasing discount compared with its launch value. This reflects worries among currency dealers and industrialists that an expected European economic boom has failed to materialise and that the political and economic arrangements underpinning the new currency are not yet in place. The euro is hanging in mid-air.

The working class is temporarily at a disadvantage in this situation because it lacks its own international political party and leadership, so it is unable to develop an effective strategy to confront the attacks of the ruling class.

This gives the ruling class the chance to overcome its crisis, temporarily, at workers' expense. A number of strategies they employ around the world are instantly recognisable to working-class activists.

- An all-out state attack on legal trade union rights is evident almost all over the world.

- Wherever possible, employers are willing to close down enterprises with a militant and organised workforce. They are helped by surplus capacity in many industries, and are in any case planning to locate the next generation of factories in poverty-stricken areas with massive unemployment.

- Government regulations which used to offer workers a measure of protection are systematically stripped away all over the world.

- Essential social provision, such as education, transport, health, welfare benefits, social housing, is increasingly handed over to private owners. At one stroke it is removed from any semblance of popular control and made into an object of capitalist speculation

and profit, while employees' rights are conjured away and the service to users is cheapened.

In many areas the attacks are carried out by the very Socialist and Labour parties to which workers formerly looked for improvement and reform. Meanwhile the official trade union movement encourages workers to accept paltry bribes in return for letting these changes happen. Windy "mobilisations" of protest against this or that attack, which hardly get beyond the threshold of the union office, are intended to prevent any real campaign of working class struggle.

In former colonies, imperialists and their puppets follow the same lines, but also operate more openly, fomenting bloody ethnic conflicts, coups and civil wars to get their hands on raw materials at the cheapest possible rate. Often they intervene militarily, either through local pawns or directly, and this tendency will undoubtedly increase.

Such a situation calls for a new development in working class leadership. Workers' International is dedicated to working to resolve this problem with all those who sincerely come forward for that purpose.

Such a development must arise within the working class itself. It cannot be done by a realignment between political groups which is then presented to the working class as a fait accompli. Of course there will be political discussions, joint actions and re-alignments, but they will be important in their connection with how a new leadership emerges in the actual struggles of workers themselves.

And this will be a contradictory process, with apparent wrong turnings, zig-zags and delays. For example workers throughout Europe seem to be turning their backs on the so-called "democratic process" in which the main protagonists are all open pro-capitalists. This may not be translated directly into electoral support for left-wing candidates (although Workers International supports socialist candidates with pro-working class policies and call on electors to vote for them). For many workers, a significant stage in their break with existing parties is to abstain or write in a protest on the ballot form. Such a move has to be thought about and its implications understood by socialists.

The International Executive Committee meeting heard reports on work in South Africa, Namibia and Britain (see pages 2 and 3). Future issues of Workers International Press will contain fuller reports on such work, the tactical and strategic lessons it contains and the theoretical issues and principles it raises.

The committee reiterated its affiliation of the Koorkom, an international alliance working to rebuild an international revolutionary socialist party. It also confirmed that it would work in every way to make a success of the International Network of Active Solidarity (see pages 4,5,6 and 7).

### Bangladesh Garments Workers call national strike July 1st

In Bangladesh, National Garments Workers Federation (NGWF) with 6 other federations in the Banner Bangladesh Garments Workers Unity Council (BGWUC) have called a strike in the whole garments sector in Bangladesh on 1st of July 2001.

This strike is for the realisation of their 6 points demands that they submitted to the BGMEA (Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association) on 24 March 2001. These 6 demands are:

1. New wage structure for the garment workers on the basis of a basic minimum wage of tk 1800 (unskilled).
2. Ensure the health and safety of the garments workers.
3. Necessary steps for the development and expansion of the garments industries and its markets.
4. Implementation of Trade Union Rights in the garments sector. Trade Union Rights for the EPZ workers.
5. Separate industrial zones for the garments industries. Colony, schools and hospitals in the zones.
6. Implementation of Memoranda of Agreement signed between the



BGMEA and BGWUC in 1997 and 2000 (appointment letter, identity card, service book, weekly holiday, maternity leave etc. ).

The BGWUC and NGWF have also adopted a programme of action to prepare for the strike.

The National Garments Workers Federation organised a demonstration on 11 May (picture above) to publicise the garment workers' strike. It was organised at 5 pm in the central square of Dhaka. The procession passed through the main streets of the city. It was addressed by, among others,

Amirul Haque Amin, Miss Shahida Sarker, Mrs. Ohiduzzaman, Miss Safia Pervin, Mojibor Rahman Pintu, Miss Nurun Nahar and Anowar. They called on garment workers to make a success of the strike for the 6 demands.

Messages of solidarity and support to:

G.P.O Box: 864, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Phone: 88 019 340268, Fax: 88 02 9562562E-mail: unity@bdmail.net (See 'Bangladesh clothing workers fight to get pay' page 6. )

### Inside this issue:

**Report on work in South Africa and Namibia, Education crisis in South Africa. (p.2)**

**Lenin's 'Imperialism' today (p.3)**

**The International Network of Active Solidarity: Reports and discussion on the problems faced by trade unionists around the world. (pp4-7)**

**The Irish worker (p8)**

### Apology

Due to the editor's illness and the pressure of other work, it proved impossible to publish "Workers International Press" in May. The editorial board apologises to readers for this and assures them that it will spare no effort to publish future issues regularly and on time. This work should be made easier because more comrades directly involved in working class struggle are coming forward with reports, articles and political opinions. We believe readers will not be disappointed.

**WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!**



## Towards All Africa Conference of Workers, Peasants and Youth

# Reports from South Africa and Namibia

By Dot Gibson

The All-Africa Conference of Workers, Peasants and Students, based on socialism, has been a crucial question for the Workers International Executive Committee, supported by the African Liberation Support Campaign, since it was first proposed by comrades in Durban, South Africa and Namibia some five years ago.

The whole African continent is embroiled in crisis — imperialist plunder, wars and desperate political, economic and social needs cry out for the development of a united struggle. However, this fact alone does not automatically create such a conference. Therefore our comrades, with very limited financial resources, have been waging an uphill battle to lay the basis of a campaign for the conference.

This work, together with the changing relationship of the working class to their old leaderships, is now bearing fruit. Our comrades in Durban and Namibia brought reports to our executive committee meeting in London on 12-13 May showing the possibilities of making the principle into a reality, and, whilst in Britain they were able to discuss with members of the African Liberation Support Campaign who can take the campaign for the conference to other countries on the continent.

From South Africa: When the African National Congress (ANC)—South African Communist Party (SACP) formed a government in 1994, workers and poor people in South Africa thought that this would mean the end of apartheid and the implementation of socialist policies. But this government is bringing in wholesale privatisation of public, social and health services; apartheid remains in the schools; there are laws against the trade unions; 50 per cent of the people are unemployed and there

is no unemployment or social benefits.

Our comrade brought news of the effects of the widespread disillusionment now sweeping through the mass of the people and the beginnings of alternative organisations to represent their interests. Local campaigns are springing up in every township against the high cost of water, electricity

arisen in another Durban township, Umlazi. An old waste dump has been put underground with a playing field on top, but there is smoke coming out of the ground and the people fear for the health and safety of themselves and particularly their children.

