

Socialist Worker

For a Workers' Republic and International Socialism 40p

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The face of the future

Keeping kids in ignorance

THE government has given the bishops a free hand in forcing their moral views on school children under the guise of sex education.

The White Paper on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Programmes says the content of these programmes should be 'tailored to the community level'.

This sounds democratic but in reality it leaves control of sex education in the hands of local Parish Priests who chair school boards.

In one inner-city school in Dublin the PP invited another priest to address the meeting. This 'sexuality expert'—no doubt celibate—gave a hardline speech opposing premarital sex, masturbation, contraception and homosexuality.

According to one teacher, anyone who objected was bullied into silence.

Discourage

Archbishop Connell of Dublin has proposed the *Human Development Programme* as a model for schools in his diocese. It will discourage children from asking questions about sex.

In the section on conception, if a child asks "how did the seed get to the egg?" the teacher will not answer and may tell the child to ask a parent. Sexual intercourse is not discussed until a later stage.

Worse still, a Canadian group called Team Challenge has been allowed to tour Irish schools spreading lies about sex. Part of their routine has been to roll a dice to illustrate the 'unreliability' of condoms.

Niamh Breanach's cowardice in ducking the issue means sex education is still in the hands of bigots who want to keep young people in ignorance.

As courts order water disconnections... We need more 'childish' protests

TWO WEEKS before Xmas, Fingal County Council got Court Orders to disconnect the water supply of two non-payers in Skerries.

Protesters disrupted the court in Balbriggan with angry chants as the disconnection orders were made.

Justice Delap was outraged calling the pickets "childish" and "disgraceful" and warning that he didn't want a repeat of this again.

He should be answered the next time with even bigger and more disruptive pickets.

Poll Tax

Poll tax protesters in Britain used this tactic to great effect in their fight as they realised very quickly that the courts were not going to play fair with ordinary working people.

The cases of another six non-payers were adjourned to 11th January after legal representations were made on their behalf.

All other non-payment cases in Fingal were adjourned until after Xmas while the Council gets proof that these people are 'consumers' and 'occupiers'.

Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown has now gone on the offensive with 13 summonses issued to people in the area.

The fact that the councils threatened disconnections in the run-up to Xmas shows just how vicious they are.

They hope to frighten people into paying up.

Refusing

However the anti-water charges campaign is much stronger than that. 60,000 households are refusing outright to pay this unjust double tax.

If disconnection orders are made demonstrations should be organised to prevent them from being carried out.

In this way the law can be made a nonsense of.

The need to fight the charges is becoming more obvious as council



after council votes to increase the rate. Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Council have already raised the water charge by 5 per cent.

Labour and Democratic Left have totally betrayed workers on this issue.

We need to organise ourselves to fight to end this betrayal.

Ringsend incinerator victory...

LOCALS IN Ringsend and Sandymount have won their fight against plans to build an incinerator in the area.

Earlier this month An Bord Pleanála refused to grant Waste to Energy Ltd planning permission for the incinerator.

Locals set up a campaign. Dublin Bay Action for Health, in July 1994 to oppose the incinerator. They argued that the incinerator, which was to have processed hospital waste, posed a serious health risk to the local population.

Residents organised protests and pickets to demonstrate their opposition to the incinerator. In September over 400 people turned up to a march in Ringsend.

The company retaliated by

trying to bribe locals. They brought a delegation on an all-paid expenses trip to England to see another incinerator.

But this cheap attempt to buy them off didn't work. Claire Watson of DBAH said, "It shows that it is possible to take on a big company with a lot of money behind them and win."

But the campaign is not going to stop there. Those involved are determined to ensure that no incinerator will be built anywhere.

Instead, the government must be forced to introduce the safest, cleanest technology to dispose of waste.

...now do the same in Clare!

CONCERN is growing in Clare at plans by the Syntex company to develop an incinerator for the disposal of waste.

Syntex is a big local employer in Clarecastle but its record on pollution of local rivers has been poor. Despite growing opposition in other areas to incinerators, Syntex have now decided to go ahead with their own plant.

But 400 people turned up to a meeting called by the group Care for Clare to oppose the company's plans. Care for Clare arranged for a Greenpeace expert to comment on the company's plans.

The company claimed that no dioxins would be emitted from their waste disposal unit.

But the Greenpeace expert rubbished this by pointing out that with the chemical process involved, 350 items would be emitted—and some of them had not even been scientifically named.

There are alternative technologies available. But Syntex says that it is determined not to incur 'excessive costs'.

The people of Ringsend in Dublin have already shown how plans for an incinerator can be defeated. Care for Clare is determined to do the same.

inside the system

Antis divorce

MEMBERS of the Anti-Divorce Campaign are 'divorcing' each other, following the recent referendum result.

Some have accused Muintir na hEireann's Richard Greene of mental abuse and cruelty against their chairman, Des Hanafin.

Greene has accused Hanafin of infidelity and desertion!!

Xmas waste

All the government parties are holding big bashes for themselves and those they want to influence, including journalists and hacks.

And just to make sure they spend as much money as possible, the parties are having their own separate evenings, with free drink, and the best of exquisite food.

Government buildings are the most popular venue, especially newly refurbished rooms which add to the millions spent on renovations in recent years.

Reebok, Nike run on cheap labour

Sport shoe manufacturers Reebok present an annual Human Rights Award aimed at making it 'simply unacceptable to mistreat human beings'.

Last year's winner was Iqbal Masih, a 12-year-old bonded carpet weaver in Pakistan who was later murdered.

But Reebok themselves take advantage of cheap labour and lack of human rights in Indonesia.

"If we make a mistake,

they call us dogs and prostitutes and sometimes they hit us," says Eni who works in the Eltri factory in Indonesia making Reebok, Nike and Adidas trainers.

Afford

Eltri's workers cannot

afford the trainers they make.

They are paid 16p an hour but a pair of Reebok Instapump Fury Graphite costs £99.99.

"To you (in the West) these shoes have an image of freedom and individuality.

"To us they mean op-

pression", says Sadihah who was sacked from the Eltri factory in 1992 for leading a strike.

Phillip Knight, Nike's founder, says Nike has a 'soul that recognises the value of human beings'. It seems that Nike and Reebok value Indonesian workers at 16p an hour.

Wild colonial boy

THAT pillar of the Irish ruling class, Dermot Desmond, recently spent the best part of a million doing up his mansion on the exclusive Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4.

And just for good measure, he says his "usual residential address" is 59 Queensway Quay ... GIBRALTAR!!

Mr Desmond is renting a 2,832 sq ft pad on the British colony.

The fact that he's "residing" outside of Ireland should help his tax status.

CLINTON BILL

Who's going to foot the Bill for Clinton's recent visit to these shores?

Probably ordinary PAYE workers. A figure of two million has been thrown about as the cost of the visit—and that was only to the South!

"The most expensive PR trip ever", some people are saying.

we think

The face of the future

"Industrial unrest is almost guaranteed at the heart of Europe in 1996. It would appear that the French disease will spread."

So wrote David McWilliams, a senior economist with a London stockbroking firm, in the *Irish Times*.

He is probably correct. The struggles in France have torn apart an illusion which was peddled by many commentators until recently: that we live in a 'post-industrial' society where class struggle belongs to a past era.

Outcome

Whatever the outcome of their struggle, French workers have sent a shiver through the hearts of Europe's rulers.

In a country where less than 12 per cent formally



France: A grassroots revolt

belong to unions, they have shown the immense power which workers command when they take action.

Many commentators have been quick to draw a paral-

lel between the explosion in France and the events of May '68 when students and workers took France to the brink of revolution.

But they also imagine that

these type of events could not happen in Ireland because of the 'moderate' trade union leadership.

But French workers are no more naturally radical than

any other.

A few years ago French socialists had to argue that despite big votes for the fascist National Front, workers would rise again.

Some of the union leaders in unions such as Force Ouvrier are comparable to the SIPTU leaders.

Grassroots

But a grassroots revolt has forced them to move into resistance to the government.

Irish workers are more than familiar with the bitterness that has erupted in France.

The politicians in Ireland have been repeating the same message of the need for 'cuts in public spending' or flexibility on pensions and holiday pay.

The rulers of Europe have imposed a collective whip on

each other in order to move to a Single European Currency in 1999.

Welfare

They have all agreed to slash their welfare spending and try to break up the power of key public sector groups like electricity or transport workers through the threat of privatisation.

Their hope is that the creation of a gigantic European market will lead to a new period of growth for the capitalists.

But France shows that workers are not having it.

A decade of talk of 'sacrifice' and 'competitiveness' has not solved unemployment.

The struggle in France has shown how practical revolutionary socialism has become.

Now is the time to build a party urgently in Ireland to be ready when the same sort of fight erupts here.

Convicted on the word of a gun-runner

A LEADING member of the Progressive Unionist Party, Lindsey Robb has been convicted on a charge of gun running—months after the loyalist UVF claimed to be implementing a ceasefire.

The conviction throws a new light on the claims of his associates David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson that they are now engaged in progressive non-sectarian politics.

Robb played a key role in the conviction of Lurgan man Colin Duffy for the murder in 1993 of a former UDR soldier.

In June Robb claimed that he saw Duffy shoot the ex-UDR man dead.

Duffy has always maintained his innocence and is currently appealing his conviction.

The only real evidence against Duffy was Robb's testimony. In finding Duffy guilty the judge relied heavily on Robb's account.

Judge Kerr praised Robb as a man of "obvious honesty", "impartiality", "reliability" and that his evidence had all the "hallmarks of accuracy and honesty".

Without Robb, Duffy would not have been convicted.

During the trial Robb claimed that neither he nor the PUP had any links with the UVF. The judge accepted this.

Robb's subsequent conviction in Scotland of UVF gun-running adds considerable weight to Duffy's claim that the RUC and Robb conspired in framing him.

Colin Duffy's wife Susan has supported her husband's fight to prove his innocence.

She has now helped to set up The Friends of Colin Duffy to campaign for his immediate release and get

his conviction overturned. She spoke to *Socialist Worker*.

