

Militant International Review

No.57 August-September 1994 £1



Nipping fascism in the bud

Militant International Review

Issue 58, August-September 1994. Editor: Lynn Walsh, 3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

2

Blair's Britain?

Is there, as media commentators maintain, a political 'sea-change' developing in Britain?

8

Capitalism's 'lost continent'

The Rwandan horror is a symptom of a wider African crisis.

13

The role of the police

A look at a key debate within the YRE.



13

The YRE's summer camp meets in Germany this month. On pages 13-20 the MIR examines some of the issues being discussed.



21

The prospects for the USA are examined by recent visitor Peter Taaffe, Militant Labour's general secretary.

18

The origins of racism

Racism is not part of 'human nature' but rooted in class society.

21

USA Today

What is happening in the world's mightiest capitalist power?

28

Book Reviews

The role of the media; Christopher Hill on the English revolution; and EP Thompson's study of William Blake.

Blair's Britain?



Is there, as media commentators maintain, a political 'sea-change' developing in Britain? John Bulaitis writes.

SO, AT LAST, Tony Blair is officially the new leader of the Labour Party - although the eight Tory newspapers that campaigned for him anointed him victor even before the contest had begun.

Blair was the open candidate of the capitalist class. Howard Davies, the Director-General of the CBI, gave him his personal endorsement. Former Tory chairman, Chris Patten, also found himself 'in complete agreement' with Blair's views on 'community values'.

The new 'OMOV' voting system, rather than extending real democracy in the Labour Party, has given the millionaire press unprecedented influence in the affairs of the workers' movement. Some of the unelected owners and editors who urged their readers to vote for Tony Blair surpassed even their usual hypocrisy when they condemned the TGWU executive for nominating and recommending Margaret Beckett.

There was, however, no 'left' candidate or socialist alternative on offer in this election. John Prescott made much of his working-class and trade union background yet studiously avoided giving any

public support to the signal workers - even though he, himself, is an RMT member. It was the same with Margaret Beckett. She used some left phraseology in the campaign, but is now preparing to serve a loyal role under Blair's leadership as she did under John Smith.

*Blair's coronation has
coincided with an
electoral resurgence for
Labour.*

Blair's coronation as leader has coincided with an electoral resurgence for Labour. This started with the local elections on May 5, and rallied further at the parliamentary by-elections and Euro elections on June 9. The party also has a massive lead in the opinion polls, polling around 44%, with one survey putting them on a record 55%. This is

a reflection of the burning desire for an end of this Tory government amongst the working class but also, a growing proportion of the middle layers of society.

This has prompted media commentators to talk of a political 'sea change' in Britain. According to *The Guardian* (2 July, 1994) the mood "goes beyond the idea that it is time to give the other lot a chance. There's a perceptible feeling in Britain... that here may be the opposition's moment of challenge. It is not the Conservative Party alone which is exhausted. It may be conservatism itself..."

The relative stability of 'conservatism' was a result of the 1980s upswing reinforced by the apparent 'triumph' of capitalism with the collapse of Stalinism. The curtain is falling on that era and opening on a new one to be marked by rapid shifts in consciousness, inevitable social conflict and chronic instability in the political institutions.

Part of this 'sea change' has been a marked shift in attitude to the prospect of a Labour government by the ruling class itself. For them, Labour is now 'electable again'. When the CBI chief endorsed Blair he also said it would be "churlish not to admit that Labour has changed" and urged business to prepare to work with a Labour government.

A survey in *The Independent* of so-called top people (industrialists, financiers, senior civil servants, media executives etc) found they thought Tony Blair would make a much better prime minister than any of the main Tory contenders and 53% expect him to be in Downing Street in the year 2000.

SOME CAPITALIST COMMENTATORS have been openly arguing that, in the words of former Tory minister John Nott, "the Tories could do well with a spell in opposition to rethink their policies". In *The Times* Peter Riddell has likewise argued that "the Tories... can only renew themselves in opposition". He went on to outline the splits in their ranks on Europe and the welfare state and pointed out that "these battles may have to be resolved in opposition, as the arguments over the Corn Laws were after 1846".

The decline of British capitalism has prepared a new rupture in the Tory party.

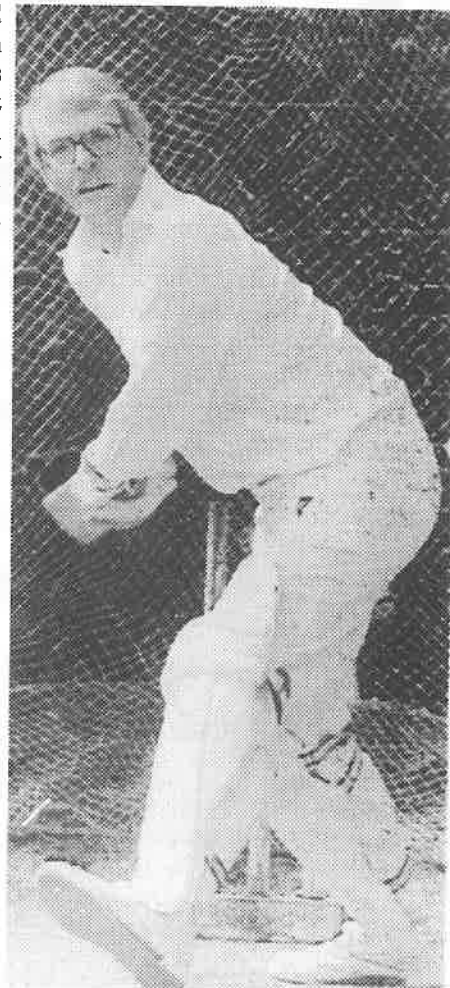
Remarks about 1846 are not insignificant or accidental. The Tories, at that time the main party of the landowners, were shattered by the rise of industrial capitalism. Peel abolished the tariffs on corn, which protected the interests of the big land-

owners, in the interests of cheap food, which allowed the manufacturers to pay lower wages. The Tory party split, and the Peel faction lined up with the Whigs and Liberals. The Conservative party was later reshaped by Disraeli who tied it to the interests of finance capital. The rise of British imperialism into the dominant world power then provided the basis for the Tories becoming the main party of the British capitalist class.

Now the decline of British capitalism has prepared the way for a new rupture. A recent economic forecast from the Engineering Employers Federation revealed that "Britain's manufacturing base will decline from 20% of gross domestic product to 15% and thousands of low-skilled workers face redundancy". The two irreconcilable trends in the Tory party are a reflection of the struggle in the ruling class as it tries to reconcile itself to the fact that Britain is at best a second-rate world power.

The shopping of Jeffrey Archer - close to both the Major and the Thatcher wings - by Heseltine's Department of Trade and Industry (which publicly announced Archer was being investigated for 'insider trading' in shares) is the latest rather bizarre foray in the full-scale faction war that is being fought out. It is a power struggle that could reach resolution after a Tory election defeat for which both sides will blame each other. There is the distinct possibility of a split - ending the hegemony of the present Tory party as the main capitalist party in Britain.

Major is currently making concessions to the 'bastard' wing of the party to bolster his position. Only two months ago it looked a good bet that it would be he, not Labour, who would be facing a leadership contest. Gillian Sheppard MP, a loyal Majorite, had announced to the world that 'only' one



in five Tory MPs were opposed to him and that Heseltine and Portillo were canvassing support for a challenge.

John Smith's untimely death, and the Tory's narrow avoidance of the 'meltdown' scenario at the European elections, gave Major a stay of execution and recently he has been trying to give the impression of looking more 'prime ministerial'. He led the Tory-Euro campaign from the front, vetoed the proposed president of the European commission, Jean-Luc Dehane, and tried to freshen-up the appearance of his cabinet. But he is, as one Tory MP put it, "like a man riding two horses, a leg tied to each, with the horses running in opposite directions".

The prospects for a recovery in the Tories election chances are slim but cannot be completely ruled out. The Labour leaders have mastered as a fine art the ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. The Tories are hoping to coax back support with pre-election tax concessions on the basis of the booty from rail and post office privatisation. But the odds are long on this strategy succeeding. It will be extremely difficult to cut across the deep corrosion in support from traditional Tory voters that has developed over the past period.

AT THE EURO-ELECTIONS the Tories lost seats in strongholds such as Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent, Hertfordshire and Essex - only a further 2% swing and they would have been reduced to just five seats. *The Independent*

described these results as a "demonstration of mass anger and anxiety" by sections of the "southern middle-classes". From a position two years ago when they polled the highest ever vote for any political party at a general election, the Tory vote plummeted to 6% lower than at any national election this century. Repeated at a general election these results would have given Labour a 250-seat majority.

While Tory spokesmen tried to explain this away as an 'understandable, mid-term protest' it is in reality a symptom of a much deeper process. An opinion poll by MORI has found that "eight out of ten traditional middle-class Tories are dissatisfied with the way the government are running the country". Only 12% believe that 'Tory politicians serve their best interests'.

In the October 1974 general election, although won by Labour, the Tories polled 56% amongst the ABC1s (who the pundits normally describe as 'the middle-class', but who also include the upper layer of white-collar workers and some skilled workers). In 1990, when the Tories were being rocked by the mass movement against the poll tax, they were still supported by 48% of this layer. Yet they have now plummeted to 33% - trailing Labour for the first time ever.

The effect of all this on the morale and organisation of the Tory party itself has been devastating. George Gardiner MP, under a headline 'Why I weep for the Tory Party', has lamented on "slumping party membership, as once enthusiastic



party workers disappear into the gloom... It was never as bad as this". The final straw for Norman Fowler, leading him to throw in the towel as party chairman, was when the Tories' largest big business backer Allied Lyons cut off their cash. In fact donations to Tory coffers from both rich individuals and companies have fallen, leaving the Tories with a persistent £20 million deficit.

Militant International Review has in the past pointed to the process of the loosening of the ties between the Labour Party and its traditional roots in the working class. But alongside this has been a similar weakening of the loyalty between the Tory party and many of their traditional followers.

THE 1980s BOOM gave to the so-called ABCs the impression of ever increasing prosperity. 'Thatcherism', the supremacy of the 'free market', meant for them the idea of more 'personal choice' in home ownership, jobs, private health care, private education and so on. But the result has been not an increase in 'choice' but a massive increase in uncertainty. Martin Jacques, writing in *The Sunday Times* (12 June, 1994), pointed out that "the middle-classes probably feel more insecure than at any time this century". A report by the Rowntree Trust showed that between 1989 and 1993 people in employment in Luton were twice as likely to receive a cut in income as in Glasgow and two-thirds as likely to lose their jobs. In this same period 23% of 30-49 year olds missed a mortgage repayment.

A liberal market policy has savaged the fortunes of large swathes of Conservative voters.

As Jacques explained, the recession meant that "sectors such as financial services and advertising, which had done particularly well in the boom, shed staff like confetti. The small consultancies that had mushroomed in areas such as architecture and design found themselves fighting for survival. Solicitors and estate agents who had thrived in an inflationary housing market now hit hard times". In addition traditional job security in the large corporations has vanished and short-term contracts and performance related pay have become widespread in a large range of professions.

On top of this has been the effect of the tax hikes - leaving an average two income family £12-a-week worse off - and the effects of the Child Support Act. Then there is the question of negative equity - a major factor in the 20% swing to Labour in the two by-elections in the London borough of Barking on June 9. A house purchased in that area



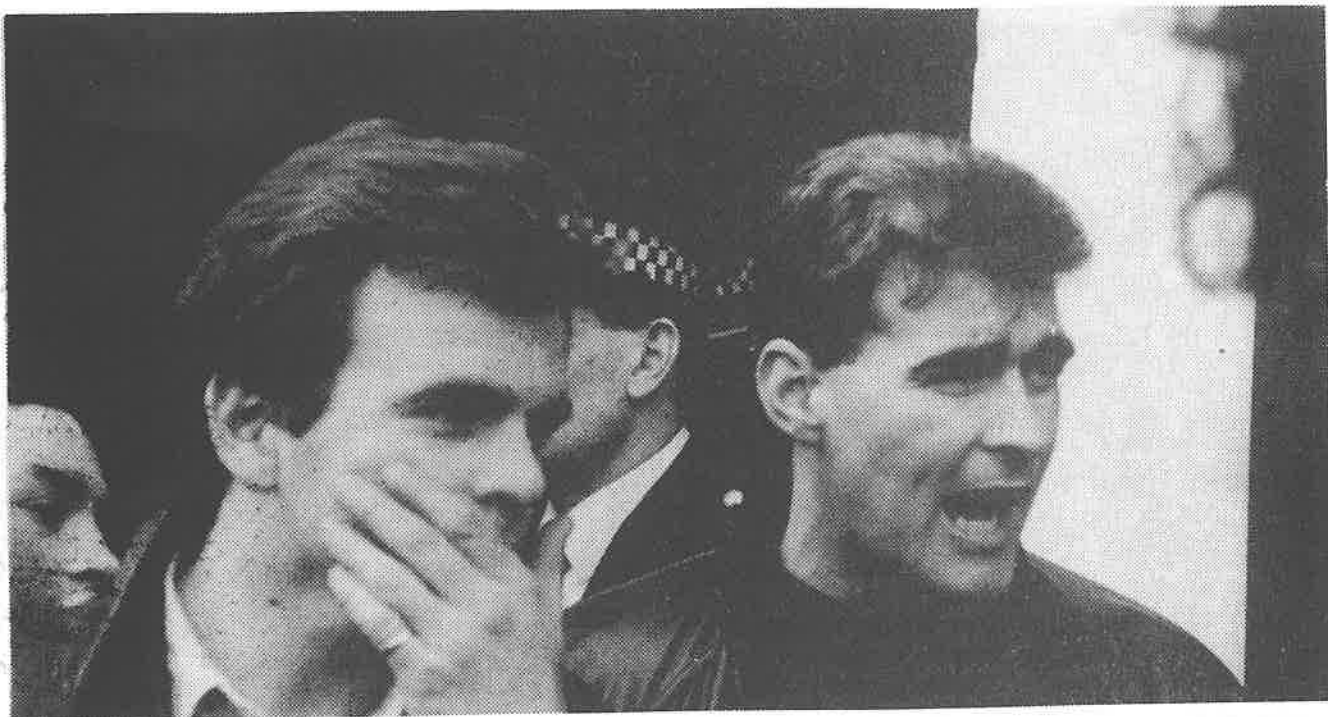
Negative equity in the South East.

for £67,000 in 1988 is now worth only £46,000. This is typical of the situation throughout London and the South East. A survey by the Association of London Authorities found that "four out of five recent home-buyers in London are trapped in homes worth less than they paid for and face a lifetime of debt".