Underlying the people's problems is the wholesale privatisation being legislated by

There is also discontent among hospital workers. One supervisor, also formerly ANC, in the Port Elizabeth hospital has resigned. She said that the nurses were having to bring in food for the patients and very often there is no electricity. The government boasts that it will install toilets for the people. But the people say "what is the point of giving us toilets when we live in shacks? We don't just want toilets. We want proper homes with toilets!" In the struggles against apartheid, workers, led by their shop stewards, brought forward the Workers' Charter based on socialist demands as opposed to the reformist People's Charter proposed by the ANC. The ANC-SACP did everything to deter the campaign for this, but there was a widespread discussion throughout the trade union rank-and-file. Our member who was in the leadership of the campaign for this Workers' Charter was expelled from COSATU and a leading full-time official of that confederation was sacked from his job. Nevertheless when the first post-apartheid elections were held in 1994 our comrade, Bongani Mkhungo, stood with this Workers Charter as his policy and he received 5,600 votes.

We can now see that this Workers Charter is at the centre of all the struggles coming up against the pro-capitalist policies of the ANC-SACP government, and we propose that it should be at the centre of the campaign for the All-Africa Conference bringing in all the township campaigns, concerned groups and socialist organisations. Meetings to discuss this have been arranged.

In Namibia our comrades are engaged in developments which could benefit communities throughout Africa. The homeless struggle, and particularly the direct action of a group of women had eventual-

ly resulted in the municipality handing over a plot of land for the development of co-operative housing.

Engineers, surveyors and building workers are being mobilised for the project. They are encouraged that, through their co-operative efforts, they are part of a scheme to house the homeless. A survey, which usually costs £12,000 was done for a mere £1,600. Whereas the government offers houses at £20,000 each with a bond repayment at 20 per cent per annum, the housing co-operative is building 80 square metre houses for £5,000 each using a building method developed in Sweden. On this first plot there will be 43 houses. News of this development is spreading throughout the population. People are demanding an extension of the scheme. Organised workers are calling for co-operative housing schemes to be set up in their place of work. Once completed this scheme will be a blueprint for housing throughout Namibia and throughout the continent, but — with governments promoting the interests of the multinational building, and building supply companies — a big fight for the principle of cheap and accessible housing is expected.

This extension of big business and privatisation throughout the country, encroaching on the traditional rights of the people, is leading to the further impoverishment of communities. For instance in Luderitz there is an abundance of fish, but whereas the multinational fishery companies can exploit the seas, the locals are not permitted to catch more than two crayfish a day. Poverty is driving people into the centre looking for work but unemployment is rife.

Namibian workers are facing the denial of basic trade union and social rights when employed in the government's enterprise zones (EPZ) where

these rights do not apply, and workers can be "made redundant" very easily. Trade union leaderships, collaborating with the government, are proving to be a deadweight on the workers. So much so that shop stewards and leading socialist activists have signed a report and petition with demands for the proper implementation of the Labour Laws which are mandatory on the government, but which are being waived on many occasions. (see report in WIP issue 30, April 2001). Signatories of this petition now include students and nurses etc.

In the university a students' Socialist Youth League has been registered and has already run into trouble with the authorities through its fight to defend students threatened with expulsion over non-payment of fees. On 1 May there was a meeting at the university which brought together students and trade union shop stewards. Discussions ranged over labour issues, the educational crisis, housing and the necessity for a socialist party. Tribalism remains a problem in Namibia, and discussion at the meeting led to a decision to write a pamphlet on this subject. There was also a decision to join hands with the homeless to protest to the municipality and the housing parastatal with demands on land availability with some facts and figures about the government's high cost of housing as opposed to the cheap and good housing provided by the co-op.

This meeting was seen as the first of others in the future. Just as in South Africa — the central question of preparing the All-Africa Conference is understood to be bringing together the community, youth and factory struggles. People are engaged on a daily basis for survival. It is now necessary to develop a socialist plan and a united practical programme of struggle



### Homeless campaigners in Namibia have forced the municipality to hand over land for the development of co-operative housing

and land rates. There are also environmental campaigns, and struggles over the privatisation of hospitals. In the local elections in Durban at the end of last year there were 23 independent candidates — most of them former ANC members. This caused considerable consternation in the ANC-SACP and they carried out a campaign to confuse the township people. But the numbers at their meetings dwindled and many people refused to even cast a vote. Only one of the independents was elected, but he is backed up by an important environmental campaign. In his township there is a chemical pipe under the houses, which is causing pollution, skin cancer and skin problems.

A similar problem has

the government. The response to an article written by our comrade and published in the Soweto Times showed how far the new organisations have developed. He was visited by 18 campaign organisers from townships — some as far afield as 400 kms. Most of them were former ANC organisers and they wanted to discuss our joint efforts. A meeting on 1 May revealed that these campaigns are definitely anti-capitalist in character and they are gaining ground. In one township there was a meeting of 500 people to protest at the high cost of water. The authorities cynically accuse people of having 'a culture of non-payment', but in fact the water charges are so high that most cannot afford them.

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## Education crisis in South Africa

by **Bhekithemba Reuben Zondo**  
Durban, Umlazi Durban Socialist Youth Organiser

Firstly, I would like to congratulate those masses who participated in commemoration of the Sharpville, South Africa, heroes of 21 March 1960 Anti-Passlaws massacre on human Rights Day (21 March 2001) where 69 people were mowed down and 200 left maimed. Up to date the government has not fulfilled the promises made by African National Congress(ANC) before the first 1994 Democratic South African elections.

The injured participants were promised reparations and were made to fill in numerous forms for a special

pension. So far for nothing tangible has been done.

Coming back to education, the South African Education System is still in a shambles and nothing has been improved since the new government took over. The government should do more than talking, the promises must be turned into action.

People should now come out in numbers and protest about the standard of education we are facing. Everybody knows that education is integral for each and every child's well being worldwide. Children are still roaming the street here. Where is the free education we were promised?

The Minister of Education and Culture, Mr Kader Asmall, should undertake drastic changes to save the

youth. It was appalling to see on television how schools in the small areas suffer. The lessons are still conducted under the trees even without desks to write on.

One of the school principals in the Eastern Cape appeared on South African Broadcasting Co-operation channel 1 (SABC) 7:30 pm. news saying that she had, a hundred times, asked for an assistance from the Education Department for the provision of new extended classrooms but up to no avail. She, with her staff and members of the community voluntarily pleaded with a certain bus company to give them old used buses. They only got two and converted them into classrooms. In the same area a learner could not longer attend the school

as the school is as 30km away from home so he had to quit because of that distance on foot. The time for government to act is now, not tomorrow. It must be born in mind that the youth (learners) played a significant role in changing the powers that oppressed us. To improve education especially to us Africans the government should:

- Make facilities available to indigenous schools. Our education is still far behind. The educators and learners are victims of the new education system of redeployment because of the so-called "abundance" of education.

- Make sure that each and every school receives stationery in good time.



# Lenin's 'Imperialism'

## A study by Mitchell Van Wyk, WRP Namibia — today!

**In order to understand imperialism as a possible theory of development, one has to look at how imperialism came about, the forms it took and what it might hold in for modern society. Lenin describes imperialism as the highest stage of imperialism as having five basic features:**

- the concentration of production and capital develop to such a stage, giving rise to monopolies;

- there is a merging of bank capital with industrial capital creating finance capital which gave rise to a financial oligarchy.

- Further there is an export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities.

- Then there is a formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world amongst themselves.

- Lastly, there prevails a situation whereby the territorial division of the world amongst the biggest capitalist powers is complete.

Through this one might just see how this whole concept of unequal development which prevails today has come about. The stage in which finance capital reigns has brought about great rivalry for more possession of land territory and the means of production, so much so that war has been haunting the past century as illustrated by World Wars I and II, etc.

**This imperialist stage in which destruction and crisis reigns is a reflection of the decay of capitalism.**

To begin to understand how monopolies came about we need to look at how production is grouped into a single enterprise of different branches of industry.