"Colin has never denied that he is a republican, but he is completely innocent. He now has to spend another Christmas in prison for a crime he didn't do.

Looking

"The RUC were looking for someone to blame the killing on, so they picked on Colin. He was always being harassed and we had our house raided by the police and army.

"In 1990 Colin survived a UVF murder bid in which his friend was killed. Afterwards he spoke out against RUC and UVF collusion, so that's probably why he was framed. Lindsey Robb was wheeled in to make sure they got a conviction.

"Colin's case shows that miscarriages of justice are still happening despite what's happening with the peace process.

"His trial was almost a year after the ceasefire, but he didn't have a jury to hear his case—if he had, he

would have been found innocent, but all he had was a single judge in a Diplock Court."

After Duffy's trial the RUC issued Lindsey Robb with a semi-automatic pistol for "his protection" and he was given £2,000 cash to relocate in Scotland.

At Robb's subsequent

trial in Glasgow, Lurgan policeman, RUC Sergeant Forde appeared on his behalf as a character witness. Forde was the policeman who had arrested and charged Colin Duffy.

Both trials show that the PUP cannot be trusted when it talks the language of peace.

Derry gay pride march

OVER 100 people joined Derry's first ever gay rights march on Saturday December 9.

By the time the march reached the Guildhall Square, it had doubled in size and the atmosphere was triumphant.

The march had been organised because of an alarming number of physical assaults on gay people in the town.

The march was intended to isolate the bigots who carry out the assaults.

Meanwhile in one of the local shirt factories, workers are boycotting the local Factory Queen competition in solidarity with a lesbian fellow worker.

She had been chosen by the other workers to represent their factory in the Factory Queen but management refused to put her forward because of her sexual orientation. Hence the boycott.



Belfast leisure centres

THE DISPUTE over cuts in Belfast's leisure centres continue as the council has deferred a decision until the middle of January.

Councillor Fred Cobain is the main advocate of the cuts in leisure.

He sits on the "Waterfront

Committee" and promotes the huge spending on the conference centre.

Cut Back

One city council worker told *Socialist Worker*, "Cobain and his mates all hold posi-

tions on the Waterfront Committee and they get an extra £7,500 a year each for this.

"These people want to cut back leisure services for working class areas to fund their fancy conference centre which is designed to cater for the rich and business."

Institute for right-wing Burkes

IRELAND's right wingers are setting up a new think tank called the Edmund Burke Institute.

They want to influence the media and universities to promote the wonders of free market capitalism.

The new think tank is modelled on organisations like the Adam Smith Institute in Britain which has operated as a ginger group for ideas among the Tory party.

Among its founders is one Richard Lynn. This is the former Professor of Psychology in Coleraine who argued that black people were genetically less intelligent than whites.

Lynn is already connected to extreme right-wing racist groups in Britain and America.

Much of the funding for his research came from the Heritage Institute in America which promotes racist ideas.

Another of the members is the UCD economics lecturer Moore McDowell. He denounced the establishment of a rapid rail system in Dublin, the DART service, as a waste of public money.

The right wingers have certainly chosen a good name for the new institute.

Edmund Burke argued that there should be no state money given out to relieve distress even when famines were looming.

behind the headlines

Who are our allies?

I WAS standing in Waterloo Place in Derry as the multitudes who had cheered Bill Clinton poured past from Guildhall Square when an old comrade drifted over. "You weren't in that crowd?", he demanded to know. I reassured him that I had not indeed.

"Remember Bernadette and the Black Panthers?", he grinned, and went off without waiting for an answer. And I did, and I knew why he'd thought it apt to call it back to mind now.

Irish politicians had been heading off to the States even then, looking for support for their cause back here.

On one trip, in late 1969, in New York, Bernadette Devlin, then, at 21, the youngest MP in Westminster, had been given the Freedom of the City, the honour symbolised in the presentation on the steps of City Hall of a ceremonial Golden Key by a young charismatic politician, Mayor John Lindsay.

Sheepish

Bernadette brought the key back and sheepishly showed it to us in its leather and velvet presentation case: sheepish because, like many of the rest of us, she was feeling there was maybe something dodgy about accepting an honour from the US political establishment at that time.

The main consideration was that in the USA then the Black Panther Party was under sustained and ferocious assault.

The Panthers had been founded in Oakland, California, in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton to fight against the oppression of black Americans, originally specifically against police harassment.

What was to distinguish them from other radical black groups before and since was their implacable will to oppose police attacks on blacks "by any means necessary": they signalled this by exercising the constitutional right of all US citizens not only to carry guns but to carry them openly if in reasonable fear of imminent attack.

Pictures of black men standing stolidly outside Panther premises arms folded across heavy-duty assault rifles sent a shiver through the US establishment. The party's full name was the Black Panther Party for Self Defence.

Their other distinguishing feature was their explicit rejection of the black cultural nationalism beginning to emerge. In head on contradiction to the philosophy of the Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan—whose "Million Man March" in Washington caught the media imagination in October—the Panthers argued against the notion that all whites benefited from racism and were to some degree racist.

Bobby Seale wrote in 1968: "We call for an alliance with all of the people and organisations that want to move against the power structure. We do not fight racism with racism. We fight racism with solidarity. We do not fight exploitation with black capitalism".

Some of us really liked the sound of that. We felt in a vague but nonetheless real way like our side was taking heavy blows when, FBI boss J Edgar Hoover having declared the Panthers "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country", the US authorities launched a campaign against them which looked very much like war.

Bullets

Seale's closest associate, Bobby Hutton, was shot dead by police in Oakland. The head of the party in Chicago, Fred Hampton, died in a torrent of police bullets.

Taking it all into account, there was an uneasy feeling that Bernadette's scene with Lindsay on the City Hall steps had not been well-advised.

So it was eventually resolved that the key should be carried back to New York and passed on to the local Panther organisation.

This was done with some ceremony in Harlem a little time later. It's what my grinning friend was reminding me of in Waterloo Place on the day Clinton came to town.

It seemed natural back then, when we looked abroad for alliances, to look to the victims of oppression, not to those who preside over it. "One world, one struggle". That sort of stuff.

From then to now, some things have stayed the same. Then as now, by any measure of economic deprivation or social exclusion, blacks in the US are more discriminated against than any section of people in the North.

But other things have changed, of course, as shown in the choreographed sea of Stars and Stripes and the orchestrated chants of "We Want Bill" which arose in Guildhall Square.

All the mainstream political leaders—and we have to include Sinn Fein in that category these days—believe this is a change for the better.

Which speaks as eloquently as anything else about the rottenness of their political ideas.

by EAMONN MCCANN

Christmas on welfare

by MICK DOYLE

THIS YEAR well over 400,000 people in Ireland, many of them with families to support, have another Christmas on the dole.

But politicians like Bertie Ahern of Fianna Fail is calling for cuts in social welfare.

The governments claim that there are currently about 283,100 unemployed in the republic and about 88,000 in The North.

But The Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed maintains that the real figures are closer to 306,173 in the Republic and 105,700 in The North.

Whatever way you slice it, it's a hell of a lot of people depending on social welfare to survive.

According to the Combat Poverty Agency there are between 20 and 30% of people in the Republic living below the poverty level.

Entitled

An unemployed single person in the Republic this Christmas got €62.50. Only those on long-term assistance or pensions were entitled to a fuel allowance of €8 and the Christmas bonus which is 70% of a normal week's dole.

A married person got an extra €37.50 for his or her spouse and €13.29 pints for any children they have.

In the North a single person under eighteen gets €28 and over eighteen, €36.80.

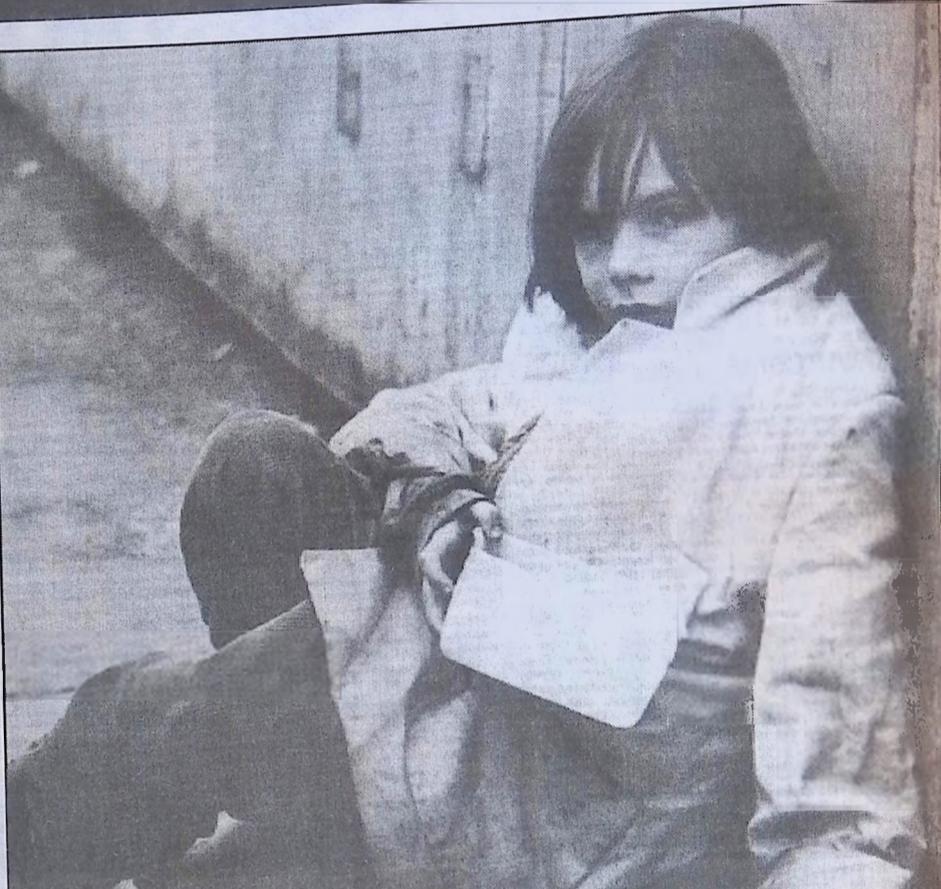
Twenty fives and over get €46.50. A couple who are both under eighteen get €55 each. Over eighteens get €73.