The Tories used to heap Thatcher with bouquets as their 'greatest ever leader' but she is now being held responsible for not only undermining this government but possibly even the foundation of the Tory party itself. John Gray, head of the Social Market Institute, has noted "the insoluble dilemma for the Tories is that a liberal market policy... has savaged the fortunes of large swathes of Conservative voters. As a result the party now stands at the brink of an electoral abyss...".

These trends are not unique to Britain but are part of an international process. In the US average earnings of middle-class men between the ages of 45 and 54 have fallen from \$55,000 to \$41,000 since 1989. This was undoubtedly a key factor in the rise of Ross Perot at the last presidential elections. In Italy the corruption crisis has led to the collapse of the Christian Democrats with the middle layers flocking to the new formation of Berlusconi's Forza Italia, while at the Canadian general election the Tories disintegrated to just two seats.

The irony is that just as the middle layers are abandoning the ideology of Thatcherism the Labour leadership is moving further to embrace almost identical ideas and policies. Blair speaks of the 'dynamic market economy', has accepted Tory anti-union laws and privatisations, and now seems about to adopt their education reforms. Even *The Independent on Sunday* warned (3 July, 1994), "the danger is that he (Blair) tries too much to trim his agenda to that of the 1980s; far from being



Tommy Sheridan - beat the Tories in Glasgow's Euro-seat.

enamoured of such words as 'market' and 'choice' electors are likely soon to find them as repulsive as 'nationalisation' used to be". In fact the bosses' plundering of the privatised industries, with super profits and their mega-salaries, will soon mean that growing numbers will be open to the ideas of nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management.

AMONGST THE WORKING-CLASS there is a burning desire for the end of this Tory government and what has been predominantly an anti-Tory mood is developing into a more positive support for Labour. This feeling could harden further as the election approaches but it is primarily electoral support and not being reflected in an increase in membership or activity by workers in the party itself.

*This pro-Labour mood
now is different to that
when Labour was last
elected.*

This pro-Labour mood now is of a different character to that when Labour was last elected, at the two elections in 1974. Then, there was genuine enthusiasm and expectations in Labour amongst the youth and the most politically advanced layers of the working class. Labour was identified with the struggle of the miners against the Heath gov-

ernment. They fought on a programme of far-reaching reforms, with Denis Healey promising to produce "howls of anguish from the rich" when Labour's policies were implemented. In fact, the end of the post-war upswing coincided with Wilson's election victories and resulted in the abandonment of reforms for the cuts and wage restraint policies that provoked the battles of the 'winter of discontent' in 1978/79.

Labour's historic base as the political wing of the trade union movement, and its advocacy and implementation of reforms, was the basis for the politically advanced workers in the workplaces and communities recognising it as 'their' party - a working class socialist party. Many participated in it at constituency level. It was the bitter disappointment of their aspirations by the Wilson/Callaghan government that led to the swing to the left in 1979-81. Tony Benn was narrowly defeated in the deputy leadership contest and far-reaching democratic reforms in party organisation were won.

However, the Thatcher-Reagan boom of the late 1980s together with the crisis and collapse of Stalinism, provided the basis for the unprecedented lurch to the right under Neil Kinnock. The capitulation to Thatcherism, and increasing distancing from the struggles of the working class - most notably the miners and the mass anti-poll tax movement - served to massively undermine the identity with Labour amongst the youth, trade union activists and sections of the most oppressed layers of the working class. This means that there is a much larger layer than ever before who, while prepared to vote Labour, will do so with enormous skepticism as to what Labour will deliver.

The outstanding election results of Militant Labour at both the Glasgow Euro-election and local elections are a symptom of this. They are particularly significant as Militant Labour has always pointed out that our candidates at present are in the main laying the basis for Marxist policies amongst the most active and politically conscious layer and our best results will come intervening in the opposition that will develop to the right-wing policies of a Labour government.

Further, the MORI poll previously mentioned also found that a large layer amongst the young, and also amongst the lowest paid workers, will not vote at all. Although 18-34 year olds comprise 34% of the electorate they account for 46% of those saying they won't vote, while the ratio for low paid workers is 31% and 37%.

A Blair government would come to office against the background of the spiralling crisis in capitalism in Britain and internationally. The general election could coincide with the end of the present stuttering recovery and the onset of a new recession.

The Labour leaders recognise this, which is why they make no concrete promises on anything. They oppose unemployment and poverty in the same way that bishops praise virtue. For Blair, the 'Christian socialist', the proverb has become "the meek shall inherit the earth... but unfortunately the resources won't allow it".

Yet the millions looking towards a Labour government are doing so because they want concrete results in terms of jobs, living standards, and improved services. Blair as prime minister would be likely to get a brief honeymoon but it is inevitable that an enormous disillusionment in the Labour government would develop. There would be a growing confrontation with a working class seeking to regain what it has lost under the Tories.

A section of the middle layers who looked to Labour will feel their hopes dashed and many will look for a political home on the right - possibly providing a base for a right-wing split from the Tories. Another section of the middle strata could be further radicalised as a result of the developing social crisis.

The *Financial Times* (25 June 1994) quoted an unnamed Campaign Group MP as saying that Blair's "social democratic agenda will lead to a huge internal conflict with the left and the unions in the first year of a Labour government". Undoubtedly movements of the working class will be reflected in a conflict within the party between some of the trade union tops and the parliamentary wing. However, an upsurge in party membership or activity is still extremely unlikely.

There have always been tensions and conflicts between the trade union tops and the parliamentarians but in the past they also both recognised their dependence on each other. Now there is a new situation. Labour has a leader with an agenda to break the trade union links, thus qualitatively



Scargill - a new party possible.

changing the nature of the party by transforming it into a version of the US Democrats. At the same time many of the trade union leaders themselves agree that the unions no longer have a direct role to play in the party.

In addition, there has been a mood developing particularly in the council trade unions of 'why give money to a party sacking our members'? Lambeth UNISON, for example, in the run up to the local elections, withheld £2,500 on this basis. This mood could increase under a Labour government as more trade union activists are forced to organise resistance to its right-wing policies.

What has stayed the hand of the right-wing up to now has been the party's dependence on trade union money. Blair as prime minister could turn to state funding for political parties and attempt to cut the unions adrift.

The Campaign Group interview previously quoted also talks of an 'inevitable split'. Arthur Scargill has also raised that the continual movement of the Labour Party to the right puts a new party on the agenda. There is the possibility, although not the certainty, of a split in the Labour Party and the establishment of a new left party based on a section of the trade unions.

One thing is certain though - an entirely new period has opened up in British politics. Parties and institutions that appeared stable and fixed will be rocked to their foundations by the crisis in capitalism and the momentous social movements it will provoke. It is a situation in which the fighting socialist alternative of Militant Labour will be adopted by ever more significant sections of the working class. □

Capitalism's lost continent



The Rwandan horror, argues Martin Cock, is a symptom of a wider African crisis.

WITHIN THE SPACE of a few horrific months, the image of Rwanda has changed from *Gorillas in the Mist* to blood-letting, massacres and tribalism. Up to 500,000 people have been killed since the assassination of president Habyarimana in April. Over two million refugees have fled to neighbouring countries, Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi - Rwanda's 'twin sister' - since the civil war re-ignited.

To the capitalist media, it is all very simple: the

bloodshed provides 'proof' of the inevitability of 'tribal' warfare in Africa. But it was the intervention of imperialism - Germany from 1890 to 1916 and Belgium from 1916 to independence in 1962 - which exacerbated and intensified ethnic divisions. The Belgian colonialists, in particular, very quickly learnt how to divide and rule the population.

Historically, the antagonisms between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi tribes in East Africa were based on social status. The Tutsi have historically been the elite, cattle-owning part of the

population (Tutsi, in fact, means 'rich' in the common language of Kinyarwanda), while the Hutus (meaning 'poor') comprised the masses of poor peasants. The Tutsis, who ruled through absolute monarchies, were picked out to be educated and trained by Belgium to act as their administrators and organisers.

The tidal wave of revolutions, revolts and uprisings which marked the colonial world after 1945 led to the eviction of Belgium from their 'Ruanda/Urundi' trust territory, but not before they had split the nation in two. In November 1959, the 'peasants revolution' gave effective control to the Hutu majority in Rwanda, which was consolidated in elections held in September 1961. The Tutsis were left with a dominant position in the government and military in Burundi.

Massacres of both Hutus in Burundi and Tutsis in Rwanda continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s - 150,000 Hutus were massacred in Burundi during two months in 1972 after launching a rebellion. In Rwanda itself, after Habyarimana seized power in a 1973 coup, the Tutsis were forced out as refugees into the surrounding territory, creating explosive material for the future.

Habyarimana's vicious dictatorship was backed by the Western powers as a bulwark against the possible spread of Soviet influence from Ethiopia. The regime received arms from Egypt, South Africa and France. Human Rights Watch recently reported that France provided weapons, armoured cars, helicopters, military advisors and up to 680 troops to help the dictatorship in their fight against the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in the civil war of the early 1990s.

The RPF, formed by exiled Rwandan Tutsi officers in the Ugandan army in 1979, launched an invasion of Rwanda in 1990, leading to a three-year civil war and very nearly taking power. A peace agreement was signed in August 1993, but was never implemented. Instead, Habyarimana used the opportunity to create the Hutu militias which eventually became the killing machines of the Interahamwe ('Those who attack together').

The first to be massacred were not Tutsis but Hutu members of the opposition Liberal and Social Democratic parties. The press at the time commented that the fighting was "among Hutu factions which are either for or against negotiations to establish a multi-ethnic democracy with the Tutsi opposition". (*Guardian*, 13 April 1994). Having dealt with the opposition, the militias then moved on to a systematic massacre of the indigenous Tutsi population, egged on by rump government and army forces and the state-owned radio, whose chilling phrase 'when you kill rats, you don't leave the pregnant ones' will go down alongside the Nazi 'Holocaust' and Pol Pot's 'Year Zero' in the Pantheon of modern horror.

In contrast the RPF is generally recognised as having refrained from involvement in massacres of civilians (although there have been reports of some

units carrying out such attacks). Based on a much more efficient and better-trained army, they rapidly won control of the country outside the so-called 'safe zone' occupied by French troops.

The French forces have been forced to recognise the RPF's victory.

The French forces are already seen as a foreign invasion force by the RPF. From an initial position of attempting to prop up the 'rump' government and maintain some French influence in the region, they have been forced to recognise the reality of the RPF's victory. Their efforts to 'protect' the fleeing Hutus, including a number of members of the militias, could well end in even greater ignominy than the US's similarly 'humanitarian' adventure in Somalia.

It appears from recent reports that the character of the RPF has changed from its original ethnic basis, with up to 40% of its fighters now ethnic Hutus. Its leader, Kanyarengwe, (who was actually the minister of the interior in Habyarimana's cabinet during the 1970s and is a former head of internal security) is a Hutu and the RPF-installed 'national unity' government is headed by two Hutus, president Bizimungu and prime minister Twagiramungu.

Nonetheless, the events in Burundi, where the Tutsi-dominated army have continued to dominate politics and carry out massacres of the Hutu majority, provide a warning about the future course of the RPF-led government. In the absence of a clearly socialist programme to resolve the crushing problems of Rwandan society, despite verbal commitments to democratic and ethnic rights, RPF rule could slip into a similarly ethnic-based government and the communalism and dictatorial rule that the previous 'liberators' of the majority Hutu population in Rwanda did.

INTervention by the imperialist powers will not solve any of the economic, social or national problems of the continent - which are the legacy of imperialism in the first place. As *The Financial Times* recently put it, in a masterly understatement, "It is not Africa's fault that boundaries are arbitrary, that former nation states were divided, or several nations encompassed within newly created territories". (18 March 1994).

Alongside the forced and artificial creation of states by imperialism went the pressure to concentrate economic resources on commodity production and gear agriculture to the Western market - often by ripping up the crops traditionally used to grow food for local people and re-planting the land with



Refugees flee Rwanda.

coffee, cocoa or other cash crops for the Western market.

The environmental consequences have been disastrous - the lack of crop rotation and intensive farming methods have done untold damage to the ecosystem. African deserts are advancing at an alarming rate as soil salinity increases and trees are felled 30-times faster than they are planted.

Economically, this policy has meant that the majority of African states now rely almost entirely on one or two commodities to sustain their economy. Rwanda itself relies on coffee for over 80% of its total export earnings.

*The majority of Africans
have experienced an
absolute fall in living
standards over the past
two decades.*

This leaves the economies of the whole of the ex-colonial world at the mercy of the international speculators on the world commodity exchanges. One of the major factors behind the 'boom' in the advanced capitalist countries of the 1980s was the worsening of the terms of trade for primary producers - a remorseless driving down of the cost of third-world commodities in relation to the cost of the advanced countries' finished industrial products. During the 1980s, the overall export prices of primary products fell by one-third. Africa lost \$5.6bn from the fall in commodity prices in 1991

alone. Added to that are the crippling costs of repayment of loans - Africa's debt mountain now equals 93% of its total annual production of all goods and services.