From free competition of industries, the rise of concentration of production occurs which in turn leads to monopoly.

Referring to such a situation, in 1904 in the USA, 1,900 large scale industries out of 216,180 had an output of one million dollars and over, having 1,400,000 workers in their employ.

In 1909, 3 060 large scale enterprises out of 268,491 had an output of 9,000,000,000 out of 20,700,000,000. They had 2,000,000 out of 6,600,000 workers in their employ. It was basically the same situation in Germany.

These monopolies take control of industry after industry, but this occurs mainly in the raw material industry as against the manufacturing of goods industry.

It is significant to note that these monopolies rose in particular after crises struck the Western world. In the period of 1860-70, with the development of free competition, monopoly was still in its embryonic stage. After the 1873 crisis — the stock exchange crash — the development of cartels came about.

With the boom at the end of the 19th century and the 1900-1903 crisis, cartels became one of the foundations of economic life. This is also the

period when capitalism entered its imperialist stage. These cartels are economically powerful today as they were in the early years of their development.

I am referring here to a South African diamond cartel, De Beers, which was formed in 1930 by a mine operator. The 1930s marks the crisis of the depression. De Beers handles over 80 percent of the world's yearly production of diamonds, and has done so for decades.

**The latest UN report states that there are 140 million officially unemployed people in the world of which 10 percent of this is found in Asia alone, a stark reality of the 1997 money collapse in that area.**

Like all cartels they have ways to manipulate the industry. They stock diamonds of all kinds. Thus when a producer attempts to sell diamonds outside the cartel, they flood the market with the same type of diamond.

They are involved in both mining and wholesaling of diamonds. In wholesaling, De Beers sell diamonds in boxes of assorted diamonds, you either take the whole box or nothing.

If a weak market exists for a certain size of diamond, they can reduce the number of those diamonds offered in the boxes thus making them more scarce.

They spend a hundred and ten million dollars annually on advertising with which they can influence the direction of final demand for diamonds. These are but some of the methods used by cartels for their own gain.

The banks are no exception, for they too become monopolies after a concentration into a small few. The smaller banks are taken up by the bigger ones who make these small banks their branches. At the end they have a combined deposit running over seven million marks as was the case in Germany during the period 1907-13.

Though this the banks are able to cover the whole country, centralising all capital and revenues. Lenin describes this as a single national capitalist which leads to a world capitalist economy. This new stage in capitalism, monopoly, takes due to historical development a new form.

**capitalism in its imperialist stage cannot but cause continuous crisis and inequality in the world.**

This is particularly illustrated when banks and industry merge. This happens when banks issue shares and bonds to industrial companies. Bank directors are appointed who concern themselves with particular branches of industry and the opposite where industrial bosses take up bank directorships is also another indication of this merger.

With capitalism in its monopolistic stage and the merger of banks and industry, the financial oligarchy develops. Financial capital emerges due to the link between banks and industry. This financial capital is controlled by the banks and employed only by the industries. We see thus that with the development of monopolies there is a move away from production capital, i. e. the production of commodities, and a move towards finance capital.

The finance oligarchies gain power through the strengthening of small-scale production by forming sub-companies or daughter companies under the main company. This is done through a process called the 'holding system'. As finance capital develops financial oligarchy, high profits are made through the issuing of bonds and through speculation in particular on land.

With these capitalist countries now holding big amounts of capital, they start to export this capital. They export capital to the backward countries which have already been drawn into capitalism, where conditions for industrial development has already been created. It is further marked by the development of railway systems in the colonial countries. In 1914 Britain's capital investment abroad amounted to £75-100 million as against £3. 6 million in 1862. Here in these foreign countries they seek to dominate financially and increase their profits.

One way of exporting capital or to provide loans to a country is to make sure that part of that loan is spent on buying commodities which include amongst others war materials from the creditor country.

Through this the development of capitalism in the debtor countries is influenced and accelerated. Bank branches are set up in the colonies as an indication of the rate at which finance capital extends across the world.

**The 15 richest people in the world have more money than the combined gross domestic products (GDP's) of 48 of Africa's poorest countries.**

One interesting situation is that in present-day Namibia, financial institutions, building societies, etc. are South African, which in turn are European-owned. The First National Bank in Namibia, for example, which changed to that name in the late 1980s, was first called Barclays Bank and still operates under that name in England today.

The monopolies from the different capitalist countries compete against each other. They take control of whole industries and agree on who will supply what part of the world with commodities.

This stage of finance capital thus also marks the period of colonisation. Here the struggle for territorial division of the world begun amongst the powers during the period 1860-70.

After 1876, colonial possession

increased from an area of 40 million square km to an area of 65 million square km in 1914, for the six biggest powers. There is also a great unevenness in the rate of expansion of colonial possession amongst the powers. This could be due to uneven development of monopoly and therefore finance capital amongst them.

The new stage of finance capital strives to seize as large areas of land as possible. The colonisers compete against each other to prevent one another from developing and monopolising industry in the colonies. Through the export of capital it is easy to employ monopolistic methods in the colonies.

**What, then, is this stage of imperialism?**

Lenin describes it as having the following features. First monopoly formation, then the merging of banks and industry creating finance capital and giving rise to financial oligarchy. After this is the exporting of capital and the formation of international monopoly capitalist associations who share the world amongst themselves by dividing it amongst the big capitalist powers.

During this period they acquire highly developed means of transport, industry and trade as a result of the power of finance capital. With an uneven development of the means of production and ownership thereof we have a situation whereby these countries resort to war as has been seen by both world wars in the 20th century.

**In 1973 a new crisis arose which put an end to the post world war boom.**

Africa is a continent of straight-lined boundaries, this is the extent to which the imperialist powers went to carve up the continent amongst themselves for their own gain. After World War II the capitalist system experienced a boom which has mainly been brought about by the reconstruction of vast amounts of infrastructure. This is the level at which finance capital could rejuvenate industry, however short lived that may be.

After this war the US imperialists took control over more territory,

which previously belonged to their counterparts before the war.

In 1973 a new crisis arose which put an end to the post world war boom. This has been brought about by a limit in the production process because of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the limited capacity of the market.

The separation between production capital and finance capital becomes inherent to the nature of the system, then the division between the two leads to opposition and finance capital assumes an autonomous position and gains uncontrollable weight in relation to production.

This has exactly been what led to the 1997 crisis in Asia. Only this time the finance construction collapse and the surplus of finance has no value, it has become fictitious capital. Therefore capitalism in its imperialist stage cannot but cause continuous crisis and inequality in the world.

The latest UN report states that there are 140 million officially unemployed people in the world of which 10 percent of this is found in Asia alone, a stark reality of the 1997 money collapse in that area. It also reports that the 15 richest people in the world have more money than the combined gross domestic products (GDP's) of 48 of Africa's poorest countries.

Amidst all this, these imperialist nations still compete against each other for dominance but above all survival. This is evident by the continuous wars in Africa and elsewhere, the NATO bombings in the former Yugoslavia.

Even amidst the air raids over Bosnia and Kosova the imperialist countries made it clear that they will make finance available to rebuild the infrastructure they destroyed. This is done in an effort to rebuild capitalism in that former Eastern-bloc country.

**Therefore this imperialist stage in which destruction and crisis reigns is a reflection of the decay of capitalism.**

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# The International Network of Active Solidarity (INAS)

By Bob Archer

IN August 2000, four trade unions in the left bloc of the Brazilian CUT federation organised an international conference which founded the International Network of Active Solidarity. They established a co-ordinating committee in Latin America and took a decision to develop the committee in other parts of the world.