Couples with kids get between €15.95 and €36.80 depending on the ages of their children.

None of the unemployed in the North are entitled to a Christmas bonus.

Catherine Heaney, of the INOU, sees these payments as woefully inadequate.

She says that her organisation will be sending a pre-budget submission to the government, calling on them to bring levels of payment above the 1986



The homeless

FOCUS POINT estimates that there are between 3,000 and 5,000 people homeless in the Republic.

427 of them in the Eastern Health Board area alone are under seventeen. 68% are between the ages of 13 and 16 and 42% have been in previous care.

Between 6,500 and 7,000 people will use hostels in Dublin in any given year and one third of them will stay longer than a year.

Simon Brooke, the press and information officer for Focus Point, is extremely sceptical of government assessments of the number of homeless:

"The Department of the Environment did a survey in 1993 but the survey was poorly carried out and it greatly underestimated the number of homeless."

The government has promised another survey but has produced nothing as of yet. According to Simon Brooke the situation is even worse today than it was in 1993: "It's definitely worse, on all levels."

"We in Focus Point would be particularly concerned about the increasing numbers of young people on the streets and the fact that they are spending longer and longer there."

Christmas is supposed to be a time of cheer but with so much emphasis put on the need to spend, it often turns out to be a nerve wrecking and depressing period.

The seasonal bombardment of advertisements on television, radio, in the newspapers and the window displays on main streets and in shopping centres can only add to the everyday depression, alienation and anger of those with little or no money in their pockets.

The government will never act. Only those who suffer themselves can change things so that they and their families can enjoy the holiday as it's meant to be enjoyed.

The schemes

GOVERNMENT schemes offer little. Walk into any FAS office or its equivalent, ACE, in The North, and you're likely to see advertisements for anything from kitchen porter to art technician.

Many of the advertisements stipulate that the applicant must have previous experience, begging the question: How am I supposed to get experience if I can't get a job in the first place?

The idea of a training scheme is to train but it would seem that FAS and its likes have become little more than referral agencies for tightfisted bosses on the prowl for cheap labour.

If you do succeed in

landing a place on a scheme your wages, depending on your age and what course you're doing, could be anything from €55 a week to a maximum of €80.

Some, like the VTOS schemes, leave your dole payments intact, meaning that the slim hope of getting a job at the end of it is the only incentive an unemployed person has for taking such a scheme.

Stephen, currently

on a VTOS scheme, doesn't hold out much hope: "I took the scheme to get off the dole. I don't think I'll get a job after it, no way. I just got so sick of the dole. I had to do something"

Some schemes don't even offer basic extras such as travel allowance.

Entitled

Catherine wasn't entitled to a travel allowance. I live

in Finglas and the scheme I was on was based in Ballyfermot. The supervisor told me the scheme, a CE scheme, was a com-

levels recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare set up that year.

Successive governments have failed even to meet those levels.

It is virtually impossible to save anything during the year on that kind of money and come Christmas, welfare recipients are always caught short.

Sean: "When you take into consideration going out for a few pints with your mates, buying a few presents for the nieces and nephews and that, the money doesn't go anywhere".

munity scheme and was supposed to employ people from the local community!"

There has been no study done which would give an idea of the numbers of trainees who managed to find real jobs after their scheme ended.

It's not difficult to see why the governments in the Republic and the North, who never tire of singing the praises of their respective employment agencies, would shy away from such a study.

The ever-growing unemployment figures speak for themselves.

RUSSIA:

Disillusionment grows as crisis deepens



Yeltsin

RUSSIA went to the polls at the end of December to elect new deputies to its parliament. There is massive disillusionment with the politicians.

The reason is that the living standards of the mass of the population are continuing to fall. According to official statistics, in October average incomes were down on a year before by a staggering 16 percent.

Conscripts

As one Moscow newspaper put it, "The only thing the population is united over is that the situation is almost intolerable."

On top of all this the government has sent thousands of conscripts to their death in the bloody war for oil in Chechnia, which is still claiming dozens of lives every week.

These grim realities explain why the main government party, "Our Home is Russia", led

by the prime minister Victor Chernomyrdin and backed by oil and gas magnates, is so unpopular.

In the absence of a fighting trade union movement, discontent has been channelled mainly along Russian nationalist lines, principally in the form

of two parties.

The Congress of Russian Communities is led by the aggressive but popular general Alexander Lebed, who said in an interview last summer that the Chilean military dictator Pinochet had the right idea.

The Communist

Party, led by Gennady Zyuganov, is also an extreme Russian nationalist party. There is nothing left wing about it.

Ruthless

Under the Soviet regime the Communist Party was the ruthless

party of the state capitalist ruling class, the party of the Soviet empire.

When it broke up along with the USSR in 1991, the people who held on to the red flag and the Communist label were those who believed that Stalin was the rightful inheritor of

the old Tsarist empire.

They accepted the Russian nationalist and anti-Semitic filth used by the Soviet ruling class to prop up its rule.

Zyuganov leads a mass opposition movement on the streets that unites supporters of Tsarism and fascism with the Communist Party.

His main argument is that Russia is now a colony of the United States and must become a military superpower once again.

Opposed

Although formally the Communist Party opposed the war in Chechnia, it says nothing about pulling the troops out and granting independence.

Instead it calls for unity of the Russian state (including Chechnia), patriotism and an end to all criticism of the army.

The Communist Party never talks about class. It has no links whatsoever with the trade unions and organised workers, but gets its backing from pensioners who have been impoverished by the reforms.

The party's programme states explicitly that it is not opposed to privatisation. At a meeting with Western businessmen, Zyuganov assured them that their investments would be safe.

One businessman said, "this guy would do very well if he would only change the name of his party."

Workers can change things

THE REAL alternative in Russia is coming from below. All of Russia's main political parties are driven by the fear of what they call "a social explosion" an eruption of mass unrest.

We had a glimpse of this in September when half a million teachers struck for a day over wages and in

October when hundreds of thousands of miners staged a one day strike demanding renationalisation of the pits.

Struggles

The fear of such struggles, decaying imperial might and the failure of existing policies will continue to push the ruling class to try desperate measures.

Zyuganov says it would be a "criminal error" to bring in a military regime at present, but he will be under pressure from his members, from the streets and from future coalition partners to get results.

Workers' unity in struggle is the only way to break down nationalist prejudices, stop market reforms, reverse the fall in living standards and rekindle the fight for socialism.

Can the Communists make a come-back?

MANY LIBERALS are panicking at the prospect of a big Communist vote. Despite its reactionary politics, however, such an outcome will clearly not mean a return to the past.

Firstly, Zyuganov has tried to present a more moderate face to the electorate, which reflects the fact that people's primary concern is with the

economic situation rather than militant nationalism.

Peace

Overwhelming opposition to the war in Chechnia, although passive, shows that people want peace and stability rather than imperial glory.

Secondly, the Russian ruling class is still deeply divided and the state is weak.

The army is bogged down in Chechnia and is in no position to fight a major war, let alone run the country.

General Lebed, for example, is a popular figure who would like to be a future military dictator, but he openly opposed the war in Chechnia fearing that it would do more harm than good.

The right wingers' demands to "restore order"

and what they can actually do in practice are very different things.

Finally, the current government's policies at home and abroad are so similar to those offered by the nationalist right and the Communists that it is hard to see that the elections will make any real difference.

There will be a reshuffle of deputies in the Duma, but it will be business as usual.

NIGERIA:

Dictators step up repression

THE NIGERIAN military is stepping up its repression in Ogoniland following its execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists.

The regime has banned public meetings and the army is harassing people at checkpoints and extorting money.

At least fifty community leaders have been arrested and priests have even been forbidden from mentioning Saro-Wiwa in their sermons.

According to Benjamin, a local primary school teacher, "People here are terribly frightened since the executions. The place is

now full of military and we're afraid they could kill us at any time."

The government is trying to destroy the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) which was led by Saro-Wiwa. MOSOP led the campaign which drove Shell Oil out of Ogoniland.

Sucked

Shell had sucked huge profits from the region at the expense of the Ogonis.

Until recently Ogoniland's fertile delta region produced enough food to feed the area's 500,000 people.

But regular oil spillages caused by Shell's appalling safety standards have destroyed land and fishing grounds and damaged the health of local people.

In recent years, the Nigerian police and military have burnt several Ogoni villages, killed 2,000 people and driven 100,000 from their homes.

This gives the lie to Shell's claims that the repression has nothing to do with them.

Oil accounts for 95 per

cent of foreign earnings of which Shell produces half. Yet the European Union has postponed imposing oil sanctions on the regime claiming that it would "hurt" the majority of Ogonis.

Declared

But the Ogonis gain nothing from the oil revenues. Even Rupert Murdoch's London Times has declared that Nigeria's "ruling kleptocrats have treated the country's oil wells as a lottery to which they alone have tickets."

"For ordinary people the situation is already so desperate that they are reduced

to subsistence."

The real reason the Western powers want to avoid an oil embargo is to protect the profits of multinationals.

The EU has only imposed token sanctions on military and sporting contacts.

They are following in the footsteps of Reagan and Thatcher who refused to support full sanctions against Apartheid South Africa.

Trade Unions should push for the complete isolation of Abacha's murderous regime. But it is the workers of Nigeria who have the power to topple the dictators.



Protest at the regime

FRANCE: BIGGEST REVOL

Workers and students fight back

THE REVOLT of French workers and students has brought to the surface the bitterness that exists across Europe at the plans of the bosses and right wing governments.

It has destroyed the idea that the power of the working class is dead.

When rail, post, and transport workers struck, the country came to a standstill.

After a decade in which workers have been lectured to make more sacrifices to help their country, millions stood up and said 'enough is enough'.

Their struggle has brought the fear of revolution back to haunt our rulers.

At the forefront of the strikes were the railway workers, who have been out since November 23rd.