Of course, the decline in the terms of trade and the crippling burden of debts faces the whole of the ex-colonial world. But what is different about Africa is that it is also declining in relation to other similar regions. Africa's share of exports of agricultural products from the ex-colonial world halved from 17% in 1970 to 8% in 1990. It has been completely overtaken by its former competitors: in 1965, Indonesia's GDP was lower than Nigeria's, now it is three times greater. South Korea and Thailand were once compared with Ghana and Uganda. Now

they are in a completely different economic league.

The overwhelming majority of Africans have experienced an absolute fall in living standards over the past two decades - the boom not only passed the continent by, but actually made the situation worse. A recent report for the African Development Bank explains that the average African today is "worse off than 30 years ago, with poverty, ill-health and famine threatening large and growing numbers of people. Africa's real per capita incomes fell by more than 15% in the 1980s and have slumped further since". AIDS threatens to ravage the economically-active population - a quarter of young women in the Ugandan capital of Kampala, for example, have the HIV virus.

Open any 'quality' European and North American newspaper and you can find articles about the 'lost continent' - the stockpiling of economic and environmental devastation and human misery has led to an increasing feeling of hopelessness on the part of world imperialism. The outflow of capital has been dramatic - \$30bn left the continent between 1986 and 1990. But the more long-sighted international institutions, particularly the World Bank, which spends its time producing increasingly surreally optimistic reports, are desperately trying to restore the 'economic credibility' of Africa as a whole: they simply cannot afford, economically, politically or militarily, a continent of 500 million people 'falling off the map of world capitalism'.

JESSE JACKSON, AT a recent meeting in Libreville, the capital of Gabon, told 11 African leaders that "they used to use the bullet or the rope (to keep Africans down)... they now use the World Bank and the IMF".

The collapse of Stalinism and the potential for alternative sources of economic or military aid, has

opened the way to a wave of 'privatisation advisors', 'enterprise consultants', talking of 'greater flexibility', 'more openness to market forces' and the rest of modern capitalist jargon, to move into Africa. Adam Fleming, a British merchant banker, one of these vultures moving in, told *The Sunday Times*, 15 May 1994: "They really have only one place to go now and that's the World Bank and the IMF, and he who pays the piper calls the tune. They are going to have to conform to Western-style, capitalist, open-market philosophies, which is hugely exciting". You bet it is - but not for 99% of Africans!

But the asset-strippers are already complaining at the slow progress in privatisations - the value of Nigerian privatisations, for example, between 1988 and 1992, was less than 1% of those in Argentina, Malaysia or Mexico.

Only tiny Mauritius, on the fringes of Africa with a population of one million, has experienced faster economic growth on the basis of these new 'free market' techniques, with 6.7% growth a year from 1984 to 1992 and a big reduction in inflation and unemployment. But their tax breaks for big companies, lifting of restrictions on the repatriation of profits, abolition of tariffs etc, could never be transferred to even the majority of smaller African nations, let alone the economies of Nigeria, with 125 million people, or the more developed nations.

Country after country - from Algeria in the north to Mozambique in the south - have dropped all previous 'anti-imperialist', 'socialist' and even 'Marxist-Leninist' rhetoric in the face of this onslaught from the institutions of world capitalism and gone over lock, stock and barrel to the side of capitalism, accepting much of the 'advice' and aus-

terity programmes. In the face of this ideological confusion and collapse, the masses have embraced the idea of 'liberal democracy', in the abstract, as the only way to kick out some of the most corrupt and vicious regimes. A huge wave of 'pro-democracy' movements swept the continent in the early part of the 1990s in the wake of the movements in the former Stalinist states. In the four years after 1990, 34 of the 45 states south of the Sahara had introduced multi-party democracy, held elections or undergone other major political changes.

But elections and parliaments in and of themselves, while representing a step forward for the masses, cannot solve the fundamental economic and social problems. Many of the most popular movements, based as they were on a confused mixture of 'democracy' and illusions in capitalism, very quickly ran into the sand. In Zambia, for example, a mass movement in 1991 against Kaunda's corrupt regime brought a spectacular victory for an opposition trade union leader, Chiluba, who then preceded to embark upon a draconian privatisation programme, increased the price of the staple food of maize meal by 500% and declared a state of emergency in the face of riots and strike threats!

AS IN EASTERN Europe, the emergence of 'democracy' has also led to the re-emergence of national and ethnic conflicts. But the history of colonialism in Africa, which stoked up conflicts based on language, religion, tribe and kinship, makes the situation more volatile even than the Balkans.

The talk in the learned journals of capitalism now is less about the 'miracle of democracy' but its 'dangers'. As *The Independent* (11 April 1994) put it: "Democracy alone is not the universal answer; majority rule too often means the domination of one tribe, religion or ethnic group by another".

Already Zaire, which has effectively ceased to exist as a national state, together with the bloodshed in Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia and Liberia, provide the first taste of what may be to come. The growth of radical Islamic fundamentalism has become a major factor in the northern Muslim states - Algeria, Egypt and so on - and is threatening to spill over into a number of more southern nations.

There are somewhere in the region of 1,000 different national groups and languages in Africa, so the potential for conflict is huge. But it would be crude and over-simplistic to ascribe the insecurity and tensions that have broken out in many parts of Africa to 'tribalism' alone. In the absence of major class struggles, or even of trade union and workers' organisations, opposition to poverty, hunger and dictatorship can often take on a national or ethnic tinge, but the underlying problems are economic and political. As even *The Times* (22 May 1993) was forced to recognise, "while the mismatch of people to frontiers is a problem to be reckoned with everywhere in Africa, closer observation re-



Zambian president Chiluba.

veals that the breakdown of civil order under brutal dictatorships is at the roots of these revolts". As the European spokesman for the RPF recently told *Militant*, "the RPF was formed in exile. The people in exile tended to be predominantly Tutsi... but our movement is cross-ethnic". (1 July 1994).

It cannot be overstressed that it was the intervention of imperialism, and its creation of many false and artificial states, which lies at the root of the national and ethnic question. However the problem was compounded by the post-independence African leaders, both capitalist and Stalinist, who were prepared to take whatever measures were necessary to maintain their own areas of power and privilege. The so-called 'Organisation of African Unity' based itself on a pact to maintain the disunity of Africa along the lines of existing borders. As long as the ethnic questions were not addressed, it became inevitable that, simmering away in the background for decades, they would explode at some point as an outlet for discontent and rebellion.

Both the Western bourgeois and the African leaders themselves are now desperately rooting around trying out all sorts of different methods of, at best, partially and temporarily defusing the most explosive of these questions.

The growth of COSATU points to how workers' class interests can cut across national and ethnic lines.

At one end of the scale, in Ethiopia, the regime which came to power after the overthrow of the Stalinist Mengistu regime in 1991, has emphasised ethnic differences and adopted a policy that has been dubbed 'ethnic federalism', creating 14 regional governments. Full independence has been granted to Eritrea. But, even this cannot prevent a further resurgence of national conflict in a country with over 80 widely different languages, so long as poverty and famine stalk Ethiopia.

At the other end of the scale, in Uganda, ethnic differences have been 'abolished'. After the deaths of around one million people in an almost constant series of civil wars since 1962, Museveni, who took power in 1986, has instituted 'non-party democracy'. Elections take place to a constituent assembly, but all parties are banned from standing or campaigning, as this would 'create divisions'. Having burnt their fingers with both 'multi-party democracy' and open dictatorship, this 'experiment' is being closely watched by imperialism as a possible 'third route'. But no-one on the streets of

Uganda even pretends to believe that the people standing for election aren't connected to the parties or are 'independent' of class or nationality. Museveni will be forced to move to a policy of much more blatant repression against ethnic minorities in the future as the 'experiment' is seen for the charade that it really is.

The only force capable of cutting across this potential ethnic blood bath is the working class - the predominant force in, at least, a number of the more developed and larger nations of Africa - together with the peasants and rural labourers. The growth of COSATU in South Africa in the 1980s, in the face of enormous obstacles, points to how workers' class interests can and will cut across national and ethnic lines - Xhosas and Zulus came together with the coloured, and even some elements of the white, population in the strikes and demonstrations which marked the death knell of the apartheid regime.

Africa is not 'naturally' poor - it is potentially very rich. It has 90% of the world's cobalt; 64% of its manganese; 50% of its phosphates; 50% of its gold; 40% of its platinum; 40% of the world's potential hydro-electric power supply, the bulk of the world's diamonds and countless other resources. It is a searing indictment of capitalism on a world scale, and its puppets on the continent, that it also has some of the most impoverished and down-trodden people. □



A Militant Labour pamphlet:

South Africa - from slavery to the smashing of apartheid

By Peter Taaffe

How was apartheid broken? What does the new ANC-led government mean for the South African masses? What will happen next?

Available from World Socialist Books, 3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB, £1 plus 25p postage.

The role of the police



Welling, October 16.

Lois Anderson looks at a key debate within the YRE.

THE EXPERIENCE OF anti-racist demonstrators at the hands of the police has made a discussion on the police's role vital for members of Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE).

On last year's October 16 Welling demonstration protesters had their route blocked by riot police who then divided the crowd into sections and systematically charged them. All police leave had been cancelled and 7,000 officers were drafted in to defend the fascist BNP's headquarters. Why? To teach young people that this demonstration, unofficial and militant, would not be tolerated.

The Criminal Justice Bill currently going through parliament will give the police more powers to prevent demonstrations, pickets and

assemblies. It also includes plans to outlaw raves, festivals and New Age travellers. This crackdown has pushed thousands into action in defence of democratic rights. Over 40,000 marched on 24 July in opposition to the bill.

Many young people see democratic rights being conceded all over the world, for example in South Africa and the Middle East. Meanwhile in Britain the opposite process appears to be taking place. The Tories and the ruling class recognise that their economic system is in crisis. A quarter of those unemployed are under 25. The colleges are packed to the brim and student poverty and debt is rife. Young peoples' radicalism and willingness to fight is exemplified by the numbers on anti-racist demonstrations. The current strikes by signal workers

and postal workers could be the first signs of new industrial battles.

At the same time the mood of young people is such that outbursts, riots like those of the 1980s, could break out even this summer. The ruling class are preparing for all eventualities. Most inner-city areas of Britain have the potential to flare up, as Los Angeles did two years ago, or erupt in a similar fashion to France's 'urban intifada'.

The Tories are taking measures to strengthen the police and the courts.

The Tories are taking these measures to strengthen the state, in particular the police and the courts, to prepare for future movements of the youth and the working class. It is because of this that workers and youth need a clear understanding of the nature of the state in capitalist society, to prepare our response to these attacks on democratic rights, to plan how we must organise in the light of new police powers, and to clarify our demands in relation to the police.

All of these questions were hotly debated at last year's YRE British conference. The resolution from Greenwich and Bexley YRE stated the majority position in relation to the police: "The police's job primarily is to protect the property of the rich and the powerful". No prospect can be held out that the police can be reformed into something different.

But it was also recognised that, whilst basing ourselves on the need to change society, and with it dismantle the present state, we also have to "come to grips with the immediate problems of the role of the police". While we can have no reliance on the police to stop racism and fascism, relying on our own strength to defend our communities from racist attack, it is also necessary to demand, however, that the police are made more accountable and subject to democratic control.

This was the most controversial part of the resolution. A minority put forward the idea that it was a contradiction to first explain that the police are part of the capitalist state, acting in the interests of the ruling class, and then to raise demands for democratic accountability. Surely, it was argued, the ruling class 'would never allow' the working class to 'control the police'.

TO ANSWER THIS question it is first necessary to understand the Marxist analysis of the state. Engels argued that the state is "an organisation of the exploiting class at each period for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, therefore in particular for the forcible holding down of the exploited class in the conditions of oppression (slavery, bondage or serfdom, wage labour) determined by the mode of production". "In the last analysis", he wrote, the state can be reduced to "armed bodies of men".

In the modern period the mode of production is capitalism and the oppressed class the working class. In capitalist society all the apparatus of the state, the police, courts and army, are used to preserve the system of wage labour. Therefore, the state's main role is to suppress the labour movement and the working class. The state is therefore not neutral as many politicians would have us believe - all its actions are weighted in favour of the rich in society.

For the working class to take power it would be necessary to construct a new state, a democratic workers' state under the control of the labour movement and working class. The first example Marxists had of what would replace the state after the socialist revolution was the Paris Commune in 1871, as explained by Engels: "The first decree of the Commune was the suppression of the standing army and the substitution for it of the armed people... instead of continuing to be an agent of central government, the police were at once stripped of their political attributes and turned into



the responsible and revocable agent of the Commune". (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, p51).

So whilst understanding the need to 'dismantle the state', and during a revolutionary period for the working class to carry out this task, it is also necessary for revolutionary organisations to raise demands which expose the partiality of the state and to weaken it, to prepare the ground for the carrying out of this task.

In fighting for a new society the task of the labour movement, and particularly of a far-sighted leadership, is to minimise the resistance of the ruling class. This poses the need to weaken, neutralise as far as possible and also win over those social forces upon which the capitalists rest. 'Impossible', declare the ultra-left sects, who counterpose to this empty slogans about 'smashing the state'.

Yet in the Russian revolution the workers won over the 'armed bodies of men' in the army to the revolution. In the Iranian revolution the insurrectionary movement of the workers of Tehran was successful in shattering the Shah's 'armed forces' and neutralised and even won over some 'elite' professional soldiers, such as the Republican Guard.

'Ah, but it is different with the police' reasons the sectarian. Not so, as a cursory examination of history will show. James Larkin in Belfast in 1906/7 not only succeeded in drawing Catholic and Protestant workers together in common struggle, he also won over the police who came out on strike under the leadership of constable Barret. The police also went on strike in 1919 in Liverpool and London. In the same year in Germany one of the factors involved in the January uprising of the Berlin workers was the attempted removal of the Berlin police chief Eichorn, a supporter of the United Socialist Party of Germany, by the government. More recently police have either gone on strike or threatened strike action in Nova Scotia, Canada, in Brazil, where the federal police struck, and even the notorious Los Angeles police staged a 'blue flu', ie a mass absence due to 'sickness'.