Workers' International has for a number of years worked for such a development and supports this initiative. We believe that it should be based on four principal aims:

- Trade Union independence of the state and of the employers
- Democracy in the trade unions
- Workers' internationalism
- A common international struggle against anti-trade union laws

Pages 4,5,6 and 7 of this issue of 'Workers International Press' contain striking documentation of the experiences of trade unionists in the former Yugoslavia, Spain and North America over recent months. Among the constant flow of information about workers' actions around the world, these particular texts stand out.

They illuminate a potential development in the workers' movement, a need to transcend the limitations of 'purely' trade union action on a mere-

ly local and sectional scale. They guide the attentive reader to a better understanding of what INAS could become and the scope its work could assume.

The Nezavisnost trade union federation in Serbia is an independent workers' organisation. The core of leaders who established it started over a decade ago by trying to 'reform' the bureaucratically-controlled trade unions that were an arm of the Yugoslav state. Rebuffed in this attempt, they set up their own independent union federation with the aim of securing legal rights and a recognised role in the Yugoslav federal constitution. They were determined that workers should play a role in running the workers' state! Instead they got the fanatically Serbian nationalist regime of Milosevic; a state of robbers, smugglers and armed thugs which stuffed the ranks of the official unions with its own yes-men; a regime which fomented war against the other regions of the former Yugoslavia and ethnic divisions between her citizens. Throughout all this Nezavisnost did what it could to hold aloft the best traditions of the workers' movement, celebrating 1 May as a workers' day, denouncing the regime's fanatical chauvinism and collaborating in initiatives to overcome the ethnic divisions between the regions of the former Yugoslavia.

Nezavisnost members participated in a conference of teachers' unions of the former Yugoslavia in the mid 1990s and in the international conference held by the miners' union of Bosnia Herzegovina in March 1998.

Along with other workers, Nezavisnost members played a decisive role in bringing Milosevic down last year (See 'Serbia: End of a nightmare', by Radoslav Pavlovic, WIP 27, October 2000).

As that article said, workers 'went into struggle, not for Kostunica, but against Milosevic'. It went on to point out: 'Under extremely cramped political and material conditions, Serbian workers have made a leap forward ... They have shown great heart, but in future they will need political intelligence, otherwise they will find themselves fighting for the interests of other parties and other classes, only to be disappointed in the end'.

The force of this warning was brought home earlier this year when the new, privatising, pro-market government in Serbia at very short notice enacted the kind of viciously anti-trade union legislation which is becoming only too familiar in the established capitalist states in the west.

Nezavisnost members face privatisation (with all its implications in the destruction of jobs and conditions)

and legal attacks on trades unions. (Cynical supporters of the Milosevic regime say 'we told you so', but refuse to account for the fact that this thoroughly discredited regime fell at the hands of workers). Longshoremen in North America face deregulation and the loss of union recognition. They face scabs being hired to undercut the union rate, police brutality on the picket line and vicious legal attacks on trade union organisers (see the detailed account by Jack Heyman, 'Solidarity with Charleston longshoremen', WIP 22, March 2000.) The more militant wing of US longshoremen has, through Jack Heyman 'gone public' to explain to workers everywhere the conservative limitations on struggle imposed by bureaucratic union leaders.

Nezavisnost has appealed to workers everywhere for solidarity in its struggle for independent trade unionism and legal trade union rights. Its engineering section has taken concrete steps to link up with Kossovian engineering workers. WIP makes no apology for printing the full and detailed report of the work of the joint Kossovian and Serbian delegation to Barcelona and Madrid earlier this year. In our view it is an exemplary case of international trade union solidarity in action.

No doubt sectarians will point to the links made with bourgeois parlia-

mentarians and the efforts aimed at applying pressure to the UN and other international bodies to achieve various goals in Kosova. Surely, such sceptics will say, these are capitalist bodies and the reliance these workers seem to be placing in them is a sign of inadequate political consciousness.

That may be: after decades of Stalinist rule, workers in eastern Europe undoubtedly labour under a number of illusions about life in capitalist society and undoubtedly have a number of experiences to make.

But these are trade unionists who are starting to unfold an ambitious campaign at every level, from the humanitarian to the frankly political, in order to achieve a tolerable life. And they are doing so in a conscious act of trade union solidarity and internationalism. The job of INAS should be to do everything possible to foster and consolidate this development. That includes making the closest possible links between workers in the former Soviet block and in the west in order to facilitate an exchange and assessment of information and experiences and practical acts of solidarity. For this reason we welcome the decision of the INAS committee of co-ordination in Latin America to hold a meeting in Barcelona. For INAS urgently needs to take amore organised form in Europe in order to face up to this task.

## In defense of trade union rights

# Nezavisnost appeals for help

THE INTERNATIONAL trade union movement is very well aware that Nezavisnost trade union confederation, as the only democratic, internationally recognised and the strongest trade union in Serbia, played an exceptionally important role in toppling Slobodan Milosevic's dictatorship and in starting the process of democratic reforms after 5 October.

Nezavisnost's strategy aimed at uniting the forces and efforts of all democratic, pro-reform actors in society (trade unions, political parties, NGOs, prominent intellectuals) in the struggle for the attainment of a common goal—a change of regime and democratic social and economic reforms.

Within this activity, in April 2000 Nezavisnost signed a Contract for a Democratic and Socially Just Serbia with 19 then democratic opposition parties. With their signature on this document, these parties undertook that, when they come into power, in developing and conducting their policy, they would take care of the economic, workplace and social interests of employees and that they would establish democratic social dialogue with trade unions about these issues.

Social dialogue is the achievement of present-day civilisation and international standards of labour law, set

**LAST October, massive protests, largely based on groups of organised workers, toppled the corrupt bureaucratic government of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia. The Nezavisnost trade union confederation played a major role in this development. In March this year, however, the new government showed its true character, side-lining the trade union movement in the adoption of a new and undemocratic series of labour laws. We print here the appeal Nezavisnost addressed to the world's trade union movement at the time.**

forth by International Labour Organisation conventions and other international legal documents. In spite of that, it has not been established in our country yet. On the contrary, by its method of work the government has actually marginalised trade unions. Instead of offering them comprehensive social dialogue and tripartite relations between social partners, it offered partial formal participation in the debate about less important issues.

Demands, initiatives and protests on the part of Nezavisnost in connection with such an attitude by the authorities and disrespect of trade unions as social partners have been forwarded to the government of Serbia and political parties within the

DOS coalition, but they have remained unanswered.

Nezavisnost has been extremely patient and tolerant of such behaviour by the authorities and as a result has been exposed to growing discontent and pressure from its own membership.

The upper limit of our patience and tolerance was exceeded when Nezavisnost learned from the press and from private sources that a parliamentary session has been scheduled where a set of 30 laws is to be adopted, most of which directly or indirectly refer to employees' workplace, economic and social rights.

As a protest, and with the demand that these bills be withdrawn from the agenda until the positions concerning



**Milan Nikolic (centre), leader of the engineering workers' section of Nezavisnost and vice-president of the whole confederation**

them have been harmonised through a dialogue with the trade unions, Nezavisnost decided to organise public protests in Belgrade and Nis, as well as a one-hour warning strike on 27 March — the scheduled start of the parliamentary session.

We expect that the international trade union public, international trade union organizations and trade unions of other countries, as so often in the past, will support the justified

demands and struggle of Nezavisnost members for the achievement of these demands.

Invoking the principle of international trade union solidarity, we also expect that you will demand from the governments of your countries and international institutions to intercede with the government of Serbia to respect trade union freedoms and rights and establish democratic social dialogue with trade unions.