An eyewitness report from Paris showed the extent of the anger among railworkers:

"At the giant Gare du Nord station nothing moves. There are empty lines and idle trains. A message saying 'no service due to strikes' on the indicator board.

"The Juppe plan affects everyone in the country" says Jean-Jacques. "The government is just pushing cuts, attacking our rights in the name of market politics. They want to make us work longer in order to get our pensions. Why the hell should we, especially when there are so many young people who need jobs".

Growing

The rail workers were at the centre of the growing revolt. But they were not alone. Most postal depots were on strike. Gas and electricity workers were also out, as are many teachers and health workers. Around 2 million civil servants stayed away from work in support of one of the days of action.

At Orly Airport, 500 workers blockaded the runway in support of the railway workers.

At Roissy airport, striking Air France and Air Inter employees put burning tyres at the entrances in order to block access.

In Eastern France, following violent clashes with the riot police, striking miners took their mayor hostage and brought him down to the pit in order to protest against his support for the



Juppe plan.

The miners are fighting against both the social welfare cuts and government plans to close down the mines.

The students, in their most dramatic action since May 1968, have revolted against the government's running down of the education system.

For years the governments have been cramming more and more students into crumbling university buildings, without adequate resources or teaching staff.

Several weeks ago in Rouen the bitterness erupted into revolt.

Occupied

Students occupied the university, demanded more teachers and more money.

After four weeks of strikes and occupations, the government backed down and conceded most of the students' demands.

This success inspired other students and protests spread like wildfire in the past weeks. In Paris students occupied their train stations and even stopped the high-speed TGV from leaving the station.

The giant Nanterre university voted to join the revolt at a mass meeting of over 2,000 people.

Then they marched to nearby campuses and clashed with the hated riot police, the CRS.

In Toulon, where the National

Front candidate was elected mayor last June, students marched with banners saying "STUDENTS, WORKERS, FRENCH, FOREIGNERS, UNITE AGAINST THE CUTS."

In the provincial town of Metz

the government envoy sent to negotiate with students was taken hostage for several hours. She eventually got away but was left in no doubt of the students' anger.

To get to the national demonstration called in Paris, 3,000 of these students marched to the train station and demanded a train to take them there. Their request was granted.

In Toulouse, the most radical University town, 30,000 demonstrators took to the streets and sat down in the town centre.

Kidnapped

Every night between midnight and two a.m., they staged demonstrations with bongo drums through Toulouse.

The student leading the demos, a third year mechanical engineer called Gael, said they liked to end the demos by serenading the Mayor at around 3a.m.

The French government party, the Gaullist RPR urged its supporters to take to the streets in response to the chaos. The party HQ even sent letters urging members to collect signatures for a "LET US WORK" petition.

Nazis have nothing to say

LE PEN's National Front is one of the strongest Nazi parties in Europe. Since the last Presidential election they have been working hard to build up a new street fighting force.

A leading Nazi recently wrote, "elections are not enough. I advise all our young militants to enrol in martial arts clubs"

But now with the workers and students fighting back the Nazis don't say much. One poll showed that 70% of their voters are sympathetic to the strikes.

When these voters start to take action alongside other workers, black and white, they can be won away from the Nazis.

But if the movement is defeated, the Nazis will try to grow again on the demoralisation.

Bosse

THE RULING class is frightened of a re-run of the events of May 1968 when student revolts almost led to revolution.

But if the students and workers are to be victorious, it is important to remember the lessons of 1968.

The revolt began when eight students were hauled before a university disciplinary committee for giving out leaflets denouncing the Vietnam war.

When 400 others turned up to protest, the authorities ordered the closing down of the whole of the Paris University.

The battle then shifted to the streets.

Police in full riot gear surrounded the Sorbonne university and attacked students.

★ **TEACHER:** "WHEN I look at the children in my class I can't bear to think that one day they'll say to me, 'Why didn't you fight to defend the workers state?' It's about everything. There's more and more work in the classroom. Some teachers have 28 or even 30 young children. How are they supposed to manage?" — Caroline, primary school teacher, in St Denis.

★ **TRAIN DRIVER:** "I am not bloody robots! But the bosses think we are. Since July I've had only five Sundays off work. Sometimes we have to work 11 hour shifts with only a short break. Why do we have to work longer and longer when so many young people are unemployed? It's crazy. This society doesn't care about anyone, the old or the young. It is a society which doesn't work." — PAUL, train driver

★ **METRO WORKER:** "IT'S MY first strike. I voted for Chirac in the Presidential election but the promised things would get better but everything is getting more and more rotten. We have to fight all the workers together. The Juppe plan affects everyone." — Gilles, Metro worker Paris

Their first demo drew a miserable 3,000 people. Their attempts to organise scab transport services was also a miserable failure.

The revolt against Chirac and his government reflects a growing anger at his reneging on his pre-election promises.

He promised to tackle unemployment and deal with the grow-

T SINCE 1968

students

es fear another May 68

The scale of the street fighting provoked an outcry. Young workers began to come out in support.

They forced the union leaders to call a general strike.

The demonstrations through Paris on 13 May were the biggest that country had seen since liberation from Nazi occupation.

Demands

The union leaders hoped that this would be the end of the matter. But workers now began to advance their own demands about low pay and long hours.

Workplaces which had not participated in the general strike on 13 May, like the Renault plant in Cleon, came out in protest against govern-

ment cutbacks in social security—and the protests spread.

Again it was often young and non-unionised workers who spread the protest. The Renault plant in Billancourt was occupied with 80,000 workers out.

A worker in Cleon recalled how their occupation started. "200 young workers chanting slogans marched to the managing director's office. They demanded that he meet a delegation.

"When he refused they blocked the entrance to keep him inside. That is how the occupation started. The new strikers were euphoric. No more bosses, no more bullying, total freedom".

Within a few days between 9 and 10 million people were on strike. In crisis, De Gaulle felt

the country on May 29th. It seemed the country was on the brink of revolution.

But within days of his return, the tide had turned against the strikers.

The policy of the then powerful Communist Party and its bureaucrats in the CGT union was to run ahead of the movement in order to head it off.

Barred

When students from the Sorbonne marched across Paris to the Renault plant at Billancourt to show solidarity and support for the workers, they were met by row upon row of CGT stewards who barred access to workers inside the plant.

The CGT and the CP were

determined not to have students influencing "their workers".

Mass sit downs were replaced by the occupation of plants by skeleton crews of pickets and maintenance workers.

Many workers ended up staying home and watching the strikes on tv.

When De Gaulle announced elections, this was the signal for the CP and CGT to wind down the strikes as quickly as possible.

Within three days negotiations were concluded for a return to work in key public service sectors.

The CP had derailed a movement that was going for revolution and settled for wage increases.

we think The stakes are raised

THE REVOLT of 1968 ended in defeat. But today the French government is weaker and has less room to manoeuvre.

French capitalism can no longer afford to give big wage rises. They are terrified of calling elections today when 60% of French people support the strikes.

But the French ruling class can still turn to the union leaders. The Communist led union, the CGT and the right wing union Force Ouvrier have been pushed into this massive confrontation by their rank and file.

But they still only want to show the government that they are a force to be reckoned with. They want to be taken seriously as negotiators.

This is why they will move quickly if the government starts to make small concessions.

At the time of writing, there are still two weaknesses in the French workers revolt.

First, strong rank and file committees to co-ordinate and take charge of the running of the strike have not yet been formed. These are vital to take full control of the strikes away from the union leaders.

Second, the scale of the struggle shows there is a crying need for more politics. Many French workers ask: If we bring down Juppe, does that mean we get a return to the old sell-out socialist government?

If they do not get answers, the lack of politics can impact back on the movement.

This is why there is a need for a strong organised force that argues that there is an alternative to the madness of the capitalist market. This force could start to emerge in the days ahead—but it is by no means certain.

But whatever the outcome, the French workers revolt has changed the face of Europe.

It has destroyed the idea that class politics and revolution belong to a bygone age.

Our task now is to make sure that when this type of struggle hits Ireland, there is a strong force able and willing to take it forward to revolution.

Yesterday the ideas of the SWP about revolution looked 'idealistic'. After the French events, they have become a practical necessity.

of the population have continued to back the strikes.

The right wing ideas about the 'need for competitiveness' no longer have the same appeal they had in the 1980s.

French workers have shown that they have the power not just to bring Chirac and Juppe down—but to dismantle their system that brings greed and poverty.

what do socialists say?

Was Jesus a socialist?

THE BISHOPS may be unpopular but many people still look to religion as a means of salvation and comfort in a hostile world. Behind the commercialism, they see Christmas as a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

by DAVE
McDONAGH

It is common to hear Christians argue that they hate the institution of the Church but still believe in the ideas of equality and goodwill preached by Jesus.

But how did Christianity originate and can it be married to socialist ideas in some form of Christian Socialism?

The full historical evidence on what sort of person Jesus was is at best patchy. The gospels, for example, were written and re-written two hundred years after he died.

Not surprisingly then they contain two contradictory versions of what Jesus stood for.

Chasing

On the one hand we have an angry Jesus chasing the merchants out of the temple.

On the other we have Jesus 'meek and mild' whose philosophy was to turn the other cheek.

The contradictory images are the result of rival pressures on the early Christian movement that originated among the Jewish masses in the Roman empire.

Jews were spread throughout the empire and engaged in various forms of trade.

Some were wealthy and enjoyed privileges. For example the Roman governor of Alexandria in Egypt was a Jew, Tiberius Julius Alexander.

But the mass of Jews in the cities of the empire were small traders and artisans. They were among the first to face ruin as Rome went into decline.

Between 66 and 70 AD there was an uprising in Palestine against the imperial power but also against local rulers. This rebellion was led by religious groups who had split from Orthodox Judaism practised by the wealthier Jews.

The rebellion formed the basis of

the early Christian movement which then spread beyond the Jewish urban poor to embrace the urban and peasant masses of the empire.

But the revolutionary movement could not transform society. To create a world free from poverty would require the huge development of the productive forces brought about much later by capitalism.

At a later period, Christianity was taken up by leaders of the Roman empire itself. But they changed the face of the new religion. They took the relatively democratic structures of the early church and transformed it into a bureaucracy.