The labour movement must never forget that the police, particularly the tops, the chief constables etc, are under the sway of the capitalists. Every time they are deployed against workers or youth they must be vigorously opposed. At the same time efforts must be made to bring them under the influence of the labour movement. The demand for trade union rights best facilitates this task.

There is another important dimension to the issue which is never considered by sectarians. Most workers at this stage look towards the 'state', including the police, to act 'fairly' on behalf of 'society as a whole'. Moreover the working class and labour movement in Britain is not at the stage where an alternative force, a workers' defence force for instance, would be understood or accepted. Therefore it is necessary to take account of the fact that workers' expect answers to how the present state,

including the police, can be made to act 'fairly'. It is totally insufficient to baldly state that 'the police are part of the state' and that is the end of the matter.

Engels makes the point that the state is 'armed bodies of men' in *the last analysis*. This was not a throwaway qualification by Engels but a vital part of a Marxist analysis of the state. The state, including the police, the army, the judiciary, the civil service etc, is also, for example, an arena for the resolution of the conflicting interests of different sections of the ruling class. Sometimes the state can act against immediate sectional capitalist interests, sometimes for the benefit of workers such as in health and safety regulations etc, for the purpose of preserving the capitalist system as a whole.

Similarly the police are not solely a force for repression. The current Home Office review of police tasks, carried out as a prelude to privatising some of them, has identified 95 separate police functions, including things like missing persons searches, stray dog control, lost property, taxi licensing and so on. Many workers have concerns about the police but would not at this stage accept a demand for their 'abolition'. They would however support the view that the working class, through elected committees, should control them.

WHAT DO WE mean concretely by 'control'? Historically the police have been subject to different forms of political control. The first urban police forces were established, with the exception of the Metropolitan Police, as a result of the 1835 Municipal Corporation Act. This Act gave enabling powers to new local borough councils to set-up police forces under the control of watch committees, made up of local councillors. The watch committees appointed the chief constable and all other ranks, controlled pay and discipline, and the work that the police were involved in.

The municipal watch committees reflected the balance of class forces in society. The borough councils were dominated by the industrial and commercial capitalist class. They paid for the police and insisted that they controlled them. Attempts were made by central government to assert control but they were resisted.

But this relationship between the police and local watch committees began to change at the beginning of this century. The main reason for this was the development of the working class and with it its influence on local government. After the first world war, with a radicalisation in society generally, universal (male) suffrage was introduced, leading to the election of a number of Labour local authorities. The ruling class feared that they would lose control of the watch committees. It became necessary for central government to fight for control of the police.

After the police strikes of 1918 and 1919 the

Police Act of 1919 introduced the concept of 'a centrally guided and largely uniform system of local police forces'. The Act gave the home secretary powers to pass regulations on police pay and conditions. Slowly, any element of local control was being eroded.

But it was not until 1960 that chief constables were made directly accountable to central government. Then the 1964 Police Act made decisions over operational questions outside the scope of the police committees. Also, new independent local police committees were set up that were not under local authority control.

The 1970s opened with big political battles. Unemployment, for the first time since the war, was over one million. The Tory government of the day wanted to weaken the trade unions and attempted to do this with the Industrial Relations Act of 1971. Attempts were also made to beef up the police with the establishment of Special Patrol Groups (SPGs), to be used in riot and crowd dispersal situations. New technology, computers, radios and specially equipped vans, were also introduced. Robert Mark, Metropolitan Police Commissioner in 1972, commented that the SPGs "acted as a reserve at demonstrations at which militant elements were thought to cause disorder, and in particular to assist police in the protracted industrial disputes involving dockers and building workers". (Report of the Commissioner of Police, 1972). Mark also wrote later on, in 1978, that the police had learnt their new tactics from Northern Ireland. "The introduction of snatch squads and wedges in demonstrations, and random stop and searches and roadblocks on the streets, were based on the army's experience in Ulster".

So the ruling class had carefully prepared a police force that was centrally controlled and well equipped to deal with the new situation that had opened up during the 1970s. These new tactics were used against the miners in 1974 in an attempt to break the strike. Anti-racist demonstrators were also subjected to the brutality of these methods during the battle of Lewisham in 1977 and again in Southall in 1979 when Blair Peach was murdered by a blow to the head by a police truncheon. All of these tactics were also used during the riots in the early 1980s.

It was not enough simply to say 'abolish the police'.

This created the beginnings of an opposition to the role of the police within the labour movement. With the election of the Ken Livingstone-led Greater London Council (GLC) in 1981, for example, a debate began on how the police could be



Militant organised mass non-payment.

democratically controlled. It was against this background that *Militant* developed a programme for the democratic accountability of the police which we fought for in the trade unions and the Labour Party. It was not enough simply to say 'abolish the police'. Our programme of demands included:

1. For the police to be returned to the authority of local government police committees, with powers like those of the original watch committees to appoint and dismiss chief constables and senior officers and responsibility for operational policy.
2. For the police committees to ensure a genuinely independent complaints board, comprised of elected representatives.
3. For the police committees to ensure that any racist or fascist sympathisers within the police were weeded out.

Who could deny that, through such committees, the labour movement, particularly in areas where there were Labour councils, would have been able to exercise some control over the police? Of course it would not have *resolved* the question of ending the repressive power of the police, which can only be conclusively decided by the working class coming to power. But the implementation of such a programme would have weakened the ability of the police to act, in industrial disputes, to attack demonstrations etc, and strengthened the position of the labour movement.

But didn't this programme mis-educate trade unionists and Labour Party members that the state was, after all, 'neutral', that it could be reformed? No. This programme took the existing level of con-

sciousness and experience of the working class and developed it into challenging the role of the police, preparing the working class for its future task of dismantling the current state apparatus.

IN ADDITION, THE content of a particular demand is also determined by the actions of those who advance it. Many times in history 'left' slogans and demands have been used to derail the movement. Militant Labour, however, has combined agitation for a programme demanding democratic accountability of the police, when appropriate opportunities arise, with an uncompromising prosecution of the class struggle which has, on occasions, led us into confrontation with the law - in practice not in text books!

For example the Militant-influenced Liverpool city council, under the slogan 'better to break the law than break the poor', set an illegal budget and waged a struggle against the government to win money for the city. Then, during the anti-poll tax campaign, Militant Labour, particularly in Scotland, organised to stop bailiffs, the sheriff officers in Scotland, from taking the goods of non-payers. This was effective community defence that was organised by mobilising as much of the community and working class as possible, coinciding with the consciousness of the working class at the time and its willingness to struggle. Overall in the anti-poll tax campaign, over 20 members of Militant Labour were jailed.

On last year's two big anti-racist demonstrations, on 8 May and then on 16 October, Militant Labour and YRE members had a very clear under-

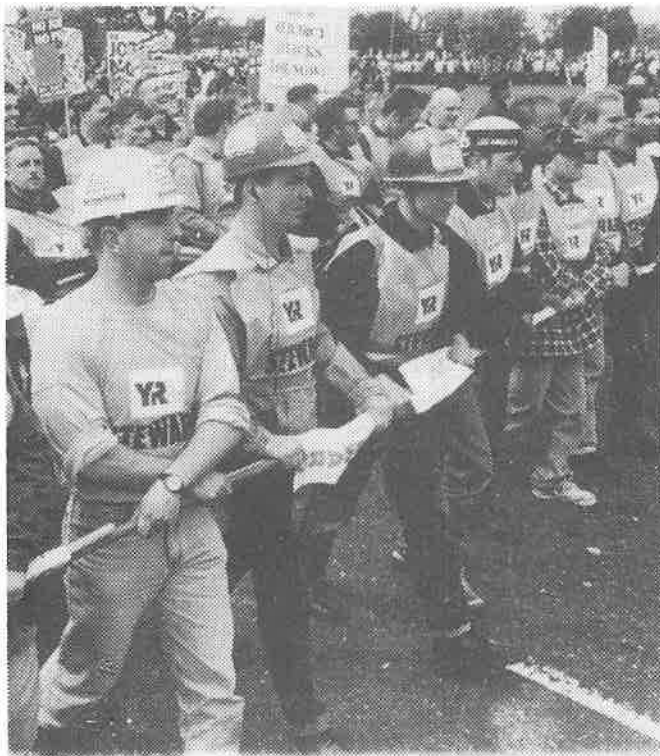
standing of exactly how and in whose interests the police would be used. Predicting that the police would attempt a provocation on 8 May our stewards were prepared and, on the day, stood firm against the attempts of the riot police to break up the demonstration. The experience of October 16, however, was different.

During the unity meeting to plan the stewarding for the 16 October march, the YRE and Militant Labour argued that similar stewarding to 8 May should be organised. We explained, on the basis of the police behaviour in discussions on the march route and the pre-demonstration press coverage, that the police were preparing to attack the demonstration. In criticising the ANL's lack of stewarding arrangements we argued that it was irresponsible to encourage people to come on a demonstration and not even attempt to provide adequate stewarding. Socialist Workers Party (SWP) members in the meeting accused us of being militaristic and of 'going over the top'. They advocated a sit-down at the point where it was clear that the police intended to provoke a confrontation. We argued that this was a ludicrous and very dangerous strategy.

Militant Labour understood that, whilst the stewards could not substitute themselves for the mass of the people on the demonstration, they could ensure a line of communication through the march and attempt to keep it together and moving like we were able to do on 8 May.

The record needs to be put straight. It was Militant Labour and YRE members who, following the police attack on the march, took the leadership at the front of the demonstration, informing the marchers what was happening. Our stewards directed those at the front to link arms, bringing the three sections of the front of the march which had been split by the police back together again, and got the march moving up the hill to the finishing point. There were some very brave ANL and SWP members involved in that stewarding. The same cannot be said, however, for their leaders who, after the ANL chief steward was injured, were nowhere to be seen.

So it is clear that in practice we have no illusions in the police. We stress that we can have no reliance on the police in our struggle against racism and fascism. We constantly explain that the police's primary role in capitalist society is to protect the rich and privileged and suppress the labour movement. But we also demand that the working class, which is the majority of society, should struggle to assert control over the police through elected, local police committees made up of representatives from the trade unions, community and tenants groups. An approach like this can ensure that our communities and the working class as a whole are prepared adequately to deal with fighting racism, organising defence of the community, but also having a programme to fight for local accountability of the police. □



YRE stewards, May 8.

The origins of racism



YRE Brussels demonstration, October 1992.

*Racism is not part of 'human nature' but rooted, argues
Andrea Enisuh, in class society.*

THE EARLY 1990s have seen the issue of race and nationality to the fore in both political and social life. The last few years have been marked by the growth of racism, the re-emergence of fascist parties on a Europe-wide scale, and the development of nationalist wars.

Equally significant, however, has been the development of a fightback against racism and fascism. Many young people in particular, repulsed by increasing racial attacks and murders, are joining the anti-fascist movement.

Yet while the far-right have provided some focus for anti-racist activity they remain a small factor in the development of racism in society. The racist sentiments that the fascists and far-right have been able to play on have to varying extents already existed in many white communities. Far more than any of their more overtly anti-working class policies it is racist rhetoric that has provided them with a platform. While not being the direct cause of racism in society they have used the growth of racism to their advantage.

Undoubtedly, overtly racist sentiments surface and gain a broader echo when social conditions worsen. A lack of decent jobs, homes and health facilities, etc, does create an atmosphere of division. In a search for scapegoats blacks are

targeted. Yet can the existence of racist ideas in society merely be attributed to the lack of a job or a home? Or do appalling social conditions simply bring to the surface and inflame already deep-rooted prejudices?

To explain last year's council seat election victory for the British National Party (BNP) in East London's Isle of Dogs, for example, simply by reference to the social conditions in the area, would be to ignore how deeply racial prejudice can sink into the consciousness of some sections of workers. It would misunderstand the 'dual consciousness' that exists amongst the white population there of, on the one hand, backward racial prejudices among some sections, and, on the other hand, a long history of radical struggle on the docks and in the community, from rent strikes in the 1960s and 1970s to, more recently, the poll tax non-payment campaign. When a clear lead has been given bigoted ideas have not been to the fore. When no authoritative alternative is posed, however, racist ideas once again find a receptive audience.

This is not to say, however, that racism is an inherent part of an individual's character. The hard-hitting advert by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is correct when it proclaims that 'people learn to be racist - no-one is born that way'. This, of course, would be contested by racist 'theo-

rists', who would argue that racial antagonisms are an inevitable part of 'human nature'. It is also by implication refuted by some black activists who believe racism has nothing to do with the type of society that we live in. Lee Jasper of the National Black Caucus, for example, has argued against a class analysis of racism on the grounds that "racism clearly pre- and indeed post-dates class societies". (*Morning Star*, 26 October 1992).

It is true that prejudice towards different ethnic groups, ignorance and xenophobia are not peculiar to capitalist society. The initial interaction of different ethnic groups could give rise to various beliefs and prejudices. Yet it was only during the early stages of capitalist society that racial theories were advanced, and then incorporated into the ideology of the ruling class.

CENTRAL TO THIS process was the development of the black slave trade from the late 16th century. To justify this brutal subjugation of African people racist ideas were developed by those involved in and benefiting from this trade, primarily the new merchant capitalists but also the plantation owners.

These ideas were then systematised and developed into an ideology of race, dividing humans into categories, ascribing 'unique' characteristics to each 'race' and so on. In any class-based society the ideology of the ruling class becomes dominant. Those that control society have a vested interest in developing concepts and ideas that justify their rule. It was in this context that racial theories developed.

The black slave trade played an enormous role in the development of modern capitalism. British cities such as Liverpool, Bristol and to a large extent London, were literally built from its profits during the 18th century. Slavery and slave-produced cotton and sugar created boom towns. Between 1630 and 1807 over £12 million profit was made by British slave merchants alone. However, slavery, while important to the development of capitalism at the early stage of accumulation, began to reach its limits. Defending the apparatus of slavery became an obstacle to the development of capitalism, the system of the 'free' market and the 'free' exchange of labour and capital. Consequently certain sections of the ruling class began to call for abolition.