# Ex Yugoslav unionists' tour great success

**Monday 26 March:** Abrazi and Todic participated in a north-south solidarity conference organised by the Pau i Solidaritat foundation. Other participants included the general secretary of the CCOO in Catalonia, Joan Coscubiela, and the president of Pau i Solidaritat, Jordi Ribo. In the afternoon they made presentations to a workshop on the Balkans which included engineering workers and miners in the CCOO union and Mr Serge Bouschet, a representative of Alpha Consulting. This company is carrying out a study of the Trepcina mining and industrial complex in the Mitrovica region of Kosovo. In the evening Abrazi and Todic were guests at a welcome dinner.

**Tuesday 27 March:** In the morning the visitors met Sra. Elisabeth of the Catalan Co-operation fund to discuss arrangements for the tour and future co-operation. They then had an interview with the president of the Catalan Parliament, Joan Rigol, where they discussed government and trade union approval for immigration and arranged mutual contact between Chambers of Commerce in the various countries. They also met the CiU, PSC and IC-V political groups in the Catalan Parliament, represented by parliamentary deputies Hinojosa, Rane and Lopez Bulla. The deputies were asked to put pressure on the new democratic government of Serbia to respect and recognise trade unions and on the institutions of the international community to put into practice in Kosovo a labour code and legal protection for workers that already exist on paper but are simply not implemented. In the afternoon the visitors had a meeting with Barcelona city councillor Jesus Maestro, about how the council could help Balkan trade unionists to organise meetings and publish their press. Councillor Maestro is responsible for co-operation and development. Later Senor Forradellas of the IC-V group joined the meeting. In the evening a rally and debate was organised in Torrelles de Llobregat organised by the city council, involving various councillors and the mayoress, Isabel Gimeno.

**Wednesday 28 March:** Activities in Girona city. In the morning, the visitors made a presentation to a CCOO solidarity conference, alongside trade unionists from the CGT in France, the CUT in Brazil, the CUTH in Honduras and the CTA in Argentina. In the afternoon there was a joint UGT and CGT rally at the UGT's headquarters. Members of both unions attended and there was a debate about the position of trade unions in Kosovo and Serbia.

**Thursday 29 March:** In the morning activity in the Bajo Llobregat industrial area, with a visit to the CELSA foundry works in Castellbisbal as guests of the CCOO group there, including a courtesy visit to the works council. Later there was a visit to the Martorell automobile plant,

**BETWEEN 26 March and 3 April 2001, Hasan Abrazi, president of the engineering workers' union of Kosovo SPMK and Aleksandar Todic, secretary of the engineering workers' section of the Serbian Nezavisnost trade union, carried out a joint tour in and around Barcelona and Madrid. The tour was arranged by a joint committee. Participants in the organising committee included the: Pau i Solidaritat foundation of the CCOO union, the Josep Comaposada foundation of the UGT union, the CGT union and the Ayuda Obrera Balcanes NGO. The Catalan section of the tour was supported by the Catalan Fund for Co-operation and Development (FCCD) and Barcelona city council. The Peace Now NGO and the solidarity department of the United Left were responsible for organising and co-ordinating with trade unions in Madrid. The following text is an edited translation of a report by ALFONS BECH of Ayuda Obrera Balcanes.**

meeting representatives of the CCOO, UGT and CGT on the works council. At midday, the visitors had a working lunch with the leadership of the UGT in Catalonia, including among others general secretary Pepe Alvarez, president of the Josep Comaposada foundation Francisco Neira and international co-ordinator Jaume Llanso. In the evening there were speeches and discussion at a civic rally attended by 150 citizens of Cotxeres de Sants hosted by councillor Jesus Maestro.

**Friday 30 March:** In the morning, the two visitors met with Anna

with immigrants occupying the Mathematical University, followed by participation in their rally. Later that afternoon there was a civic rally and question and answer session at the headquarters of Peace Now, also involving university professor, journalist and author of a number of books on the Balkans, Carlos Taibo. In the evening there was a solidarity dinner with typical Balkan dishes.

**Sunday 1 April:** At noon, there was a visit to the SINTEL workers' camp, with a mutual exchange of information between the Kosovar and Serbian trade unionists on the one

there was a meeting with representatives of the presidium of the United Left, including MEP Pedro Marset, senator Manuel Camera, Denche Shell (secretary for social movements) and international co-ordinator Jose Navas. In the afternoon there was a round table involving, besides Hasan Abazi and Aleksandar Todic, Julio Rodriguez of Peace Now, Gloria de Pascual of the CGT, Javier Doz of the CCOO, Manuel Camera of the United Left and Alfons Bech of CCOO and Ayuda Obrera Balcanes.

**Tuesday 3 March:** A noon meeting in Barcelona with the host organisa-



Balletbo, president of the Olof Palme foundation, to discuss and plan work and co-operation in the immediate future. At midday a visit to the Unidad Hermetica de Sabadell, a factory in the Valles industrial district producing electric motors. Here there was an interview with representatives of the works committee. In the afternoon the tour proceeded to the Bages district, with a visit to the CREMSA automobile components plant and a rally in Manresa organised by engineering workers and miners in the CGT. That night Abrazi and Todic set off for Madrid.

**Saturday 31 March:** In the morning they met with the secretary of the engineering workers' union and young engineering workers in Madrid. At midday, they had lunch

hand and the president of the CCOO, UGT and CGT works council on the other, directly dealing with certain effects of privatisation and globalisation. In the evening there was a dinner with CCOO and UGT representatives.

**Monday 2 April:** There was a joint meeting with CCOO and UGT at the latter's headquarters. CCOO representatives included, among others, international co-ordinator Javier Doz and Paz y Solidaridad foundation president Gracia Santos, a leading engineering worker. The UGT was represented by, among others, international co-ordinator Manuel Bonmati, UGT foundation representative Gloria de Pascual and the international representative of the engineering workers' section. At midday

## Nezavisnost members urgently need equipment for their union offices and the means to keep in touch with members and local branches

tions drew up a brief summary and assessment of the tour and arising from it established guidelines for continued help in rebuilding trade unions in the Balkans. The meeting basically identified three areas where work needed to be prepared and developed:

**1** Institutional, arising from meetings with the Catalan parliament and deputies and senators of the Spanish parliament, as well as members of the European parliament. They should exert pressure through these bodies on the Serbian government to start a social dialogue with the trade unions, and at the same time on UNMIK (the UN-created organ which administers Kosovo) to enact labour legislation in Kosovo and Serbia in accordance with the

internationally-recognised norms of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). They should also apply pressure to encourage the economic development of these countries and their trade and commerce and foster investment plans with the knowledge and backing of the trade unions in the countries in question.

**2** Co-operation in specific aid projects by foundations, city councils, regional governments, etc., building on work already started by the Catalan co-operation fund and Barcelona city council. The aim is to be to rebuild trade unions throughout the Balkans in three ways:

- Organising an annual meeting in Barcelona of trades unionist from all over the Balkans to act as a Balkan forum to encourage mutual co-operation between the unions, peace and multi-culturalism. There are sound civic, social, cultural and political reasons for helping to solve one of the most serious conflicts in the Mediterranean region definitively and peacefully, so that all armies can be withdrawn from the zone and civil society can play an effective role.
- Trade union training and education of groups of trade unionists in the Balkan countries, starting with Serbia and Kosovo. Mr. Aleksandar Todic of Nezavisnost to send detailed proposals, including a budget, for three-day courses involving two or three union training officers.
- To help communication and the passage of information between trade unions and their branches, and also co-operation and the flow of information between trade unions, a subsidy for trade union journals which agree to publish a Balkan supplement open to all of them.