The mass of people still looked to the religious ideas as a form of salvation. But these ideas were now turned on their head.

Instead of fighting for a heaven on Earth people were now encouraged to toil for their masters and await their reward in the after life. The gospels contain elements of both versions of Christianity.

Luke's gospel declares: "Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled... But woe unto you that are rich!... Woe unto you, ye that are full now for ye shall hunger..."

But in Matthew's gospel this has been changed to: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

The first version expresses the anger of the poor against the rich while the second preaches acceptance of poverty and class rule in this world and promises salvation in the next.

The laws of the church also changed to fit the new regime. Originally the Com-

mandments were based on real demands of an oppressed people.

For example the idea of keeping the Sabbath free from work was a revolutionary demand raised by the poor to have one day a week off without work or slavery.

The Commandments were later used to keep the poor in their place by threatening damnation if they stole from the rich or disobeyed their masters.

The symbols of the new Church were mostly borrowed from other religions.

The Lord's Prayer was taken from an old Jewish prayer. Holy Communion was derived from a pagan tradition.

Feudal

The notion of the virgin birth was a new version of an idea common to Greek, Egyptian and Persian religions.

Christianity became the official religion of the feudal lords who came to dominate Europe in the middle ages.

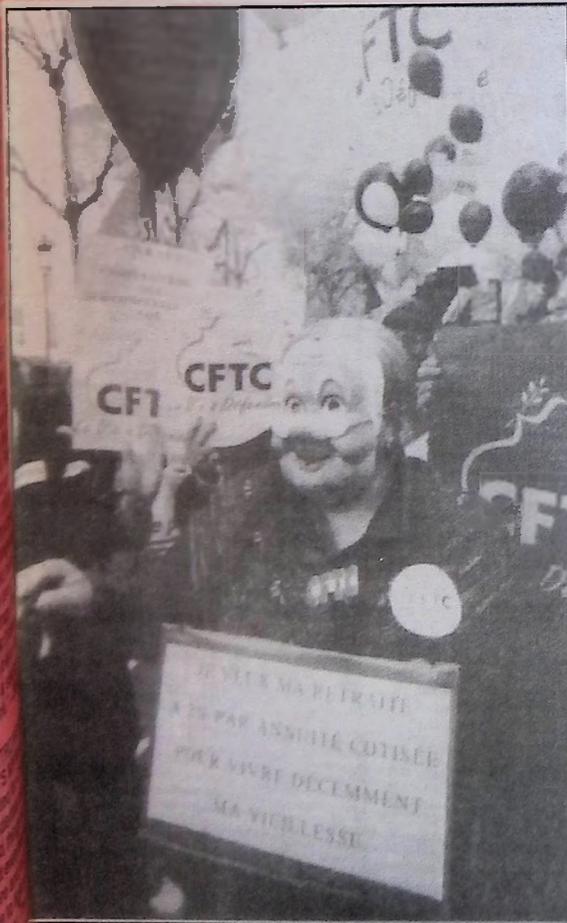
Today the bishops support the rulers in society. The Pope and his Cardinals share the lifestyle of the rich, with their palaces and wealth.

But in the lower ranks of the Church there are priests and nuns who stand up for the poor. In Latin America there was a growth in 'Liberation Theology' in the 1980's which defied the Pope's orders that priests should stay out of left wing politics.

Socialists believe that religion is not just a tool of the ruling class. It is as Marx said 'the sigh of the oppressed'. That can lead to accepting oppression or using religion to fight against the system.

You do not have to be an atheist to be a socialist. But seeking to reform the Church or simply being part of a Christian Socialist group will not change the world.

Change will come when workers of all religions and none make a revolution and build a real paradise on Earth. Organising with other socialists in a party is the only way to help bring about that change.



ing social marginalisation of the homeless and unemployed.

But once he was elected he turned his back on these promises. His first act on coming to power was to announce the infamous nuclear weapons tests in the South Pacific.

He pushed VAT, a tax on working people, up from 18% to 20%.

Now he is pushing two years of budgetary austerity for France to qualify for EMU in 1998.

While the bosses want the austerity programme, they are absolutely terrified by the anger that Chirac has provoked.

The French government like most of the rest of Europe's rulers are in a very weak position. Most

New film tribute to the movement that shook racist America

Panthers- Black, militant, socialist

by DAMIAN
McLOUGHLIN

NEARLY half a million black men, sick of the racism in American society, demonstrated in Washington recently.

They heard the Nation of Islam leader, Louis Farrakhan call on them to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps".

This message—that the victims are to blame for their oppression—is one of hopelessness.

It is not the message which goes with the history of black people in the US fighting back in magnificent examples of defiance and militancy.

An exciting new film which comes to Ireland in the New Year brings to life one such episode from 25 years ago.

It pays tribute to an organisation which inspired a generation.

"Panther" tells the story of the Black Panther Party for Self Defence.

The Black Panthers were armed, disciplined, and proud to call themselves revolutionaries.

In a period of increasing bitterness and hatred against the brutality and racism of the police, thousands of young blacks had rioted across American cities.

Their message: "Enough is Enough".

The Panthers blamed not themselves but US capitalism for their oppression. And they were prepared to unite with white workers to achieve their aims.

The Panthers were founded by Huey P Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California in 1966.

Just as today, the US police would routinely stop, harass, arrest and sometimes kill blacks of all ages.

Police

The Panthers decided to fight back against police violence.

Newton and Seale wanted the Panthers to challenge the right of "the pigs" to patrol their community.

They used Californian law to arm themselves, actually follow the police and question



"Working class people of all colours must unite against this exploitative, oppressive ruling class" — Bobby Seale

their authority. White racists had always insisted on their 'constitutional rights' to carry a gun. But the sight of blacks with guns in their hands struck terror into the hearts of racists.

The film shows an armed and uniformed Huey Newton preventing the beating of a black man and forcing the police to back down. Passers-by applauded the Panthers for restoring a sense of dignity.

The Panthers knew only too well the limitations and mis-

form alliances with "sympathetic" whites. They firmly rejected the idea that all whites benefited from racism.

As Bobby Seale wrote in 1968: "We do not fight racism with racism, we fight it with solidarity. We do not fight exploitative capitalism with black capitalism. We fight capitalism with basic socialism."

"And we fight imperialism with proletarian internationalism."

The US establishment was determined to strike back against this new powerful force.

takes of Martin Luther King's pacifist movement.

Newton explained why they took the panther as their symbol:

"The nature of the panther is that he never attacks. But if anyone tries backing him into a corner, the panther comes up to wipe out that aggressor—absolutely, resolutely, thoroughly and completely."

This echoed Malcolm X's call to fight back "by any means necessary."

The Panthers agreed with Malcolm X on the need to

With this radical socialist message the Black Panther Party grew dramatically. Very quickly they gained a membership of 5,000.

The US establishment was terrified of their influence. J Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI told President Nixon that a secret opinion poll showed that 25% of blacks had 'great respect' for the Panthers.

Ildridge Cleaver's book *Soul on Ice*—on how he became a leading figure of the Black Panthers—entered the top ten best selling books.

The rise of the Panthers came out of the movement against the Vietnam war. This had produced a flowering of radicalism of all kinds and black uprisings in many cities.

In 1965 there were nine riots, 38 in 1966, 128 in 1967 and 131 in the first six months of 1968. Tens of thousands took part in the big riots in Watts and Chicago.

The Panthers related to this mood to become a powerful force.

Sympathy

They also won the sympathy of tens of thousands of whites who were also becoming radicalised by opposition to the Vietnam war.

Bobby Seale described the effect that Cleaver had when he addressed a Chicago college where nuns were trained.

"He was exposing the politicians for what they are, man. He was exposing them at ninety miles an hour. He was talking about the pigs something wicked. The next thing I know there were 5,000 out there singing, 'Fuck Ronald Reagan! Fuck Ronald Reagan! One two three Fuck Ronald Reagan!'"

The Panthers were a huge step forward in the politics of Black America. They rejected the ideas of cultural nationalism, today promoted by the

band Arrested Development, who think it's enough to take on an "African" lifestyle. Instead they called themselves Marxist Leninists and understood that the system as a whole had to be fought.

And the Panthers' demands for full employment, compensation for slavery, decent housing, proper education and an end to police racism struck a chord with thousands of whites as well as blacks.

The Panthers started a programme of providing free breakfasts to children. They gave out shoes as part of their Survival Programme.

They began a Sickle Cell Anaemia campaign to test people for the inherited blood disorder.

In their actions they showed that they had a courage and a dignity that rose far above the media images which presented them as hoodlums. They offered hope for a real fightback against the greed of corporate America.

The US establishment were determined to strike back against this new powerful force.

With America bogged down in Vietnam, J Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI, faced the nightmare of a militant black organisation at home advocating revolution and gaining a mass hearing.

The FBI unleashed a counter intelligence unit to infil-

trate the Panthers and engineer disagreements between leading members and with other organisations.

An FBI infiltrator set-up leading Chicago Panther, Fred Hampton, saying there was a weapons stash in Hampton's apartment.

Fourteen police, with 21 guns, five shotguns and a sub-machine gun burst in and riddled Hampton as he slept. Hampton had no guns.

In 1969 alone, 27 Panthers were murdered by the police and 749 jailed or arrested.

The Panthers continued to grow despite the repression but the attacks exposed political weaknesses in the party.

The Panthers believed the unemployed, the most oppressed in society, who scraped by on petty crime or scams, would lead the revolutionary struggle.

But the most oppressed are not automatically the best placed or the first to fight back.

The "Panthers" film claims the organisation was destroyed by the FBI flooding the ghettos with drugs.

Drugs were a real problem but this is not the full reason for the Panthers demise. In reality, the organisation was unable to defend itself and was ultimately dragged down by its reliance on the "brothers on the block"

There are a number of excellent books which show just

this, including autobiographies: "Seize the Time" by Bobby Seale; "Revolutionary Suicide" by Newton; and David Hilliards "This Side Of Glory".