This call is presented in many of the history text books of today as a moral crusade. Yet in reality economic factors were the real driving force behind the demands of many leading abolitionists. Famous banking families such as Lloyds and Barclays, who had previously made a fortune out of the slave trade, now put their weight behind abolition. In 1787 a major campaign against the slave trade was launched, its ranks filled mainly by sections of the capitalists who argued that free labour and free trade were a much more profitable system. Demands to end the slave trade gained

momentum, although the slave traders and planters proved a powerful lobby in defence of the trade.

It was during this debate by sections of the ruling class that the earlier racial theories were 'refined'. In both social and political circles racial characteristics were discussed and debated. It was argued that blacks were a mere sub-species, that they were lazy, stupid and 'a few degrees from an orangutan' - in fact, being a plantation slave was the best thing for them! In a period of increasing slave rebellions these too were 'scientifically' rationalised: some slaves had a disease that made them want to keep on running away.

'Scientific' notions of black inferiority were advanced by established figures.

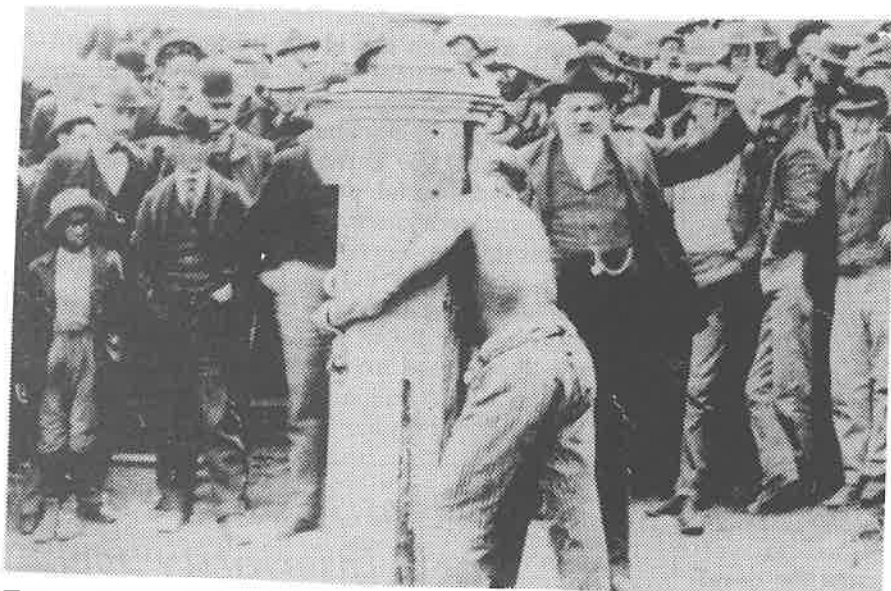
These ideas were not the rantings of a few uneducated individuals, they permeated deeply into bourgeois thought. Church leaders, writers, and academics, all espoused these views. 'Scientific' notions of black inferiority were advanced by established figures. Edward Long, a former judge and planter in Jamaica, was a pioneer in writing 'scientific' racist theories, such as his book, *History of Jamaica*, published in 1774. Western philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume argued that blacks were naturally inferior.

While leading abolitionists argued their case on the grounds of equality they had little real interest in the equality of black people. William Wilberforce, often portrayed as the great emancipator, condemned every slave rebellion that took place. Yet the increasing prevalence of slave uprisings, combined with the fact that the logic of capitalist development lay with the abolitionists, meant that the slave trade was ended in 1807 and slavery abolished in 1833.

Even after the abolition of slavery, however, racist ideas were used to argue that blacks were not capable of looking after themselves. Without the direction of white planters it was argued that they would descend into barbarism. This argument was used to try to keep blacks on the plantations as a source of cheap labour.

RACISM HAD NOW acquired a conscious and generalised character, and became part of the ideological armoury of the ruling class. It was deployed with new refinements to justify the expansion and consolidation of the empire in the 19th century.

Again pseudo-scientific 'theories' were advanced. In 1914 the British empire had a population of 431



From slavery to racist attacks.

million, over 370 million of whom were blacks. It became a popular argument that the shape of an African's skull proved that they were inferior to Europeans. Other theories suggested that blacks needed to be civilised and controlled, hence white domination.

While pseudo-scientists gave a cloak of officialdom to these ideas it was the press that played a key role in popularising these ideas amongst the working class. Moreover, the development of empire also created a material basis for the permeation of racist ideas into the working class, through the medium of a 'labour aristocracy' of relatively well-to-do skilled, craft-conscious workers and trade union officials.

It is not just in Britain that racism has been used and developed in this way. From slavery to the 'Scramble for Africa', where the imperialist powers divided up Africa for themselves, many European countries played a similar role. In the more recent period they too have continued to develop racist ideas.

Racism is still a key ideological weapon of the ruling class.

In the present period the ruling class continue to use racist ideologies to serve their purpose, to deflect attention from the cause of society's problems and to sow divisions in the working class. While more subtle, racist ideas still permeate the education system, popular press and media. The national curriculum in schools, for example, is deliberately designed, among other things, to blind children to the key role blacks have played in the

development of society. Bogus 'immigration sensation' stories are constantly churned out by the tabloid newspapers, giving the impression that the country is 'too full'. Racism has moved a long way from the early days of slavery but it is still a key ideological weapon of the ruling class, deeply rooted in society.

How then will racism be overcome? Racial prejudices will primarily be surmounted during the course of workers' struggle. In the battle against the employers, most workers will recognise that they cannot afford a disunited movement. In a search for unity opportunities will emerge to combat racist ideas.

Yet this will not be automatic nor straightforward. Struggles within the workers' movement itself will inevitably need to take place if prejudice is to be overcome. Workers' leaders who tolerate racism will have to be challenged. It is the job of Marxists to consciously intervene in these battles.

Moreover, notwithstanding the experience of united struggle, when the workers' movement suffers defeats the possibility exists for old prejudices to resurface. When the working class seized power in Russia in 1917 they made great steps in ending national oppression. But the workers themselves were too weak to hold political power for all but a short period. Stalin headed the usurping of power by the officialdom who bureaucratically ruled for the next 75 years. To maintain their privileged position the bureaucracy controlled society both with a police apparatus and by borrowing the ideological weaponry of feudalism and capitalism, including anti-semitism, chauvinism and Great Russian nationalism.

Only a new society of abundance, free from the economic and ideological control of the capitalists, will allow new generations to finally eradicate the deep rooted ideology of race. □

USA Today

*Militant Labour general secretary **Peter Taaffe**, a recent visitor to the US, examines the perspectives for the world's greatest capitalist power.*



Home Street (!), New York. The American dream.

THE AMERICAN TRADITION is based on expectations of rising wealth. Large parts of the population are now faced with the reality of being poorer than their parents or even grand parents' (*Financial Times*).

Leon Trotsky once commented that Britain was the country in which the 'religion of capitalist progress' was strongest. Such ideas however began to fade in Britain with the economic decline of British capitalism and with it the living standards of the mass of the population, particularly in comparison to its counterparts in Europe, Japan and the US.

The position formerly occupied by Britain was taken by the USA during the long 1950-75 post-war economic expansion. Despite the shock of the recessions of 1974-75 and 1979-81, the idea of an unlimited vista on the basis of capitalism held sway amongst broad sections of the population. The

'Reagan boom' of the 1980s seemed to re-enforce the notion that today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be even better. However during the hollow 'boom' of the 1980s millions of US workers were also plunged into an abyss of poverty and deprivation. A growth in the army of poor, particularly amongst blacks and Latinos, was the other side of the amassing of obscene and unprecedented wealth by the billionaires who hold the destiny of the USA in their hands.

The 1980s witnessed the greatest disparity between rich and poor in the history of the USA. The real wages of blue-collar workers were stagnant or actually declined relatively in the last 15 years. Workers were only able to keep abreast of the rise in the cost of living through overtime, taking part-time jobs (sometimes two or three other jobs) and by extending their working week, sometimes to 80

hours a week!

On top of this came the recession from 1991-93, associated in the minds of the US population with Republican president Bush. It was this that led to his downfall. However, there were not great expectations in Clinton prior to his election. He in fact received less of the vote than the defeated Democratic candidate Dukakis in the 1988 presidential elections. Yet his assumption of the presidency did generate certain expectations, although not any great enthusiasm that he could decisively change things.

Amongst organised labour however the top trade union leadership tried to feed the illusion that the coming to power of Clinton opened up a more favourable era for working people. But such hopes have been quickly dashed as Clinton has more and more demonstrated that he is as much a tool of big business as his predecessor.

The NAFTA debate opened up what the Wall Street Journal called a 'class struggle'.

The NAFTA debate, which pitted the organised trade union movement against Clinton and his congressional and senate supporters, opened up what the *Wall Street Journal* called a 'class struggle'. Clinton quickly moved to mend his fences with organised labour following this clash. Lane Kirkland, the head of the AFL-CIO, was invited to the White House, took a walk in the rose garden, and declared that the Clinton presidency was now 'an oasis' for organised labour. But it will take more than honeyed words to reconcile organised labour to this administration. The grim realities of everyday life on the shopfloor are sharpening the already existing class gulf which has begun to open up.

The US working class has not yet developed to the stage of consciousness of its European counterparts. It is in the words of Karl Marx 'a class in itself' but not yet 'a class for itself'. When Marx used the term 'a class in itself' he referred to the objective existence of a class. But the US working class, at least its great majority, are not conscious of themselves as a class separate and counterposed to the ruling class. It is not yet a 'class for itself'.

A rounded-out class consciousness is in its first stages of development, and only amongst some sections of the working class. Nevertheless, the NAFTA debate, followed by the teamsters' strike, the threat of a railway workers' strike, and turbulence on the shopfloor because of the attempt by the employers to intensify the exploitation of the

working class, is resulting in a growing class polarisation.

The bosses are seeking to apply on quite a wide scale class collaborationist ideas of 'the team concept', 'jointness' and so on. These notions imply the virtual liquidation of the independent organisations of the working class, the stewards in particular, into 'teams' which are in reality 'management teams'. The US socialist pioneer Daniel De Leon once said that the capitalists sought to transform the trade union and labour leaders into the 'labour lieutenants of capital'. Now the same efforts are being made, this time directed towards independent union organisation on the shopfloor, with the stewards who are to occupy this role. But such efforts will inevitably break-down as the mass of the workers see that it is an attempt to further tighten the screw on them. They are already chained to industry for longer than most of their counterparts in the advanced industrial countries. They are worn-out by work, plagued by sleep deprivation and suffering increased stress both at work and in travelling to and from work because of the massive breakdown of the infrastructure. The ground is being prepared for a huge eruption of the US working class.



Clinton weighs in for NAFTA.



Los Angeles, May 1992.

THE STAGNATION AND even decline in living standards for the broad layer of US workers has stoked up huge resentment. Even the *Wall Street Journal* admitted on May 23, "wage increases haven't even kept up with the cost of living for years. The trend in productivity, the amount produced by every hour worked, seems to be improving". And with amazing frankness, arising from a misplaced confidence that they are not challenged by an organised working class, this journal can also state, "economists teach that the unemployment rate can fall too low. Push the jobless rate down too far, and wages will probably start to go up faster than productivity is improving. Price increases follow and up goes the inflation rate. 'It is only sensible', says Brookings Institute economist Barry Bosworth, 'when people aren't so worried about being laid off there is more pressure for raises'. When profits are flush people wonder 'how come I can't get a bigger wage'."

The development of the US economy, estimated between 2-3% growth rate for the next year, has not been on the basis of a big extension of new plant, of increased investment. Indeed US capitalism faces a glut of capacity. At the height of a 'boom' it can not achieve more than 83% 'capacity utilisation'. The development of the economy also comes up against the barriers of stagnant income for the US working class. Any 'upswing' in the USA now will bypass whole swathes of the population. Moreover in a 'country', which is in effect a continent, the development of the economy, social relations etc can proceed at different tempos, from one state and one region to another.

In California, for instance, where the jobless rate

is almost 10%, wages are only rising at 2.8%, whereas in Illinois in the mid-West wages are rising at almost double this and the unemployment rate is half that of California. The collapse in the fortunes of the 'Golden State' symbolises the dashing of that 'golden future' that was held out by the ideologists of US capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s, and revived by Reagan in the 1980s.

All of this is preparing a revolt of the US working class. Commenting on its own proposals to hold down living standards the *Wall Street Journal* comments "all this must sound pretty hard-hearted to those American workers who voted for Bill Clinton because they believed in his vow to improve living standards. That can only happen if wages climb faster than the cost of living. But pushing the economy into the inflationary zone in pursuit of a short-term wage boost won't accomplish that end".

*Spending is being cut at
federal, state and city
level.*

It is not just wages which are held down but now there is an attempt to savage public expenditure. Spending is being cut at federal, state and city level. As a result of Clinton's promise to cut the budget deficit an estimated 100,000 federal employees will lose their jobs. The Republican mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, has evoked

protests, including demonstrations and threats of strikes, with his proposal to slash city expenditure on jobs and services. In a thinly veiled racist appeal he promised during his election to maintain jobs for city employees in teaching, the fire service and the police which, by coincidence, employ largely white workers. Those departments largely employing Afro-Americans and Latinos face drastic cuts. It will also be black and Latino areas, already blighted by lack of services and social deprivation, which will bear the burden of Giuliani's cuts.