**3** Last but not least a direct campaign of solidarity in order to collect money in factories, trade-union branches, meetings, etc., so that workers and their unions can join in rebuilding the trade union infrastructure needed by their comrades in the territories of the former Yugoslavia along the lines stated during the tour: computers, mobile phones, faxes, telephones, various means of propaganda, and premises. The committee will organise an appeal on all these points to be sent to engineering workers' branches, starting with the factories visited during the tour. The campaign of direct solidarity has started during the tour itself. The CCOO branch at CELSA foundry handed over 250,000 pesetas to each of the participating unions and Torrelles de Llobregat city council 50,000 pesetas. The committee expects that there will be a certain financial response to this campaign throughout the whole Spanish state by the summer.

# ILA President attacks militant longshoremen

## 'Confusion and reservations' about 'Workers' Coalition'

To: ILA Membership  
From: John Bowers, President  
Re: Charleston Five

### Dear Sisters and Brothers

All of us are aware of the courageous and valiant efforts made by our fellow members of the International Longshoremen's Association, AFL-CIO, in the port of Charleston S. C. last January when they engaged in a protest against Nordana Lines after the company hired non-union workers to replace them. Led by members of Charleston ILA Local 1422, this peaceful protest was disrupted and turned violent when more than 600 riot police began using clubs and tear gas against our membership.

The ugly aftermath of this confrontation between ILA members and police is that five of those protestors, now known as the Charleston Five, are facing criminal charges in relation to the protest.

Much has been written about the International's response and assistance to the Charleston Five so I want to clarify the events of the past 14 months and our plans to aid these brave ILA members.

When Nordana Lines first made the wrong decision to replace ILA members' jobs with scab labor, I held a series of meetings with officials from the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) in London, including David Cockcroft, General Secretary; Kees Marges, Dockers' Section Secretary and David Cotton, Secretary, Special Seafarers' Department.

The ITF is a worldwide labor organization representing more than six million transport workers in 78 countries. I serve as one of three Vice Presidents from North America and

**This letter from John Bowers, President of the International Longshoremen's Association, (ILA) was originally distributed in March, it later appeared on the front page of an undated International Longshoremen's Association News Report Special Issue in April.**

am Chairman of the worldwide Dockers' Section.

I traveled to London personally to ask ITF leadership to generate and promote International labor solidarity for the striking ILA members in Charleston to negotiate a settlement with the ILA. These meetings were successful as negotiations soon commenced with Nordana Lines and Benny Holland, President South Atlantic and Gulf District and Kenneth Riley, President ILA Local 1422. A successful contract was negotiated and the strike was ended.

It is sad to report that the ending of this labor dispute did not result in complete peace in the Port of Charleston. The Charleston Five still face a criminal trial which is set to begin shortly.

Shortly after the riots and arrest of the Charleston Five, ILA Local 1422 established a Dockers' Defense Fund in January 2000, to which I immediately made a personal contribution.

The Charleston Five committee requested a contribution from the International. The matter was studied carefully by our International's General counsel office who advised us that the ILA treasury could not be used for the Charleston Five legal defense fund.

I wish this was not the case, but no matter how justified the cause may be, Robert Gleason, ILA Secretary Treasurer and I am ultimately responsible for protecting the ILA membership's treasury.

Still, the ILA in the Port of Charleston can be certain that your International intends to rally behind the Charleston Five with all means — financial and otherwise — available to us. Last week, the ILA Executive Council approved the creation of an Educational Fund called IDEA [International Dockers Educational Association], which will be used to publicize the plight of the Charleston Five and organize nationwide and worldwide support for them.

I am compelled to comment here about an organization, the Workers' Coalition, because this organization has solicited contributions for the Charleston Five from labor organizations in the United States and around the world. The International Executive Council, joined by the Executive of the Atlantic Coast and South Atlantic and Gulf Coast voted unanimously at separate meetings last week to condemn this body. This action was precipitated by the leadership of the Workers' Coalition taking

the International to Federal Court objecting to results of two case decisions made by your elected representatives.

The first challenged decision was made by the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast District regarding eligibility to run for office, a decision which was affirmed by the International. The second involved the suspension of an ILA local officer for using the ILA's registered logo to solicit contributions for the Workers' Coalition, after charges were brought against him by a brother member of that local.

After the International affirmed this local's action to suspend this officer, (he) filed a Federal lawsuit against your International. As far as I am concerned, the Workers' Coalition is trying to operate as a union within a union. It will not work and I am grateful the International Executive Council and our two District Boards supported this position.

John Sweeney, the president of AFL-CIO, on whose Executive Council I am honored to serve, contacted me over concerns he and the Federation had about the Workers' Coalition and its appeals for help. He and the leadership of other AFL-CIO affiliated unions were concerned

whether their contributions were earmarked for the Charleston Five or the Workers' Coalition.

The ITF has also expressed both confusion and reservations about the Workers' Coalition and their appeals for contributions. In fact, the ITF recently instructed the International Longshore and Harbor Workers Union [ILWU] to direct its request for support of the Charleston Five through the office of the President of ILA.

I am announcing the creation of the ILA Defense fund, a fund to be managed by the International and for the benefit of the Charleston Five. I will be making appeals to ILA members and labor organizations in the United States and throughout the world to make voluntary personal contributions — not union treasury money — to the ILA Defense Fund, through the ILA.

Your ILA International and I have not been silent or inactive in rendering support for the Charleston Five, contrary to comments such as the ones made by Jack Heyman of the ILWU.

In a recent internet newsletter piece, Mr. Heyman described me as the only weak link in the Charleston Five defense campaign. This is an ugly and false statement. The ILA is continuing to call upon worldwide labor, business and government contacts — developed and strengthened over decades — to bring a successful conclusion, with justice and honor, to the wrongly accused Charleston Five.

I hope this letter clearly demonstrates our position in this matter.

I thank you for your continued support.

Faternally,

John Bowers, President

## Bangladesh clothing workers fight to get paid

From Amirul Haque Amin, General Secretary, National Garments Workers Federation of Bangla Desh

Challenger is a small garment factory in New Eskaton Road, Dhaka. A hundred and ten employees work there. Last month there were 3 months monthly salary and 6 months overtime outstanding.

Management committed themselves five times to pay the outstanding wages and overtime payments, but did not carry out their promises.

On 25 April the workers carried out a sit-in strike in the factory. Then there was a written agreement between the workers and management in the presence of a police officer from Ramna police station that management would pay on 2 May.

At 5pm on 2 May management refused to pay the outstanding wages. The workers blockaded the factory and the manager. Finally on 5 May management paid a part of the out standing payment and promised to pay the rest "soon".



There was no union at Challenger garments, but National Garments Workers Federation have some member there. NGWF have supported the Challenger garment workers' movement and co-operated with them.

## Privatisation threat to Austrian railways

THE Austrian government has taken a big step towards breaking up and privatising the state-owned railway network by appointing a new director general for the system.

Ruediger vorm Walde was put in charge of the Berlin Transport Company in 1992 and has since then cut the number of employees by half. Berlin transport workers now work for different companies and as a consequence have suffered wage cuts.

The city's transport system is nevertheless still working at a loss.

Vorm Walde will be asked to do a similar number on the OeBB, the Austrian state railways. The plan is to 'unbundle' the business. Passenger and goods services will be hived off and track-maintenance and infrastructure will be carried out by a separate company.

Liberalisation of rail traffic under EU regulations means that private transport firms will be able to make a killing by offering goods and passenger services on the railway system. The state meanwhile

will maintain the infrastructure, track, signalling, stations, etc. for their benefit out of the public purse.