Another brilliant book is "Soledad Brother" by George Jackson, who joined the Panthers while serving a prison sentence for stealing seventy dollars from a petrol station.

At the end of the day, the story of the Black Panthers is one to be proud of.

Their tragedy was that while their every instinct was revolutionary they did not know how to relate to the power of the working class.

Unions

In fact, to be a "proper" Panther you had to give up your job.

And yet the reality was that black workers were playing a leading role in the unions. In the 1930s, there were less than 200,000 black trade union members in the US. At the Panthers' height, there were 2.5 million and today that figure continues to climb.

In 1968, black revolutionary trade unionists took the struggle forward in the car plants of Detroit and other cities.

They organised strikes to hit the bosses where it hurts.

Groups like DRUM, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement put organised workers at the centre of their politics.

And like the Panthers, DRUM members realized that a worker's revolution was needed to sweep away all oppression and inequality.

With Louis Farrakhan and others today posing as representatives of ordinary blacks, it's important to remember the vision and experience that symbolised the Panthers.

comment

Finola Bruton's family values

FINOLA BRUTON is now a person in her own right. She has upstaged the Taoiseach himself and got more attention than him in the media before Xmas.

She has her opinions which she expressed in her speech at the National Gallery to welcome Hilary Clinton to these shores.

It's not the first time in recent months that Finola has stood up and been counted. Such are the pressures of her busy life that she demanded the right to flout the smoking ban on a flight to America during the Summer.

After all, Ireland's "first lady" shouldn't have to abide by the same rules as us plebs.

She's a woman who is always on the go, jet-setting around the world with John. It's a job that means she can't always be at home.

Strange then to hear Finola advocating in her now infamous speech that women should stay at home when she has such a high-powered career of her own.

Affirmed

She affirmed that she supports "the building of families" and believes "that a loving married relationship between a man and a woman is a core value to be recognised and supported".

Pretty run-of-the-mill stuff from an out-and-out Fine Gael-er. You might have thought that it would ruffle the feathers of the left-wing parties in Government though.

Well, not exactly. According to Liz McManus of Democratic Left, "I think she articulated a lot of what many women feel, of what many young women feel."

Okay, so what about Eithne Fitzgerald, Labour Minister of State? "It was not a speech that I would have made. However, it is the speech that Mrs Bruton made. I would prefer not to go into more detail than that."

Very enlightening. But surely no one on the left actually explicitly applauded it.

Well again, not exactly. Roisin Shortall, Labour TD for Dublin North West, thought that "she said a lot of things that needed to be said... Basically I had no difficulty with it at all".

Finola Bruton set herself up as the champion

of women in the home. The other well-known woman to have done this is Nora Bennis.

Her Solidarity Movement has always put the protection of women in the home at the heart of its politics. Their not-so-subtle agenda is to force on women the role of wife and mother.

What they present as concern masks a desire to return to the Ireland of the 1950's where women have little or no control over their own lives and the only acceptable structure in which to live is the family, based on marriage.

Finola Bruton is playing to this audience at a time when they are trying to pull together a serious right wing force in this country.

The left-wing parties surely should be cutting the ground from under them, not making concessions to their arguments.

Finola Bruton, like many others, is now attempting to use anti-feminist arguments to roll back the gains that the women's liberation movement made.

Attacks

And to some extent her attacks on feminism will gain a resonance. Feminism has brought great gains to a layer of middle class women like Finola Bruton and Hilary Clinton, but has failed to deliver very much to ordinary women.

For example, the vast majority of working women are in low-paid, part-time jobs. Latest figures from the International Labour Organisation show that the average hourly wage of women is 68% of men's.

Bruton and her ilk demonstrate clearly why the feminist strategy failed. Most women have nothing in common with her. She is part of the privileged elite in this country.

Feminism failed because it told working class women to look to all other women as allies in the fight for women's rights.

But working class women have much more in common with the men they work with day in, day out than they will ever have with the likes of Finola Bruton.

by ROISIN CRONIN

books:

Nigeria's art of resistance

WRITER KEN Saro-Wiwa paid with his life for daring to stand up to the brutal Nigerian dictatorship and its giant oil firm backer, Shell.

KEN OLENDE looks at some of his work and that of the rich crop of powerful writers to emerge from Nigeria in recent years.

SOZABOY, Ken Saro-Wiwa's most famous novel, is full of horror at all things military.

The story is told by a naive young recruit to the rebel army in the civil war which tore Nigeria apart in the late 1960s.

The man joins up to impress his wife and the novel opens with comic scenes, only to drift quickly into a tale of horror as society falls apart.

The style is vivid and conversational. Sometimes the slang is difficult to follow, but it is worth the effort.

Sozaboy is a far cry from Saro-Wiwa's other most well known work—*Basi and Company*—which started life as a play and ended up as the 80 episodes of Nigeria's longest running TV comedy series.

This is a gentle satire on the efforts of Basi and his friends to become rich, and is pervaded by a sense of small scale corruption.

Saro-Wiwa stems from a rich tradition of Nigerian writing in English which has developed over the last 40 years.

Among the most accessible and widely available



Urban life provides themes of most modern Nigerian writers

works is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This is a realistic look at the impact of colonialism on Nigerian society.

It shows the corruption and brutality of the British imperialists.

Focus

But its focus is on how colonialism impacted on the internal weaknesses and corruption of the existing village social structures in Nigeria.

Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drunkard* and his *My*

Life in the Bush of Ghosts also make fascinating reading. They seem surreal and modern, yet are re-tellings of traditional myths from Nigeria's Yoruba speaking people.

The majority of modern Nigerian writing is, not surprisingly in Africa's most populous state, concerned with modern city life.

Good examples that are well worth reading include Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*.

In 1967 Nigeria plunged into civil war over the breakaway state of Biafra.

The war which still haunts Nigerian society ended after three years with misery and cynicism on all sides.

Regime

The war produced much powerful writing such as Wole Soyinka's autobiographical *The Man Died*, based on his experiences while jailed for opposing the military regime.

More recently Nigerian writers have sought to link realistic elements from modern society with mythical themes of Yoruba gods.

Examples include the famous *The Famished Road* by Booker Prize winning writer Ben Okri, though this is not an easy read.

Other books worth reading include the compelling *Violence* by Festus Iyaya, detailing the everyday brutality of working class life in Nigeria's shanty towns.

■ All these books are available from Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE, phone 0181 802 6145, or from Africa Book Centre, 38 King Street, London WC2E 8JY, phone 0171 240 6649.

book:

The truth behind the peace process

Behind the Lines is an account of the events leading up to the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994.

The author is Brian Rowan the BBC security correspondent on the North who reveals details of off the record meetings between politicians which preceded the ceasefires.

Reviewed by MARY LAWLOR

The book shows very clearly that Sinn Fein wanted an end to the

armed struggle but did not want it replaced with mass mobilisation of Catholic and Protestant workers.

Instead they turned to politicians like Albert Reynolds and Bill Clinton to help bring about a settlement.

A week before the IRA ceasefire Sinn Fein welcomed a delegation of US politicians to their party HQ.

Contact

The Republican leadership was in regular contact with the Fianna Fail government and the SDLP in an attempt to create a 'pan-nationalist' consensus.

Rowan writes about John Hume in hushed and reverential tones and traces the peace process back to the Hume-Adams talks.

But the book contains no analysis of where this process will lead.

In reality Hume and Adams can only offer a future for the North as a low-wage economy that US investors will be only too happy to exploit.

■ *Behind the Lines* by Brian Rowan,

film:

Corporal punishment

GERRY Stembridge's new film *Guiltrip* drew fire from the top brass in the Irish Army for its portrayal of a brutal army corporal who terrorises his wife.

The film challenges the notion of the Irish Army as an upstanding peacekeeping force.

Instead it shows how an organisation based on violence and harsh discipline can brutalise its members.

Reviewed by DAVE McDONAGH

Army privates will instantly recognise some of their superiors in the character of the corporal who bullies his subordinates.

He also treats his wife as if she was under his command. He humiliates her into writing his instructions into a Standing Orders book and then forces her to read them back to him.

Stembridge described the film as a conscious intervention in the divorce debate and its release coincided with the highpoint of the Referendum campaign.

Guiltrip may not have been the deciding factor in swinging the Yes vote but it shows how lack of choice leaves women trapped in violent and degrading relationships. Catch it while it is still showing.

Books for the New Year

SICK OF turkey and the nineteenth run of *Gone With the Wind*? So what better than to settle into a comfortable chair with a good book.

Darwin by Adrian Desmond and James Moore is a fascinating account of how Darwin developed his theory of evolution—and why fears of radicalism led him to hide it for so long. *Age of Extremes* by Eric Hobsbawm is a gripping account of the 20th century.

The Jewish Question by Abraham Loon is a left wing analysis of the issue. The

author was later murdered in Auschwitz.

A real classic blockbuster is Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (£12.00+£2.00 p&p). At over a thousand pages, it is daunting. But once started it is unputdownable.

A book on economics is probably not what most would choose for holiday reading. But the *Economics of the Madhouse* by Chris Harman (£2.75+£1.00 p&p) is an excellent short answer to those who argue that market capitalism is the only option on

offer.

With workers and students once again on the streets of France, commentators are all referring back to the last great explosion of militancy in 1968. From Prague to Paris, from Rome to Derry and Chicago, revolution seems possible.

The Fire Last Time by Chris Harman is a good history of the struggles of 68-70.

Ideas

The best introduction to Marx's ideas is the recently re-published *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx*

by Alex Callinicos (£4.50 +£1.20 p&p).

And who says socialist do not write good fiction? *Fontamara*: Silone (£6.50 + £1.20 p&p) is an inspiring novel about the resistance to fascism by the peasants of a small Italian village. *Rivertown* by Ben Harper is a funny, brutal and sad tale from the assembly line at General Motors. *Children of Arbat* by Anatoli Rybakov is brilliant fast moving novel about life under Stalinism in the 1930s.

■ Most books are available from SW Books, PO box 1648, Dublin 8.

where we stand

Workers create all the wealth in capitalist society. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution.