Giuliani, however, is merely treading in the footsteps of the newly-elected 'Democratic' mayor of Philadelphia, Rendel, who has become the great hope of the capitalists both in the US and internationally with his savage programme of 'downsizing' (read slashing) spending at a city level. This provoked the fury of working people, leading to a massive campaign by the trade unions to defeat Rendel's 'referendum' empowering him to slash and cut. They distributed 500,000 pieces of literature, 100,000 phone calls were made to the workers and middle class of Philadelphia, and 1,500 volunteers turned out on 'referendum day'. This has in turn propelled many workers towards the unions, particularly in the public sector.

DURING THE 1980s, and as a result of the pusillanimous right-wing trade union leaders, union membership in the US dropped to 16%, to roughly 16 million, of the labour force. Now, for the first time in 14 years, a small growth, numbering 200,000, has been registered in overall union membership. Many unions now see the urgent need for a drive to draw in the unorganised workers. The Service Employees, for instance, which previously devoted 5% of its budget for recruiting new members, has recently decided to devote 30% of its resources for training organisers to drive into the unorganised sections of workers.

On the other hand the Teamsters' Union, still severely affected by the old guard, Mafia elements, devotes a mere two cents out of every dollar collected for organising recruitment drives. This union, with more than one million members, occupies a pivotal position within the US trade union movement. It is a barometer of future developments. On the one side it is still profoundly affected by one of the most corrupted and rotten union bureaucracies to be found anywhere in the world. This bureaucracy enjoyed, and to some extent still does, a lavish life-style, which would be envied by the average capitalist. It has been in the pockets of the mob, as we have explained elsewhere. However, a rank-and-file revolt has led to the systematic eviction of the mafia from one region, from one 'local' (union branch) after another.

This upsurge from below was reflected in the election of Ron Carey as president of the Teamsters' Union in the late 1980s. This represented a big step forward in the beginning of the transfor-

mation of the teamsters and of the trade unions in the US. However this victory was not pressed home by Carey or by the forces around the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). They did not have a clearly worked out alternative programme and did not press home the advantage they had gained in the election to drive the 'old guard' out of the union. The latter therefore have been given time to re-group. They have also been given sustenance by Carey's failure to fully articulate and fight for the best contracts for all teamsters.

In the recent United Parcel Services (UPS) negotiations, part-timers who account for 54% of the labour force received no real increase. Pursuing a policy of divide and rule the company were quite prepared for the time being to give increases to full-timers and thus widen the differential between them and part-time workers. Union activists clearly understand that by accepting very low rates of pay for part-timers this is a wedge that can be used by the company against full-timers at a later stage. They could offer some time in the future an hourly-rate below that presently enjoyed by full-timers but significantly above the part-time rate. They hope in this way they could tempt part-timers to vote for what would be perceived as an increase in hourly-rates and a big step forward for them. By pitting part-time workers against full-time workers the company, along with the US bosses as a whole, hope to drive down their wage bill.

Last year wage costs actually dropped in the USA. However, faced with the counter-offensive of the 'Old Guard', Carey may be compelled to give more of a fighting lead and this in turn could lead to a certain revival of the TDU. In any case some of the best, combative teamsters are being drawn into the orbit of *Labor Militant*, the newspaper of the co-thinkers of Militant Labour in Britain.

In general the ground is also being prepared amongst the working class for a movement to organise the unorganised. A situation somewhat similar to that which developed with the formation of the CIO in the 1930s could develop in the USA before this decade is out. A vital area for union growth will come in the South. The capitalists, fleeing from the relatively strong union organisation and high wages of the North, relocated industries in the South, completely transforming through huge industrialisation the image of the area as a 'sleepy backwater'. In the area between Atlanta and the Carolinas 25% of workers now work in manufacturing, compared with a national rate of 17%. Unions like the textile workers have begun to take on flesh as new union drives have opened up.

At the same time the political, as well as the industrial situation, is pushing in the direction of the unions separating, at a certain stage, from the Democrats and creating their own political party. Sectarian muddleheads see the development of a 'labour' or 'workers' party as a 'barrier' to the pristine pure political development of the American

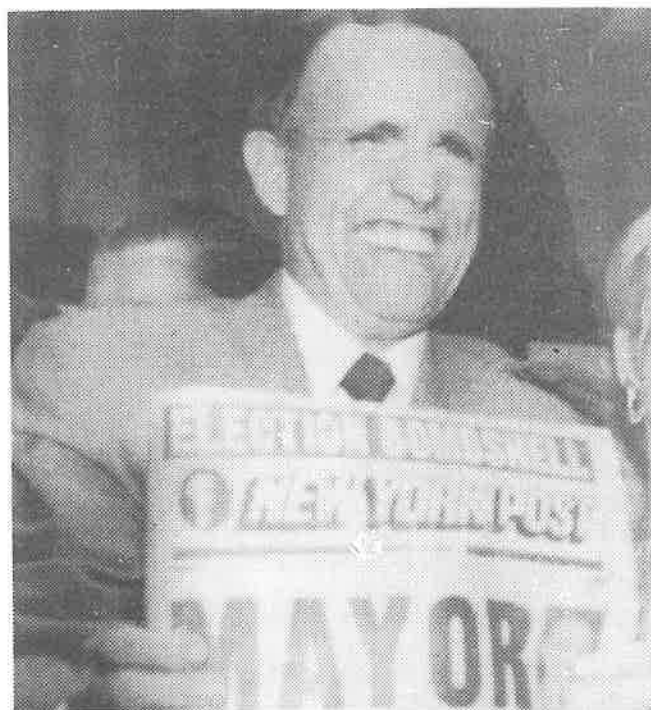
working class, usually envisaged as being under their 'Marxist' tutelage. They are deaf to Engels advice of over a century ago that "a million or two of working-mens votes next November for a bona-fida working-mens party is worth infinitely more at present than 100,000 votes for a doctrinally perfect platform. The very first attempt - soon to be made if the movement progresses - to consolidate the moving masses on a national basis will bring them all face to face".

The attempts to form a labour party in the latter part of the last century foundered, largely because there was still scope for a certain expansion of industry. The 'West' also offered a route of development for the most energetic sections of the working class to acquire land, establish a small business etc. A powerful development of the working class and labour movement began to take shape in the early decades of this century. But this again was cut across somewhat by the first world war and also by the economic boom of the 1920s. The establishment of the Communist Party raised workers' aspirations, but these were dashed by its Stalinist degeneration.

Paralysed, at least economically, in the 1929-33 depression, the working class only recovered with the revival of industry but did so with seven-league boots in the mighty development of the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) in mass battles in autos, steel, rubber, motor vehicles, the teamsters etc. Disillusionment with Roosevelt's 'New Deal' led, towards the end of the 1930s, to a growth in sentiment for the creation of an independent political party based on the trade unions. However this was in turn cut across by the outbreak of the second world war. Once the war ended there was a wave of strikes between 1946-48 which surpassed even those of the 1930s. But once more the beginnings of the long post-war economic boom softened social relations. Whenever the working class displayed its frustrations the US bourgeois was able to rock the congressional/senate political cradle from the right - the Republicans - to the 'left' - the Democrats.

THE REASON WHY a labour party has not developed in the US, almost alone in the advanced industrial world, is that US capitalism has always, up to now, found through a further expansion of industry, a means of reconciling the great majority of the population to its system. An additional factor was the refusal of the trade union tops to articulate the disillusionment with the Republicans and Democrats. But that situation is now coming to an end.

The US economy is still the strongest in the world. But it does not possess either the weight or the economic power of the immediate post-1945 situation. Then 50% of the world's gold was in its vaults, and it alone accounted for 50% of world trade. It is now challenged by Japanese and European capitalism. Its decreased competitiveness with

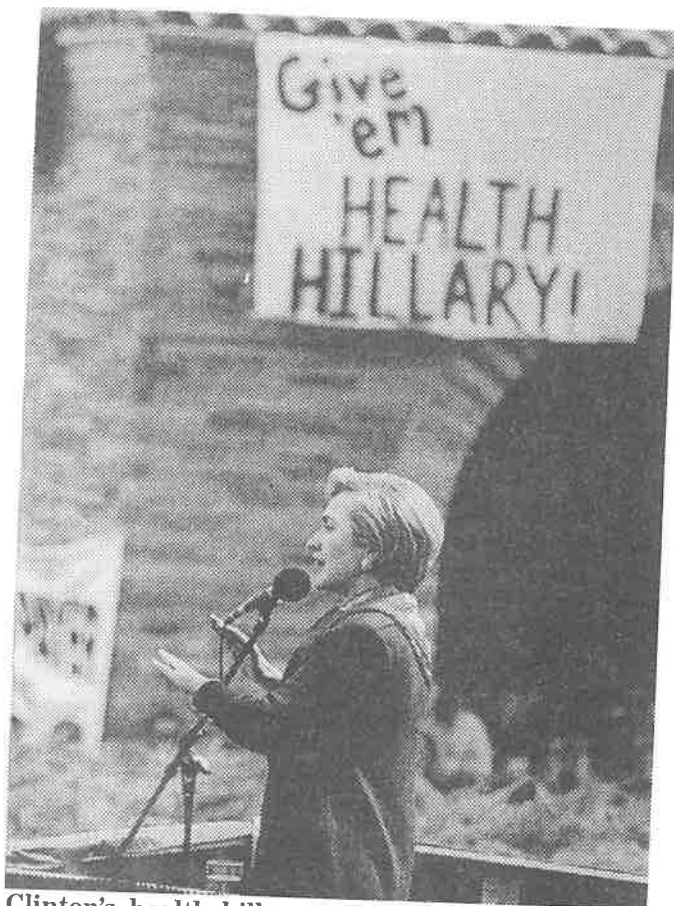


New York mayor, Rudy Giuliani.

its rivals on the world market has resulted in the inexorable growth of its trade deficit. The legacy of the 1980s, in the form of a huge accumulated budget deficit and national debt, is a massive albatross around the neck of US capitalism. Clinton's attempt to slash the deficit means that he has to embark on the same road as the British Tories and their European counterparts in attacking the 'welfare state'.

The main difference in the US is that the conquests for the working class in the form of the 'welfare state' does not exist. There is no 'safety-net', meagre though it is, which exists in Britain and other advanced industrial countries. This is one of the consequences of the lack of an independent workers' party in the US. The organised pressure exerted through a labour party compels the bourgeois to make certain concessions. This becomes evident, even to a superficial observer, when you step from the US into Canada. Despite the fact that the New Democratic Party has never held power on a national scale (it is presently in power in the Ontario and British Columbia provinces), together with the trade unions it has compelled the Canadian bourgeois to establish a health, education, and social services system somewhat akin to the British pattern.

The absence of an independent labour party, together with the weakening of the trade unions, as well as relatively higher living standards (out of which the majority of workers could pay privately for the benefits provided by the state in other countries) all allowed the US bourgeois to dispense with a 'welfare state'. But for those outside the charmed circle of the 'American dream',



Clinton's health bill - not an NHS.

life could be brutal. And with the systematic undermining of the position of US capitalism, and with it the living standards of more and more workers, millions have been drawn into the economic vortex of unemployment, poverty and social deprivation. Forty million US workers, for example, are presently without health cover. This has fuelled the clamour for the establishment of a national health service (ironically at a time when the British bourgeois are systematically dismantling the NHS in this country).

Clinton's health bill is *not* designed to establish a national health service. In fact its purpose is to cut the share of GDP which is presently devoted to health spending. And yet nine-tenths of the population, according to the most authoritative opinion polls, are demanding the establishment of a properly funded national health service. This has been denounced as 'socialised medicine' by the right but the overwhelming majority support it. This counters the notion peddled by right-wing commentators and sectarian muddleheads that in some way the US working class is moving to the right.

All kinds of ideological rubbish which has accumulated in the skulls of the US workers bursts out from time to time, on issues such as crime or hostility to 'welfare bums'. But this will be blown away on the basis of the big events that impend. One of the most important developments coming

out of this will be the creation of a labour party. The first steps towards such a force are encompassed in the formation of Labor Party Advocates (LPA) which is gathering support within the union movement. Led by the former oil workers leader Mazzocki, already this union, as well as two labour federations in California, representing a combined total of 100,000 workers, have come out for a labour party.

Cuddling up to the Clinton administration the majority of the trade union bureaucracy at this stage are hostile to such a development. It is possible that Lane Kirkland will in the near future denounce the LPA. However a significant section of the trade union officialdom is under pressure from the ranks to separate from the Democratic Party. In the light of the NAFTA events, the cuts which Clinton is proposing in welfare, and the slashing of jobs at federal, state and city level by Democratic and Republican grandees alike, has led to widespread disillusionment in the Democratic Party.

Once more a revolt of the inner cities is being prepared.

ONE THING IS clear: the contradictions of US capitalism are preparing unprecedented social and political convulsions. Once more a revolt of the inner cities is being prepared which could dwarf the uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s and even the huge Los Angeles uprising. The illusions of the 1980s that the black and Latino populations could steadily advance up the ladder of economic progress are now shattered. Only a thin layer of bourgeoisified blacks and Latinos have benefitted, while all the statistics show a worse position of social deprivation and unemployment now than 20 years ago. Families have been broken up, neighbourhoods destroyed, unemployment is endemic, and battenning onto these horrific conditions is now the nightmare of drugs. US capitalism in its death agony is criminalising whole layers of society.

On a world scale, the 'drugs industry' now generates greater income than even the arms industry. Without the connivance of the police tops, utterly corrupted and rotten, and the customs, drugs could not be systematically used on such a wide scale. Many blacks now comment that 'it is not us (blacks) who fly the aeroplanes which bring the drugs in, we don't man the customs posts'. Completely alienated from US society, layers of blacks, Latinos and even whites have been drawn into the gangs which now exist in every major city in the US. The symbols of the 'Cripps' and 'Bloods' seem to exist in every neighbourhood and most of the

cities of the US. Their membership is now estimated at something like a million.