Breaking the system up will also enable the employers to attack working conditions and wage agreements achieved by railway workers through long years of struggle.

Fighting the privatisation of public services and nationalised industries is a vital issue for workers in many countries. Often workers in a particular industry in a particular country have difficulty in finding a way to mobilise action and support on this question.

The International Network of Active Solidarity should devote considerable attention to the struggle against privatisation, collaborating with all initiatives which aim to strengthen an international campaign on this question and carefully evaluating the experiences of workers and communities who take up the fight to protect jobs, conditions and services.



## Open letter to ILA President John Bowers

# Setting the record straight

May 7, 2001

Dear Mr. Bowers:

From the beginning of the Charleston longshore struggle you have been silent. Now, your first public statement, your self-serving letter of March 28, 2001 to the ILA membership, appears full of slanders, distortions and omissions.

Most ominously, by attacking union activists who are doing the yeoman's work in the Charleston 5 defense campaign, your letter undermines the very labor defense which it claims to support.

To those who walked the picket line in Charleston in the face of a massive police mobilization, you recklessly impugn base motives and deceptive practices, while sitting in the luxury of your office in New York's financial district.

Clearly, the intent of your letter is to undermine this growing workers' defense campaign and whitewash your inaction.

As a rank-and-file working longshoreman active in the Charleston 5 campaign, I feel compelled to set the record straight.

You objected to my characterization of you in my Bay Area defense campaign report of March 7, 2001, as the one "weak link" in the struggle. Yet, as president of the largest maritime union in North America, you refused a request from the embattled Charleston longshoremen to appeal to ILA locals and to other unions for financial contributions to their legal expenses.

By your own admission, for 14 months you did nothing to aid the defense campaign except make a personal financial donation (of \$1,000) out of an annual salary totaling nearly \$300,000. Your indefensible conduct is consistent with your betrayal of the strike by ILA's defeated but determined Domino sugar workers and the raid against UNITE grocery store workers, both in New York City.

From the beginning you've hidden behind your lawyers' sought and paid-for "advice" that the "ILA treasury could not be used for the Charleston Five legal defense fund.

"How is it that International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) members voted to contribute tens of thousands of dollars immediately and continue to do so?"

Proudly, rank-and-file members of the ILWU have walked the picket line in Charleston; organized defense committees to prepare for an international day of solidarity action with the Charleston Five; enlisted trade union support from our AFL-CIO Labor Councils; held fundraiser and educational events; galvanized international longshore support; had our officers send protest letters to Charles Condon, (the South Carolina State Attorney General); for over one year we've had articles published regularly in our newspaper, "The Dispatcher", informing our membership as the Charleston struggle has developed; invited Ken Riley, ILA Local 1422 president, to address our

union meetings, Caucuses and Convention.

Where have you and all the resources of the ILA International been? And when in the last 15 months have you been to Charleston to show your support? Will you be in Columbia, South Carolina on June 9th for the Charleston 5 rally? You claim credit for securing an agreement for the Charleston locals last April, along with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), with Nordana shipping lines, one of the culprits.

Yet, you omit the fact that Nordana was reluctant to negotiate and sign a contract until after the Coordinadora dockworkers' union of Spain, affiliated to the International Dockworkers' Council, boarded the

ly-fallen. It's time to take your head out of the sand. This is a global problem! The exemplary stand by our Coordinadora brothers in Spain shows how we can successfully defend our unions against attacks from these multinationals with solidarity actions. Charleston can be the starting point.

Obviously, you've got a political axe to grind against the Longshore Workers' Coalition, a group of ILA members and officials in the U. S. and Canada who are critical of your policies and who have been supportive of the Charleston longshore workers struggle.

Unfortunately, two members of the Coalition have sued the ILA in court. They claim that if union democracy prevailed in the ILA, they

against the Charleston 5. However, you don't uphold that labor principle and are just using these two court suits as a hammer against the Longshore Workers' Coalition.

Clearly, political differences must be set aside to defend the ILA and the labor movement as a whole. As we say in the ILWU, "An injury to one is an injury to all." You charge that the Longshore Workers' Coalition has appealed to labor organizations for contributions to the Charleston 5. Then, without documentation and by mentioning the ITF and John Sweeney, you suggest by innuendo that donations may have gone to the Longshore Workers' Coalition instead of the

finances and publicity of the defense campaign in order to strangle it because a victory for the Charleston 5 would be an embarrassment to you and a vindication of your critics. All contributions should continue to be sent directly to the Dockworkers' Defense Fund in Charleston at the same address as ILA Local 1422.

You also disrespectfully and falsely state that the ITF "recently instructed the International Longshore and Harbor (sic) Workers Union (ILWU) to direct its support of the Charleston Five" to you. As president of the only other longshore union in North America, you should be able to state ILWU's name correctly.

As you well know, we took the name International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union when we left the ILA in 1937 because of a lack of union democracy and representation, a development that grew out of the militant 1934 West Coast Maritime Strike.

We affiliated to the then-militant Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). We've recently changed our name to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union to reflect the increased composition of women in our union. Moreover, neither the ITF nor any organization "instructs" the ILWU. The ILWU's instructions come from the rank and file through the decisions voted by democratically-elected delegates to Longshore Caucuses and Conventions.

The Charleston longshore defense campaign has forged a closer bond between the rank and file of the ILWU and the ILA. At our last Longshore Caucus in March, ILA General Vice President Benny Holland thanked the ILWU for all it has done in support of the Charleston 5. He went on to say, "We work the same carriers. We work for the same stevedores. Separately, I think, they can play one against the other. They can take us on. But if we put our heads together, they can't do that. If we can shut them down from Maine to Texas and from Seattle to L. A. or San Diego ... then we've got them." Riley concurred with those sentiments wholeheartedly.

At the same Caucus we voted to assess our members \$2 a month for the Charleston Five defense fund and most significantly, voted for a day of international solidarity actions—in conjunction with the ILA, the IDC and the ITF—in ports around the world on the first day of the trial. The Charleston 5 face apartheid-like court-imposed conditions, being under house arrest from 7 P. M. to 7 A. M.

Mr. Bowers, the eyes of the world's waterfront are on you. Will you join with us in calling for the ILA to participate in this international day of solidarity action?

**Victory to the Charleston 5!**

**Jack Heyman**



Above: demonstration in support of the sacked Liverpool dockers in the UK.

*'Union busting, casualisation and privatisation are wreaking havoc. This is a global problem.'*

M/V Skodsborg to tell the Captain that they weren't going to handle scab-loaded cargo from Charleston. Meanwhile, Nordana ships, loaded by the same scab labor in Charleston, were being worked by ILA locals in US ports, in part because you didn't really back the struggle, calling it a "local issue".

No, Mr. Bowers, maritime employers' union-busting attacks through contract evasion, casualization of the workforce, privatization of the docks are wreaking havoc not only in Charleston, but in New Orleans (where only half the longshore workers are unionized), Houston and Philadelphia.

Ports in Mexico, Britain and Brazil are only a short list of the most recent-

would never have resorted to court action. One suit is for the right of a union member, Ken Riley's brother Leonard, to run for union office and the other for the right of a union official to sign a letter, stating his union position for identification purposes only.

Using the big business-controlled government whether through the courts or the police to intervene in labor's internal affairs is neither a principled nor effective remedy.

If you were really opposed to government intervention against unions, then you would have written a letter to South Carolina State Attorney General Condon condemning the police attack on the picket line and demanding he drop the charges

Charleston 5. This slander, to the extent that anyone believes this hogwash, can only serve to fracture the unity and integrity of the defense campaign.

