

# The Tube workers' battle

AS WE go to press the long running dispute on the London Underground is set to enter a new stage.

Either the RMT union leadership will manage to extract enough face saving concessions to call off the action, or both sides will dig in for a very bitter war of attrition.

The RMT's claim is not only for a 6% increase in pay but also for a reduction in hours, and job security guarantees for areas threatened with privatisation by management's "make or buy" review.

The claim for a reduction in hours would do much to reduce the increasing stress and pressure we are put under. It would also create hundreds of jobs.

The dispute got off to an excellent start with unity between the all-grade RMT and the drivers' craft union ASLEF producing big majorities for action in both unions' ballots.

But that was too good to last. On the eve of the first co-ordinated BR and tube strike for years, ASLEF's Lew Adams stuck the boot in — on the workers.

First the BR dispute was called off without any gains and with the action absolutely solid. Adam's reason for cancellation was that management had backed down on the shorter working week. What he was less willing to point out was that his much-vaunted hours reduction was not due to be introduced for a couple of years — exactly in line with the timetable that BR had already suggested.

Nor was Lew too keen to point out that his agreement was with BR and not with the new train operators who will actually be managing the trains when the new deal is comes into effect.

Lew also remained rather vague about the strings that management wanted to tie to the hours cut.

Not surprisingly, this deal was thrown out by the ASLEF membership. But Lew was not to be stopped. He took the ballot mandate and went straight into new talks with BR, where he managed to scrape together a new deal. The only problem was that the new deal was as least as bad as the old one. Except that this time the members were not to get the chance to accept or reject it in a ballot. The executive had already accepted it for them.

At the same time Lew was stitching up his tube membership. Some genius in the ASLEF head office managed to mess up the technicalities of the ballot. The courts ruled against the union. The dispute then went on the back burner while ASLEF re-ballotted.

When the ASLEF drivers again voted for action Adams did the obvious thing and settled the dispute without any gains whatsoever. When ASLEF members rejected this in a ballot, Adams signed up to a three year productivity deal instead!

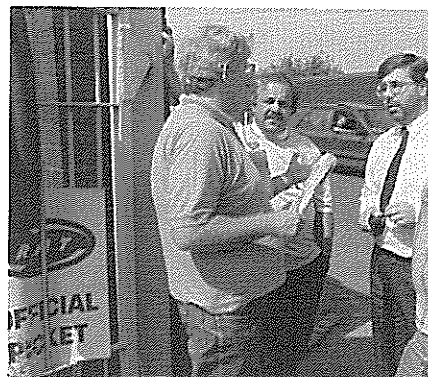
All this goes to confirm what many tube activists have believed for a long time: the ASLEF leadership have got a secret no-strike

deal with LUL management.

The result of Adams' behaviour has been to induce hundreds of ASLEF members to cross over to the RMT because they don't want to cross picket lines and they want to be part of a fighting union.

The RMT has now had three successful one day strikes and is poised to resume the action on Tuesday November 7 after yet another legal row. It involves the rights of ASLEF members who have transferred over to RMT to support a strike that they didn't vote for in a RMT ballot even though they did vote for it as ASLEF members and left ASLEF because it wasn't striking!

It would be a tragedy if the RMT local or national leadership were now to call off the action without any substantial gains. But whatever happens in the next few days



one thing is clear: the ASLEF leaderships' stranglehold over industrial action on the tube has been broken, as has the local RMT leaderships' fear of going it alone.

## A witch-hunter witch-hunted An open letter to Clare Short

Dear Clare,

THEY are a rotten, ungrateful lot of male-pig swine, aren't they? The media I mean. Just because, in your gabby, fetching fashion — "I've got a brain somewhere, if only I can get the room to stop spinning for long enough to gather my thoughts" — you let out on TV the half-thought that perhaps, maybe, one day, cannabis might be legalised, they turn on you!

How dare you, Clare!