The horror which this phenomena generates is graphically described in the book *Monster*, the autobiography of an LA gang member, 'Monster' Kodie Scott. This 'original gangster' moved from being almost a teenage 'terrorist', through prison, to a consciousness that led him to reject this path, challenging capitalism, although ending up supporting the idea of the separation of the blacks in the US. More than 50% of blacks now support an independent black party. There is total disillusionment, reflected in most polls, with the alleged 'progress' of the 1980s. However, as history has demonstrated, these tendencies towards separatism will be cut across once a revival of the working class takes place. Above all a surge in union membership and organisation will draw in blacks and Latinos, to a much greater extent than even amongst whites in the first instance, towards a labour party.

Not just domestic but international events could act to radicalise the US working class. Revolutionary upheavals like that in Mexico, together with the possible victory of Lula in October's Brazilian elections, could give a big push to the development of the consciousness of US workers. If the economy should go into a nosedive Clinton could become a 'lame duck president' even before the next election looms.

One thing is clear. The political fragmentation reflected in the last election - particularly by the 19% vote for Perot, which in turn indicated the possibilities for a labour party at this stage - look certain to be repeated. Under this fragmentation there is however an underlying polarisation. There is widespread disillusionment with the present system. Voters feel that Washington has become 'an iron triangle', which cannot be changed by voting.

Not just domestic but international events could act to radicalise the US working class.

In the presidential elections of 1996 it is likely that apart from a Democrat and a Republican candidate, Perot will stand again and the rampant 'moral majority', the Buchanan right of the Republican Party, could also stand. It is possible therefore that there could be three or four candidates in the next US presidential elections. At the same time, as the disillusionment with Clinton develops, it cannot be excluded that other populist figures like Jesse Jackson or Ralph Nader, together with forces for an inde-

pendent labour party, could be pushed into standing even in the presidential elections. At city and state level, the unions in particular could be pushed into putting forward independent labour candidates. All this will prepare the ground for the emergence of an independent political organisation of the working class, which would represent a colossal step forward not just for the US but indeed for the world labour movement.

We said at the beginning of this decade that the 1990s would be characterised by the emergence of the three most important working classes of the world, Germany, Japan and that of the US. Already the German working class has flexed its muscles in the huge strikes of the first few months of 1994. The economic crisis, together with the 'political revolution' in Japan, is preparing the ground for the re-emergence industrially and politically of the Japanese working class.

But the US working class probably occupies the most important strategic position of the world labour movement. It has a powerful radical, socialist and revolutionary tradition which has been covered over by a combination of the post-war economic boom and the hampering effect of the right-wing trade union leadership. But big events will push this working class into action. And once it moves it will be at the velocity of America, at American speed, and not at the slower European tempo. This is the country upon which ultimately the fate of mankind rests. It is the anvil which will shape the future of humankind. And the hammer which will accomplish this task is a mass Marxist force, which exists in the germ in the US Marxist journal, *Labor Militant*. Once the US goes socialist it will draw in the rest of the world like iron filings into a huge magnet into a socialist federation. □



Perot - likely to stand in '96.

Book Reviews

In this issue we look at the role of the media through a history of the Reuters news agency; Christopher Hill's most recent work on the English revolution; and EP Thompson's study of William Blake.

The Power Of News - The History Of Reuters (1849-1989)

By Donald Read

Published by Oxford University Press, 1994, £9.99

Reviewed by Colin Fox

IF YOU HAVE ever skimmed through the international news pages of your morning paper you will have no doubt seen articles signed simply 'Reuters'. But who are Reuters and why have they become so successful? Donald Read's *The Power Of News* tries to explain.

The international news agency Reuters is one of perhaps only three British successes in world media terms, alongside *The Economist* and *The Financial Times*.

The 1980's boom in communications technology made them an ever-present fixture in the finance houses of Europe. The company invested heavily in real-time technology and its fortunes leapt remarkably. In 1980 pre-tax profits were £3.9m; in 1989 £283m. Employment grew fourfold.

Julius Reuter, the company's founder, was born in Germany in 1816. He began his service by sending messages to subscribers via carrier pigeon, linking the two ends of the existing telegraph services between Brussels and Germany. He literally found a gap in the market for news.

In June 1851 he moved to London to follow the European telegraph system which was extended across the channel. This opened up the massive British empire and its links with Africa, India and the Far East. This was the making of him.

Reuter emerged as Europe's



Reuters Pacific newsdesk, 1952.

leading news gatherer at the dawn of a new era in communications. The company catered for personal messages as well as news, but its main income came chiefly from the business world through the communication of information on stocks, shares and markets.

Queen Victoria was paying nearly £20 for a six-month supply of Reuter telegrams. In 1871 Victoria's brother in law, Duke Ernst II, had made Julius Reuter, Baron de Reuter of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. The title was awarded in recognition of Rueter's services to the public.

"This was entirely proper, but in a sense Reuter bought his title. It cost Reuter £800 to obtain the necessary landed qualification in Coburg". Here Read exposes, albeit naively, the relationship between the emerging industrialist classes and the aristocracy.

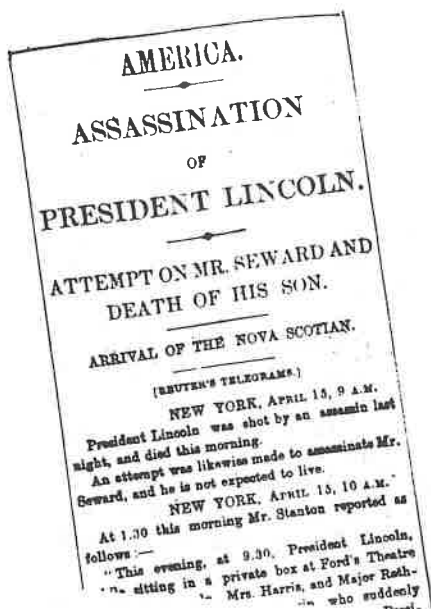
Reuter felt the company would thrive if it built up a reputation for impartiality and accuracy as well as speed. *The Power of News*

gives this reputation a good airing and uses many famous examples of Reuter scoop's. These are interesting, but I must say I enjoyed far more the occasions when they got it wrong.

No-one would expect an organisation's 150-year history to be without a few blemishes and Reuters certainly got in a spot or two in its time. Consider the news it sent on the sinking of the Titanic: "The Titanic sank at 2.20 this morning. No lives were lost". Or the Battle of the Somme: "At about half past seven this morning a vigorous attack was launched by the British Army... British troops have already occupied the German front line.

"Many prisoners have fallen into our hands and as far as can be ascertained our casualties have not been heavy. So far the day is going well for Great Britain and France".

But my favourite gaff has to be the telegraphic message sent to customers upon the out break of



World War One: "Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated at Sarajevo on June 28".

The first message communicated to Reuters reported tersely "Sarajevo Ferdinand Deste assassine". That was all. The sub-editor who took down the message was awaiting the result of the Paris Grand Prix horse race. He took this to be it and prepared the story! "The result of the Grand Prix at Paris this afternoon was 1: Sarajevo 2: Ferdinand 3: Assassine". Within a month Europe was slipping into war. Oops!

What Reuters did get right however was its ability to foresee the way mass communications were developing. The concept of real-time communications boggles my imagination, both technically in the transmission of information from say Rwanda or Bosnia to say the Rhondha or Bognor, and in the immense profits to be made from the same. Reuters saw the way the wind was blowing so to speak and invested heavily in the 1980s

in the latest technological communications and news gathering techniques.

Throughout its history the company was determined to keep to the fore in developing these innovations. Whether that meant sending a small boat out to meet the incoming packet ships from America or cultivating links with eminent politicians, they assiduously sought each new story.

Real-time links to the world stock exchanges may as yet be beyond *Militant's* needs, but they have become essential to finance houses throughout the world as 'Black Wednesday' and other crashes testify. From a virtual monopoly in this service Reuters stole a march on competitors and dramatically turned round its historically precarious finances.

The most captivating features of the book are those highlighting the cosy relationship between Reuters and her majesty's government. Generous financial state support, dual employment of British intelligence agents as Reuters' foreign correspondents and secret reports written exclusively for the British government form less honourable parts of the Reuters history.

Reuters's reporters doubled up as agents for British intelligence.

Leaving aside the fact that the

head of Reuters could always rely on being accommodated at British diplomatic residences abroad and overlook as a temporary commercial deal the £276,000 the government gave Reuters in 1866 as compensation for lost trade, the case for cronyism becomes difficult for Reuters to dismiss. Especially considering that the Foreign Office owned 500 of the 999 shares which Reuters issued in the early 1900s, and held a directorship with a veto.

More seriously than all this even is the accusation, backed up frequently in Read's book, that Reuter's reporters doubled up as agents for British intelligence. The case of Jimmy Cox, chief Reuters correspondent in Tokyo in 1941, is particularly devastating to a reputation for impartiality. "Japanese secret police believed him (Cox) to be an intelligence gatherer.

"Reuters did not reveal that at this very period the salaries of several of its correspondents in the Far East were being supplemented by payments from the Foreign office". It certainly makes you wonder whether the roles played by the Brian Hanarahans and Kate Adies of this world are all that they seem.

The Power of News is a well researched book. It is sometimes a little bit gushing about the company's performance over the years, perhaps too often in awe of the history and achievements.

Nonetheless it gives a valuable insight into the history of one of its most successful modern companies, one certainly at the cutting edge of mass communications and one which could not have got where it is today without the assistance of the British government. □

A Nation of Change and Novelty
By Christopher Hill
Published by Bookmarks, 1993,
£10.95
Reviewed by Bill Hopwood

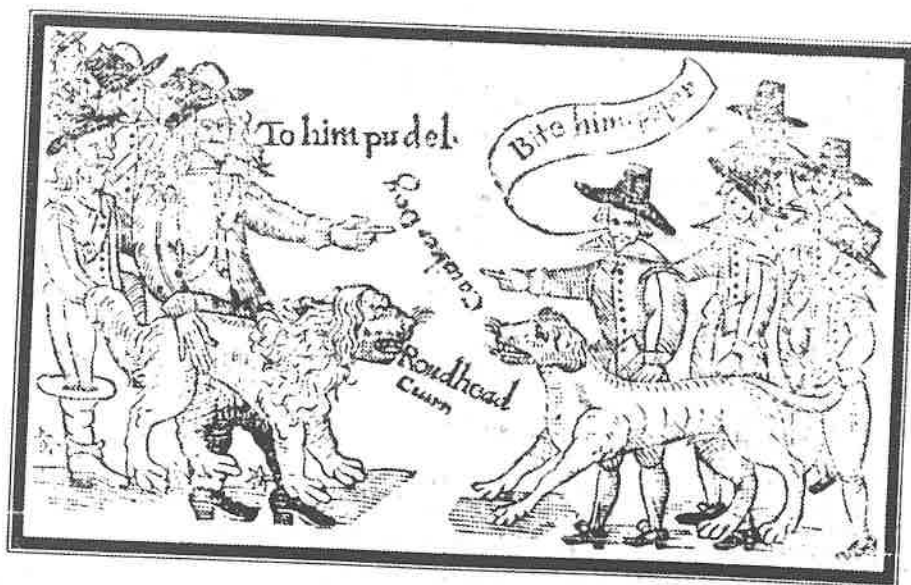
“ALL GOVERNMENTS LIE to their peoples,” states Christopher Hill, a well known

historian of the English revolution of 1640-1660. This is an important understanding for historians - after all, where do they get much of their information from?

Some historians have claimed that there was little discontent in England before the revolution because the official records don't show any strong opposition. Hill in

contrast points to the need to look beyond the official records and use other sources, such as private diaries, literature and songs.

Official records are written by the ruling class. They are not objective records but are aimed to persuade or even hide the truth. As the poet William Blake put it, "only a scoundrel believes public



reason, not God as the creator. There were many religious trends in the revolution, including powerful movements against the established church and clergy.

The revolution also generated early arguments for women's rights. Winstanley said: "Not one word was spoken in the beginning, that one branch of mankind should rule over another. And the reason is this, every man, male and female, is a perfect creature of himself". In a religious group called the Ranters women had much equality. Milton argued for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. The parliament of 1653 established civil marriage.

The literature of the revolution had a worldwide impact.

The literature of the revolution had a worldwide impact. The most published book in 19th century Russia was Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and for many years the world's best seller after the bible was *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, who spent a third of his life in jail for refusing to stop preaching.

An interesting point in Hill's book is on the word revolution. Some historians argue that as the word in its modern usage didn't exist then how could there be a revolution? One Professor Pocock states, "men cannot do what they have no means of saying they have done". Hill makes the obvious point that things exist before they have names.

The book then is a defence of the importance of the revolution. It uses a method of history based on a wide-ranging analysis of society and its development. He argues against a recent popular trend of historians who claim history is a series of accidents. One such recent claim was that the French revolution was caused by erupting volcanoes. Hill shows the growing tensions in society including the

records to be true". This is as much the case today as 300 years ago.

Imagine writing a history of the present Tory government based on their 'economical with the truth' statements. Just consider the Tories' record on arms sales to Iraq, aid to Malaysia, or the gerrymandering of Westminster council?

How then, in an era of censorship, such as England before 1640, can official documents be considered the only valid sources? If the rulers feel the need to impose censorship surely there must be discontent and other points of view to be suppressed. Milton, the great poet who supported the revolution, wrote: "If it come to prohibiting there is not aught more likely to be prohibited than truth itself". He was aware of the danger of censorship as at the end of the revolution he was lucky to escape being hanged.

Hill also considers how criticism is often veiled in religious or historic comparisons. In recent times Tory critics of Thatcher talked of a 'One Nation' Conservative Party in a politely disguised attack on her brutal pro-capitalist policies. Dissidents often criticise a policy indirectly by criticising the advisors or its presentation.

In the 17th century much thought was expressed in religious terms. Consequently, some historians claim that the revolution was

solely about religion. Hill however shows that the religious arguments were based on social tensions. As Cromwell, the leader of the revolution, stated, "religion was not the thing first contested for".