From the beginning, you've been an obstacle to support for the Charleston 5. Now, you've magnanimously decided to set up an ILA Defense Fund "for the benefit of the Charleston Five", controlled by you. Then, you belatedly created an Educational Fund called IDEA to publicize the plight of the Charleston Five ... months after AFL-CIO President John Sweeney initiated the Workers' Rights Campaign in South Carolina to assist in the defense of the Charleston longshoremen.

You seek to take over the



## The Irish Worker by John Steele

# The Peace process has solved nothing

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the election campaign in the north of Ireland for the eighteen seats at Westminster is how little excitement it is generating and how similar in style it is to the campaigns in Britain. Just a few years after the ending of the IRA's war which mobilised tens of thousands of nationalist youth and rocked the military, political and judicial structures of the British state there appears to be an acceptance of the peaceful, "democratic" methods of change. The speed of this transformation is largely due to the ease by which Sinn Fein was able to sell its electoral policy to a war-weary people. The "peace" process could only gain approval when the theory of the "long war" had run its course and the isolated and increasingly desperate tactics of the IRA were seen as bankrupt and manifestly unable to protect nationalists from the loyalist killer gangs.

After years of pronouncing that the six-county state was irreformable, today the Sinn Fein leaders are the staunchest supporters of the New Stormont—the constitutional apparatus for diverting the nationalist struggle and maintaining imperialist control in the six counties.

However, the election campaign and the posturing of the political leaders in the Stormont assembly give a totally false impression.

The situation is not like it is in Britain. Behind the shallow appearance of the pollsters and media pundits there is a deeply divided working class which is increasingly being pushed into ghettos where reactionary paramilitaries thrive.

Attacks by loyalist gangs on Catholic homes have intensified, particularly in different parts of Belfast and Antrim—some 1,600 people

have been forced from their homes since the Good Friday Agreement was signed.

And, of course, the residents of the Garvaghy Road in Portadown continue to suffer intimidation and physical attacks—recently around 150 supporters of the Orange Order blocked the lower part of the Garvaghy Road attacking cars and houses.

These and other volatile situations produce a highly unstable statelet in which the inherent contradictions of the "peace process" ensure that there is a series of political crises. And it also means that Britain can neither reduce its direct political role or withdraw its army.

The next major crisis has been signalled by the decision of David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and first minister in the Stormont executive, to give a post-dated letter of resignation to the speaker of the assembly.

A little over a year ago the British Labour government, with Peter Mandelson as secretary of state, suspended the assembly and re-introduced direct rule from Westminster. This possibility is again posed and again it is the issue of IRA decommissioning of weapons which is the immediate issue. Trimble's resignation will take effect on 1 July unless the IRA leadership begin to "initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put IRA arms beyond use in such a way as to avoid risk to the public and misappropriation by others and ensure maximum public confidence".

Trimble is well aware that there is no chance of the IRA complying with this. His immediate fear is that the growing anti-GFA feeling among Unionists could be translated into support for Ian Paisley's Democratic

Unionist Party at the polling booths and his resignation threat is a desperate bid to hold onto some vulnerable seats.

Whether Trimble grabs at some compromise or sticks to his threat and brings the executive down is immaterial to workers.

It makes no difference to their living conditions if capitalism is administered by the current "power-sharing" crowd at Stormont or by direct rule from London.

What we are seeing in this latest crisis, however, is another manifestation of the continuing break-up of Unionism. The political parties and ideology which maintained the repressive and discriminatory regime in the six counties since partition are in deep disarray.

This should be a great opportunity for anti-partitionists to make political capital, but as Unionism flounders who is regretting the situation the most? None other than Sinn Fein whose leadership is so far embedded in the administrative apparatus of Stormont that they are attempting to bolster up Trimble in order to save the administration.

Martin McGuinness lamented Trimble's resignation threat as "an absolute disaster" and expressed his deep disappointment because "we had hoped that, in the course of the election, Trimble would come out and bat for the Good Friday Agreement wholeheartedly ... I think the unionist people deserve better".

Many commentators are noting how, in this election, Sinn Fein and John Hume's Social Democratic and Labour Party are virtually indistinguishable. But, if anything, the former republicans have fitted more easily into their roles as functionaries of the capitalist state.

Whether it is closing emergency facilities in hospitals, denying the restoration of political status for republican prisoners, or going on junkets around the world pleading with big business to come and exploit the

Fein's capitulation has to a certain extent been responsible for the slow and hesitant growth of a socialist opposition. But this is beginning to take shape—inevitably in a fragmented manner.



The "power sharing" crowd. Former Republicans have fitted easily into their roles as functionaries of the capitalist state

Irish workers, Sinn Fein leaders have fitted smoothly into their government positions.

Perhaps one of their greatest crimes occurred last year when they promised that a Sinn Fein representative would visit the black activist and socialist Mumia Abu Jamal, currently on death row in the US, and publicise his case.

That visit was cancelled because Sinn Fein said that it was a critical time in the peace process and they did not want to cause a problem with the new president of the United States, George Bush.

The depth and speed of Sinn

Groups like the Republican Writers' Group, the Voice of the Lark, the Rebel City Collective in Cork, those around the Red Banner magazine and the Left Unity meetings, have begun the necessary debate on such issues as the nature of Republicanism and socialism.

This discussion is welcome and will inevitably lead to all-Ireland conferences and alliances which will pose the decisive question of what sort of movement is necessary, not only to challenge Sinn Fein and the other capitalist parties, but to smash partition and lead the working class to power.

### Following death of black patient

## Call for public enquiry

from: INQUEST campaign group

Last month, the jury at the inquest into the death of David 'Rocky' Bennett returned a verdict of "Accidental Death aggravated by Neglect".

Mr. Bennett, a 38-year-old Black man, was certified dead in the early hours of Saturday 31 October 1998. He had been a detained patient in the Norvic Clinic, a National Health Service medium secure unit, in Norwich (UK) for three years. His death followed an incident involving the use of restraint.

The Coroner conducting the inquest made six searching recommendations following the verdict. INQUEST particularly welcomes his emphasis on the need for national standards on restraint in psychiatric hospitals, and for staff to be proactive in dealing with incidents of racist behaviour by and against patients.

The family of Mr. Bennett, their lawyers and INQUEST are calling on the Government to consider holding a

public inquiry into Mr. Bennett's death, that can address the many systemic issues that arise including:

- institutional racism within the British National Health Service;
- the lack of central collection of information on deaths of detained patients and monitoring of the issues arising from inquests;
- over diagnosis of severe mental illness in Black people with mental health problems.
- over use of seclusion and detention and over medication of Black patients.
- the over-representation of Black people as psychiatric patients and their under-representation as staff.
- the apparent failure of the psychiatric services to implement appropriate strategies to manage frustration and anger.
- the apparent failure of mental health services to provide appropriate support and care at an early stage.
- the poor treatment of bereaved families following a death.

● the failure of the NHS to learn from previous deaths following the use of control and restraint and failure of Government to ensure cross communication across different custodial settings.

INQUEST has drawn national and international attention to the disproportionate number of deaths of black people in custody following the use of force or gross medical neglect.

Despite urging from INQUEST and the MPs concerned in Mr Bennett's case soon after his death, no formal mechanism has been established to ensure the dangers of prone restraint are being learnt in all relevant forums and government departments.

There is complex and controversial scientific debate about deaths following prone restraint and yet it continues to be routinely used in many settings (psychiatric, social services and educational) without due regard to the potential dangers.

**For more information contact:**  
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