FOR REVOLUTION, NOT REFORM
The present system cannot be reformed out of existence. Parliament cannot be used to end the system. The courts army and police are there to defend the interests of the capitalist class not to run society in a neutral fashion. To destroy capitalism, workers need to smash the state and create a workers' state based on workers' councils.

FOR REAL SOCIALISM, EAST AND WEST:
The SWP welcomed the break-up of the USSR and the end of the East European dictatorships. These states were not socialist but were run by a state-capitalist class. We are against the domination of the globe by imperialist powers and we oppose their wars. We are for the right of all nations, East and West, to self-determination.

FOR AN END TO ALL OPPRESSION
We oppose all forms of oppression which divide and weaken the working class. We are for full social, economic and political equality for women. We stand for: free contraception and free, legalised abortion and the right to divorce; the complete separation of church and state, an end to church control over schools and hospitals; an end to discrimination against gays and lesbians; an end to racism and anti-traveller bigotry. We argue for working class unity in the fight against oppression.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH:
Northern Ireland is a sectarian state, propped up by the British Army. Catholic workers are systematically discriminated against by the state. The division between Catholic and Protestant workers weakens the whole working class. Workers' unity can only be won and maintained in a fight to smash both the Northern and Southern states. We stand for the immediate withdrawal of British troops. Violence will only end when workers unite in the fight for a workers' republic.

FOR A FIGHTING TRADE UNION MOVEMENT:
Trade unions exist to defend workers' interests. But the union leaders role is to negotiate with capitalism - not to end it. We support the leaders when they fight but oppose them when they betray workers. We stand for independent rank and file action.

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY:
To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party. This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system. The SWP aims to build such a party in Ireland.

news & reports—politics; the unions—

Anger grows in the health service

IRELAND's overcrowded hospitals are facing a major growth of industrial militancy.

In the Midlands, nurses have taken industrial action over understaffing.

Now the government has been forced to announce that the numbers waiting for a hospital bed has risen dramatically this year.

According to one psychiatric nurse the situation is near breaking point.

Respite

"You look at North Dublin with an overall population of 200,000 people. There is one psycho-geriatric consultant for the whole area—even though they talk a lot now about community care.

"Somewhere near 300 people will probably need



respite care. If they suffer Alzheimer's disease, their families will need a break some time. But many are not getting it".

Anger is now growing at the treatment of the staff. There are two key nationwide issues facing health workers at the moment.

Nurses campaign on pay

Nurses' pay has fallen way out of line with groups such as the Gardai or prison officers that they were once comparable to.

Successive government have used nurses' reputation for avoiding industrial action to push down pay levels.

In November, talks between the unions and the

Minister for Health broke down.

A united front has now been formed between four unions—the PNA, SIPTU, IMPACT and the INO—to launch a campaign to win real pay increases.

Ballots

Ballots are now taking place for industrial action which could start as early

as January.

As one nurse put it, "They still think we are Florence Nightingales—that we just work out of the goodness of our hearts.

"But there are some groups like consultants who are just creaming it in. They get a big public salary—and big private payments.

"This time are going to fight for our rights".

ESB shape up for privatisation

ESB workers will start voting soon on major plans to re-structure the company. Among rank and file workers there is a growing mood of opposition to 'privatisation by the back door'.

ESB workers have been subject to a carefully prepared propaganda barrage from the company. Videos of Pat Kenny interviewing ESB Chief Executive Joe Moran were even distributed to individual family homes.

"It looked like the aim was to get our partners to put pressure on us to accept the 'reality' of change", explained one worker.

Under the new plans the ESB will be broken up into different units which are meant to be competitive against each other. It can only lead to greater managerial bureaucracy.

But the key change is that

companies who use more than one megawatt of electricity will be able to buy from independent producers.

Profits

One fitter explained what this meant. "There are about 50-60 big companies in Ireland who use this amount of electricity. They could get a power company to build an electricity generator next door to them. It is a very lucrative area.

"At the moment the ESB uses the profits from this area to subsidise electricity prices for the domestic customer. If the change goes ahead, working people will end up paying more on their electricity bills."

Lowry and the government claim that privatisation will mean more efficiency. But the reality is that it will mean dearer prices and huge job losses. Nearly 2,000 jobs will be slashed in the ESB.

In Northern Ireland where electricity is privatised, prices are already high. If the ESB were charging the same price, they would be making £180 million more in profit.

Under the new plans different stations will operate under new productivity deals. Managers could gain new bonuses. In the longer term this would also lay the basis for outright privatisation as happened in Britain.

ESB workers should reject these plans to make sure there is a decent future for themselves and other workers.

The fight on pensions

THE non-nursing grades in the Eastern Health Board are balloting to take action over low pension levels.

The union have launched a 'Fair Pay on Low Pensions' campaign to highlight the fact that these workers gain only £20 on top of the Old Age Pension after contributing for 30 years.

Four months ago there was a 17 to 1 ballot for strike action on the issue. The union leaders took the issue to the Labour Relations Commission—but there was no budging the government.

Now they are set to re-ballot their members on the issue.

One shop steward told *Socialist Worker* "There are some of my members that are watching what is happening in France. There the public sector went out together. If we had that sort of unity here, we would start to get results"

Order: *Socialist Worker Hospital Special* written by SWP members in the health service. Price £2 for 50 copies plus postage. Order from PO Box 1648, Dublin 8, Tel: (01) 872 2682

SWP branch meetings—all welcome

BELFAST
Meets every Wednesday at 8pm in Queens Students Union.

CORK
Meets every Tuesday at 8pm in An Spailpin Fanach opposite Beamish Brewery, South Main St. Jan 2: The fight for women's liberation today; Jan 9th: Do we celebrate Ireland's national culture?

DERRY
Meets every Tuesday in Badgers Bar at 8pm Jan

2: Is religion the opium of the people?; Jan 9th: Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

BRAY
Meets every Monday at 8pm in Royal Hotel.

DUBLIN NORTH-WEST
Meets every Tuesday at 8pm in The Snug, Dorset St. Feb 2nd: The politics of family values; Jan 9th: Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

DUBLIN ARTANE/COOLOCK
Meets every Tuesday at 8pm in the Artane/

Beaumont Family Recreation Centre, Kilmore Rd. Jan 2nd: Do we celebrate Irish national culture?; Jan 9th: Is religion the opium of the people?

DUBLIN CLONDALKIN
Contact 872 2682 for details.

DUBLIN DRIMNAGH
Meets every Tuesday at 8pm in the Bentley Pub, Drimnagh Road Jan 2nd: Do we celebrate Irish national culture?; Jan 9th: Is religion the opium of the people?

DUBLIN NORTH CENTRAL
Meets every Wednesday at 8pm in Conways, Parnell St. Jan 3rd: Is religion the opium of the people?; Feb 10th: The politics of family values

DUBLIN RATHMINES
Meets every Wednesday at 8pm in O'Connells Pub, Richmond Street. Feb 3rd: Did Lenin lead to Stalin? Jan 10th: Is religion the opium of the people?

DUBLIN SOUTH-CENTRAL
Meets every Thursday at 8pm in Trinity Inn, Pearse St. Jan 4th: Is religion the opium of the people?; Jan 11th: Do we celebrate Irish national culture?

DUBLIN TALLAGHT
Meets every Wednesday at 8.00pm, Tallaght Welfare Society, Tallaght Village. Jan 3rd: Is religion the opium of the people?; Feb 10th: The politics of family values

DUN LAOGHAIRE
Meets every Tuesday at 8pm in Smyths Pub. Jan 2nd: Did Lenin lead to Stalin?; Jan 9th: The politics of family values

GALWAY
Meets every Thursday at 7.30pm in Currans Hotel, Eyre Square Jan 4th: Is religion the opium of the people?; Jan 11th: Do we celebrate Ireland's national culture?

MAYNOOTH
Meets every Thursday at

6 pm in Class Hall D, Maynooth College

WATERFORD
Meets every Thursday at 8pm in ATGWU Hall, Keyser St. Jan 4th: The politics of family values; Jan 11th: Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

If you want to join *Socialist Worker*, fill in this form and send it to: PO Box 1648, Dublin 8, Tel: (01) 872 2682

Name

Address.....

Phone.....

★ There are *Socialist Worker* members in: ENNISKILLEN; COLERAINE; LURGAN; CAVAN; DONEGAL; NAAS; LIMERICK; KILKENNY; DUNDALK; ATHLONE; DROGHEDA. If you would like to get in touch, contact our national office at (01) 872 2682, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8

Socialist Workshop
"The Economics of the Madhouse"
An educational session on how capitalism works and why there is socialist alternative to the market.
Speaker: Chris Harman, (author of *The economics of the Madhouse*)
Saturday January 20th
3pm - 7pm
Young Traveller, St Mary's Place (off Parnell Square) Dublin
Tickets: £2 waged £1 unwaged

send in your reports telephone: (01) 872 2682, fax: (01) 872 3838

Revealed: Dunnes' plans to break the union

Socialist Worker has received a confidential company document which gives a clear indication of Dunnes Stores attempts to break union organisation.

The document instructs managers to tell union officials "that they are not in a position to enter into discussions with them".

The company is also keeping a close eye on its shop stewards.

The document notes "that telephone calls for shop stewards should be passed through a member of senior management".

Managers have also been told "that any union activity should be reported" to Mary Southwell, Dunnes senior personnel manager.

The document throws a new light on the recent dispute over Sunday opening. Dunnes have provoked the dispute over the treble time payment for Sunday Christmas trading, to try to drive a wedge into the union.

Profits

The traditional extra payment for Christmas has meant a lot to part-time workers who earn less than the average industrial wage.

Dunnes Stores makes a huge profit each year and is showing it's absolute greed by forcing workers onto the picket lines coming up to Christmas.

CORK SHOP STRIKE

SHOP WORKERS at the Early Learning Centre, Cork, are on strike for a pay increase. It is two years since the staff at the shop received a pay rise and then it was only an insulting 7p.

As a result, experienced Early Learning Centre shop workers in Ireland earn £2 an hour less than other workers in the trade. Management have shown their contempt for the workers by refusing them pension rights and demanding they perform extra duties such as unloading pallets.