One example of political views expressed in religious form are the lines from the peasants rebellion of 1381, led by early socialists John Ball and Wat Tyler: "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who then was the gentleman?" If at creation Adam and Eve worked at farming (delve) and spinning (span) and there was no ruling class, why should there be one now, is the argument.

Hill's book also defends the revolution and its long-term historical impact. The popular image is of a conflict between happy, laughing Cavaliers in support of the King and the miserable, dull Puritans. Hill shows within the revolutionary movement there was a wide diversity of views and social movements.

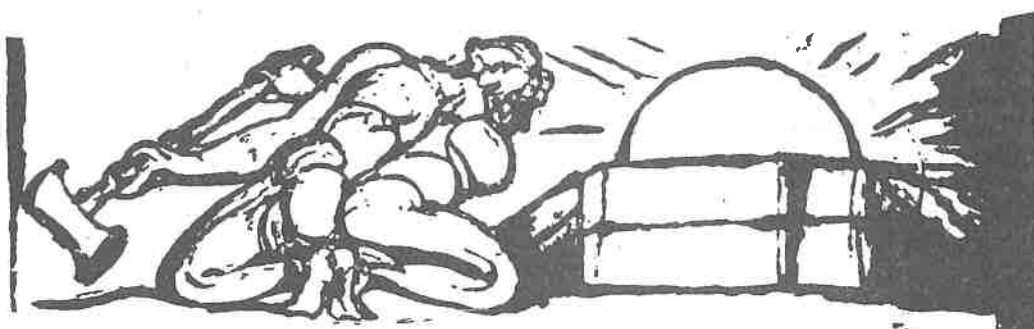
There were the early utopian socialists such as Winstanley who attacked the privileges of property, arguing that there could not be equality, democracy and freedom when wealth and land was unevenly distributed. He argued for economic equality, saying "in the beginning of time the great Creator Reason made the earth to be a common treasury". It is interesting that Winstanley talks of

lovely phrase of an ordinary Essex man of the time: "By God, I care not a turd neither for the King nor his laws". A truer view of Essex man than the recent Tory hype.

England was changed forever by the revolution. Hill's book, alongside his earlier books - *The English Revolution, 1640, God's Englishmen* and *The World Turned Upside Down* - help to answer the

question of why England was the first capitalist country. As well as economic change there were profound changes in society. Many of the ideas that shaped the modern world were influenced by the English revolution, whether in the science of Newton and Boyle, the politics of Hobbes, Locke and the early socialists, or the literature of Milton and Bunyan.

The English revolutionaries believed in action. One said, "I am not in the mind we should put our hands in our pockets and wait what will come". They changed history. For Marxists, history helps us to understand the present and shape the future. By understanding we are better able to act. □



Witness Against the Beast: Blake and the Moral Law

By EP Thompson

Published by Cambridge University Press, 1993, £17.95

Reviewed by Victor Paananen

EP THOMPSON, THE SOCIALIST historian best known for *The Making of the English Working Class*, acknowledged two sources of inspiration for his own work ('my own pantheon'): Karl Marx and William Blake. Before his death in 1993, Thompson finished *Witness Against the Beast*, which studies Blake's opposition to the morality, science and social values of his age, the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Thompson places Blake's protests in the context of the religious opinions that had been voiced by the Ranters and other sects in the English revolution of 1640-1660 and were still heard from dissenting groups in Blake's own time.

The Marxist historian AL Morton was the first to demonstrate the similarities between Blake's ideas and language and those of the Ranters. "The Ranters", Morton explains, "formed the extreme left-wing of the sects which came into prominence during the English revolution, both theologically

and politically... The Ranters, and they alone at this date, spoke for and to the most wretched and submerged elements of the population, the slum dwellers of London and other cities". (*The World of the Ranters*, p70).

Because the Ranters believed God to be literally in every human being, they advocated the radical equality of all people, rejected the need to adhere to the moral law emphasised by other Christian groups, and denounced the rich while calling for ownership in common. Around 1649, for about a year, the Ranters appear, according to Morton, "to have attracted a mass following, especially among the London poor". William Blake, a Londoner born in Soho in 1757, more than 100 years after the high point of Ranter activity, seems to echo the Ranters in his assertions of the divinity in every individual, in his objections to the conventional morality of his age, and in his aspiration for a society based on the principle defined by Blake as 'all things common'.

Thompson acknowledges Morton's pioneering research but also finds a significant degree of correspondance in content and language between Blake's work and the writings of the Muggletonians, a

Christian tendency made up of admirers of the preacher and writer Ludowick Muggleton, that originated around 1652 immediately after the period of Ranter successes. Muggletonian doctrines were similar to Ranter doctrines and influenced by them.

Thompson offers some evidence that Blake's mother may have been a member of the Muggletonians. Although not himself a Christian, Thompson, feeling the influence of both Blake and Marx, had from the time that he started to do research on the Muggletonians, been amused to call himself a 'Muggletonian Marxist'.

Blake's religious vocabulary embodied the opposition of ordinary people to the ruling powers of the age.

The context provided by Morton and Thompson greatly assists the reader of Blake who moves at all beyond the usual anthology pieces and enters the bewildering maze of myth, radical politics and visionary Christianity that Blake creates in

such major works as *Jerusalem*. Thompson convincingly shows that Blake's religious vocabulary was less eccentric than we might think: it was in fact a language that embodied the opposition of ordinary people to the ruling powers of the age.

"It struck very precisely at critical positions of the hegemonic culture, the 'common sense' of the ruling groups, which today can be seen to be intellectually unsound and sometimes to be no more than ideological apologetics", Thompson writes (p110). "Blake had been taught in childhood to place a critical distance between himself and the rich and great", Thompson explains, and Blake absorbed from the "pockets of radical dissent among the trades... a stubborn lack of deference, both social and intellectual" (pp111- 112).

Thompson's expert knowledge of the vocabulary and attitudes of the age permits him to offer some powerful new readings even of Blake's best-known works. Blake's *London* Thompson shows to be "an indictment of the acquisitive ethic, endorsed by the institutions of the state, which divides man from man" and "brings him into mental and moral bondage" (p191).

Thompson's book is not meant to provide everything that a beginning reader of Blake's longer works would need. Blake's self-generated mythic system, one of the vehicles for both his political and religious insights, is not explained, so standard works like Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* remain necessary. The book does however succeed in its demonstration of Blake's emergence from a context of growing opposition to the new commercial and industrial civilisation of England - and it communicates Thompson's passionate advocacy of Blake as an ancestor of all militant protest against this economy and culture.

There is however a further step that Thompson has not taken that would have allowed him to see more of the 'Marxist' in the 'Muggletonian'. In his opposition to what he called 'natural religion', Blake objected to the efforts of his age to understand the external world rather than to change it, and Thompson acknowledges Blake's Marx-like emphasis on 'ac-

tivity' rather than contemplation. The labour that Blake calls humanity to perform is the physical as well as cultural transformation of a recognisable modern London into 'Jerusalem'. Blake's religious vocabulary - a voice of protest in his own age, as Thompson shows - is also able to carry Blake's attempt both to redefine the human relationship to nature and to insist upon the centrality of labour: such an enterprise clearly points toward the achievement of Marx.

Yet, despite Blake's understanding of the world in terms of dynamic 'contraries', Thompson is unwilling to accept Blake as "a premature practitioner of Marxist dialectic" (p226). For the Marxist Thompson to come so close to a recognition of Blake and Marx as co-workers, and then back-off, must, I think, be a disappointment to the reader familiar with both Blake and Marx. But Thompson has nonetheless done enough to convince us that Blake's work is like Marx's, "a plank in the floor upon which the future must walk" (p228).

Deep within his demanding epic *Jerusalem*, Blake offers this account of the human consequences of the industrial revolution:

And all the Arts of Life they chang'd into the Arts of Death in Albion.

The hour-glass contemn'd because its simple workmanship

Was like the workmanship of the plowman, and the water wheel

That raises water into cisterns, broken and burned with fire

Because its workmanship was like the workmanship of the shepherd;

And, in their stead, intricate wheels invented, wheel without wheel,

To perplex youth in their outgoings and to bind to labours in Albion

Of day and night the myriads of eternity: that they may grind

And polish brass and iron hour after hour, laborious task,

Kept ignorant of its use: that they might spend the days of wisdom

In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scant pittance of bread,

In ignorance to view a small portion and think that All,

And call it Demonstration, blind

to all the simple rules of life.

(*Jerusalem*, Chapter three, Plate 65).

In Blake's objection to 'Demonstration' is heard his objection to the categories of bourgeois, non-dialectical thought. His recognition that the industrial worker is permitted knowledge of only a narrow aspect of the production of the commodity certainly foreshadows the explanations by Marx and Engels of the effects of the division of labour with the resulting alienation from one's own work.

London, a living symbol for the triumph of capital, has, in Blake's *Ranter* or *Muggletonian* language, been turned into 'Babylon'. But, in lines that are among the most widely known in the English-speaking world, Blake announces his own total commitment to the labour that will transform London into 'Jerusalem', and he asks us to join in the work:

I shall not cease from mental fight,

Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,

Till we have built Jerusalem

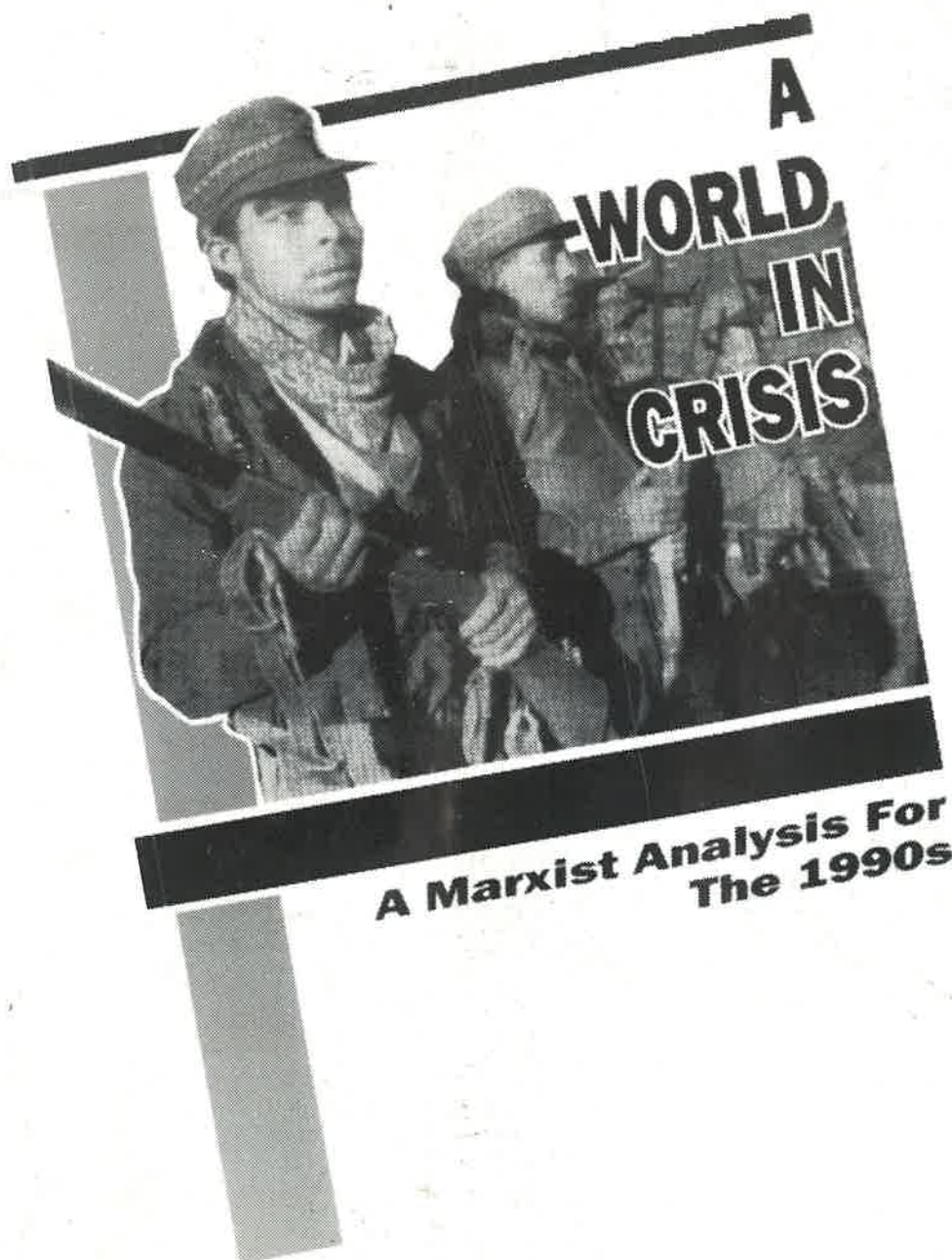
In England's green and pleasant land.

Socialists could do worse than to accept EP Thompson's recommendation of both Blake and Marx as interpreters and prophets: both saw from their London perspectives the damage to humanity that capitalism was wreaking and both called upon us not simply to understand this system but to change it. □

Subscription rates

Subscribe to the *Militant International Review* for £7-50 for six issues, UK/Ireland, or £9 overseas. Write to us with your name and address and a cheque or postal order made payable to World Socialist Books at 3/13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

Available from World Socialist Books



A World In Crisis. In December 1993, representatives from Militant Labour met with delegates from Marxist organisations throughout the world in a conference organised by the Committee for a Workers' International. Twenty-five countries were represented, with a further six unable to attend.

Now, the conclusions of the conference have been published in a 134-page book. With sections on world relations following the collapse of Stalinism; the former colonial world; racism, fascism and the prospects for reaction; the traditional workers' parties; and the world economy; this book is a handbook for the ideas of Marxism for the next period.

The book costs £4.50, £3 to Militant Labour members. To get your copy, send off now, adding 50p per copy for post and packing (orders of 5 or more post free), to World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscott Road, London, E9 5HB.