But the Cork workers have shown that they cannot be treated in this way and are actively picketing the shop, despite pressure from the gardai. Very few customers are crossing the picket line.

Strikers hope that other shop workers in the chain will now seize the time to take action and force the company to address their grievances.

Messages of support and collections can be sent to the Early Learning Strikers c/o Jim Douglas, Mandate, 1, Emmett Place, Cork

to break the union

A Union Official should not enter discussions with any staff member during working hours without seeking permission from senior management. When doing so he should be politely told that he may do so outside working hours.

Should a Union Official wish to enter discussions with a manager, you should be firm and courteous and inform him that you are not in a position to enter discussion with him but that he should address any matter to you in writing.

On receipt of a Union letter you should forward it immediately to the undersigned. As in the past any issues raised should be discussed with your staff. We will then decide if it is appropriate to meet with the Union or to respond.

Should a Union Official telephone your store for the shop steward, such calls should be passed through a member of senior management.

Remember the notice board is reserved for information and details of store activities and the passing of any notices must be authorised by management.

These bosses will not even pay the 3% increase due to the workers under the PESP.

They are trying to squeeze every penny from their workforce.

If Dunnes Stores succeed in breaking the traditional payment for Christmas,

they will be quickly followed by other retail bosses like Roches Stores, Quinnsworth and Penneys who have already indicated that they want to change the deal for some workers.

Pickets in Dunnes Stores Tallaght told *Socialist Worker*, "It makes you feel

terrible working alongside people who are being paid far less than you simply because they started in the company at a later date. They still do the same work and under the same conditions. We should all be paid the right overtime rates and no distinctions."

Teachers: Demand early retirement without longer hours

TEACHERS' unions are close to striking a deal with the government over early retirement.

Tragically however, the unions have been arguing with their members that if they are to win their demands they are going to have to agree to make concessions to the government over productivity.

This would basically mean that teachers would have to work even

longer hours.

Parent-teacher meetings and staff meetings would have to take place outside of school hours, and teachers would have to attend in-service training.

But already school principals work an average of 90 days longer than what is set down by

the Department of Education, while teachers work 56-65 days extra.

Struck

Last May thousands of teachers struck and marched for early retirement. They demanded that they should only have to work 38 years in-

stead of the current 40 in order to be entitled to full pensions.

But any attempt to link early retirement to longer hours has to be resisted.

Massive demonstrations and strikes are needed to show the government that teachers are serious about fighting for their rights.

Packard workers vote to cut hours

WORKERS in Packard Electric in Tallaght voted in early December to revert to 39-hour working instead of the 41 hours they have been working since the introduction of the company's survival plan earlier this year.

This follows the failure of the company to pay the usual bonus of about £20 after the introduction of new lines.

Workers demanded this action at an angry mass meeting in late November where officials from the ATGWU and SPTU urged restraint.

However the ballot to revert to 39 hours was passed by 354 to 25. Unfortunately the union leadership failed to implement it, instead arranging Labour Court talks with the company.

The company then demanded that the workers accept an additional five days shut down over Christmas and that 30 to 40 workers will be employed over this period without regard to seniority.

Packard blames industrial action by workers in Vauxhall, Luton which has cut production there by half.

But workers at Packard are angry. They want to know

why their union leaders have not implemented their vote to return to 39 hours allowing the company to take the initiative with its fresh demands.

Seniority

Packard workers need to ensure that the latest company demands are rejected and if the company shuts early for

SOLIDARITY is building up in the North for striking Liverpool dockers as workplaces in Derry and Belfast held collections.

Five hundred dockers have been sacked by the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company which made a £39 million profit this year.

The company want a non-

union, casual workforce who have no rights, no sick or holiday pay and no severance pay. They never expected the dockers to fight back.

Shameful

It's shameful that their union leaders aren't fighting alongside them. Instead, the ATGWU say they can't back the strike because of the To-

Xmas there is no concession on seniority and that the Xmas shut down is total.

One Packard worker told *Socialist Worker*: "The mood in the factory is angry. French workers are an inspiration. We need to fight back like them. The union leaders are letting the company walk over us. It's time we stood up and fought."

Solidarity for Liverpool dockers

The dockers had no choice. It was either fight to defend their work mates and fellow union members, or obey the law, ballot and give the bosses three weeks to organise scabbing and get in casual labour.

As we go to press, solidarity collections for the dockers are being taken up in British Telecom and the Post Office, in social services and

What's needed in Dunnes Stores is better union organisation.

Shop stewards need strong house committees to build up the union from the grassroots.

Dispute

Dunnes Management were aware after the Summer dispute that there was an element of demoralisation.

Many workers felt that the gains made through the Labour Court deal were not tangible enough.

What is really needed for the battles ahead in Dunnes stores is a high level of union organisation, regular meetings and bulletins that inform workers of the issues and give them unity and purpose to fight.

The gloves are off in Telecom

TELECOM workers are facing job cuts, pay restraint and the introduction of temporary and contract workers.

Management have even told unions that they expect agreement on cuts in return for paying the recent 2.5 per cent increase due under the PCW.

Staff in Eircell learned from the newspapers that their area would be hived off as a subsidiary from 5th January to meet competition from ESAT Digiphone who have been given a licence to provide a mobile phone service.

The company have claimed as 'speculation' a report that part of Eircell could be sold next year to the American company Airtouch. But they have not denied the reports.

While management have taken the gloves off the union leaders still see a 'partnership approach' as the best way forward.

But the ESB shows that 'partnership' really means accepting the need for cuts in the face of competition. The role of the union negotiators then becomes one of

deciding where the cuts are made. There is a danger that the company will divide clerical workers from the technical grades in deciding where to make the cuts.

Overtime

Travel and subsistence and overtime payments are targeted for technical grades in the menu of cuts, based on the notion that technical grades are 'milking the system'.

But if the company isolates and defeats one section of the workforce it will be easier to attack other groups. The workforce needs to stick together and resist all cuts.

The recent action of Eircell workers at resisting the use of temporary workers to fill vacancies gives a glimpse of what can be done.

After the threat of a work to rule the management agreed to phase out the use of recruits from FAS and look for fulltime staff. By following this example Telecom workers can defeat the planned cuts.



Dunnes needs fighting union

Socialist Worker

inside:

The Panthers: Black, militant & socialist

—page 8

Nigeria's dictators step up repression

—page 5

For a Workers' Republic and International Socialism 40p

DECOMMISSIONING:

Why this hypocrisy?

FOR OVER a year and a half the sectarian politicians of the North have been playing games over decommissioning of weapons.

Now they will spend another few months making representations to an international tribunal.

The reality is that the whole issue is surrounded by breathtaking hypocrisy.

Ian Paisley and David Trimble have not the slightest interest in removing guns from Northern politics. They are using the issue to

try to humiliate a whole section of the Catholic population who voted Sinn Fein in the past.

Paisley was a founder of the now defunct Ulster Resistance movement. He was photographed reviewing lines of men in military formation.

He has said that the 150,000 legally held weap-

ons in the North are needed to resist any move to a united Ireland by means of force.

Convicted

Trimble says that he will never talk to people with 'weapons under the table'.

But his party have been 'making representations' to the UVF despite the fact that one of their leaders, Lindsey Robb, has been convicted of gunrunning a year after they announced

their ceasefire.

Paisley and Trimble see any real moves to peace as a threat to their position. These right wing politicians have only won support by stirring up sectarianism.

They win votes by pretending that all Protestants face a threat from granting any recognition to the aspirations of Catholic workers.

Backing

The backing they have received from the Tory party in Britain gives them encouragement to press home their demands. Major's weak and unpopular government is more dependent on the votes of Unionist MPs than ever.

Paisley and Trimble are focusing on decommissioning as a way of strengthening their bargaining position before any settlement emerges in the North.

They know that this settlement would create more openings for the Catholic middle class who have grown in recent years. This would cut back on opportunities for their main backers.

So they risk a return to violence in the hope that the Tories would back them by internment and more repression.

The hypocritical games they are playing offer nothing to Northern workers.

Is this the man to see fair play?

MEET General John de Chastelain who has been charged with sitting on the International Body on Decommissioning in Northern Ireland.

John de Castelain should know all about the brutality of war.

As Chief of Staff of the Canadian Defence forces he has been presiding over a cover-up of the activities of his troops in Somalia when they were on a UN 'peacekeeping' operation.

A small part of what these troops did in Somalia leaked out at a court case held nearly a year ago.

Sixteen Canadian troops arrested a teenager Shidane Atoone who was taking pictures of them.

Torture

They subjected him to appalling torture. He was punched in the face, kicked with heavy boots, beaten with batons and burned on the soles of his feet.

The Canadian soldiers played Russian roulette holding a gun to the blindfolded boy's head. They smashed his shins before he finally died after several hours of torture.

Some of the soldiers boasted that they saw their 'peacekeeping mission' to Somalia as a chance to "kill niggers".

The commanding officer of these troops was only reprimanded for the



General John de Chastelain

event.

De Castelain is now being promoted as one of the three wise men who are going to help bring peace to Ireland.

This sick hypocrisy shows why real peace can only come when ordinary working people, both Catholic and Protestant, come together to fight the very system that the likes of de Castelain presides over.

Workers' unity is the key

EVEN IF the British and Irish government get all-party talks going by February, there will be few improvements in the lives of Catholic or Protestant workers.

The Nationalist and Unionist parties of the North want to institutionalise the sectarian divisions. They believe that there are two distinct communities with different interests.

At a time of growing economic crisis this would mean each community fighting over who got money for hospitals or schools.

Low wages

All of them, including Sinn Fein, see US investment as the key to the future. But the US multinationals who have come to the North are attracted by the low wages they get in non-union firms.

Workers have waited a

year and a half for some real change in the North. Thousands even turned out to hear Clinton in the hope that he might offer something different.

But real peace will only be forged from workers struggle from the bottom of society. The more Catholic and Protestant workers fight alongside each other, the better is the hope for the future.

The sectarian pressures of the North mean that socialists who put class interest over the claim of any one 'community', will need to play a key role in promoting this type of struggle.