Journalists all over Wapping spilt their coke in uncontrollable anger — or was it laughter? — at such a scandalously daring idea as legalising cannabis. And then TONY had you in for a "dressing down" — or "a carpeting" according to some papers. That was not all.

The *Daily Mail* felt obliged to perform the painful duty of publicly examining your distant past, when, they told their shocked readers, you had *black friends* and lived with some of them in Birmingham. Did Clare Short, asked the *Mail* magisterially, did she — 15 or 20 years ago — then smoke pot?

Are you now or have you ever been a smoker of pot, Ms Short? That is the question of the moment!

And thus, Clare Short MP, one of the nastiest little witch hunters in the New Labour Party, the ex-socialist who, at the October Labour Party conference had worked off sour spite against Liz Davies because *Briefing* once truthfully reported that people like Blair regard Clare Short as a "useful idiot", found herself being witch hunted for mouthing one of the tamest "radical" ideas it is possible to find still above ground in '90s Britain.

Legalise dope? You'll be talking about the socialist revolution before long, if this drift continues, Clare! Sober up, or your career will suffer!

This was, frankly, enjoyable. But there is a serious side to it. In the recent Littleborough and Saddleworth by-election the Labour Party raised a hue and cry against the Liberal can-

didate because he openly favoured legalising cannabis.

Do you not see the connection between that and your own experience, Clare Short? You fall victim to the dogs you helped unchain. The same is true in the inner affairs of the Labour Party.

Labour is now a quasi-stalinist party with rigid structures and an increasingly ridiculous leader worship. It combines this with utter subservience to the media. Whoever in the Labour Party offends the media offend The Leader.

Ex-soft leftists like you have felt safe with these structures. But such structures and procedures rule out dissent. Even on a petty chicken-shit matter like cannabis.

When a prominent member of the Labour Front Bench can not express even the vague notion that, maybe, cannabis will be legalised, without a media witch hunt, and a reprimand from the Great Leader for the offending MP, where is Labour going? Where is Britain going?

You can't witch-hunt the Liberal Party on cannabis one day and squeal when the Tory press does the same thing to you the day after. You can't support the stalinisation of the Labour Party for years and then feel indignant when the Great Leader himself tells you off for daring to express a stray half-thought of your own.

Freedom is indivisible. Freedom is always for the one who disagrees: the issue would not arise if no one dissented. It is delusion to think that it is possible to do what the Labour Establishment has done — from witch hunting Liberals, to stifling internal discussion in the Labour Party, to playing the well-trained, subservient toy dog to the media — and still allow a little bit of freedom and independence to people like yourself.

It is probably too late for you to learn from any of this, Clare Short. Others should.

Yours, Annie O'Keeffe

# Bosnia: will the ceasefire hold?

By Martin Thomas

A CEASEFIRE has held, more or less, in Bosnia since 5 October. US-sponsored talks for a settlement to end the war started on 1 November.

According to the chief US official involved, Richard Holbrooke, "What I've got is agreement on vague principles. That's a long way from peace."

Within the parameters set by those vague principles, almost any deal will be better than renewed war — which, in those parameters, can only be about shifting the borders of ethnic partition. But any deal in those parameters will also be an atrocious carve-up, generating conflicts, probably, for decades to come by its treatment of millions of aggrieved refugees and its jagged, arbitrary borders.

*"Probably areas of eastern Bosnia historically Muslim-dominated will become Serb territory, and areas of western Bosnia historically Serb will become Croat."*

The parameters, or principles, which the US has got all the parties to accept, are that Bosnia (in its pre-1992) borders will become a loose confederation. A Bosnian Serb Republic will have 49% of the territory: it will enter into a confederation with the already existing (but uneasy) Muslim-Croat federation. The existing Bosnian government will be reduced to being the leadership of the "Muslim" element in "Muslim-Croat federation", which in turn is only an element in the broader "confederation". The "Croat" areas of the existing "Muslim-Croat federation" already use Croatian money, have the Croatian army operating in them, etc., so in effect the Bosnian Muslims and the people of the multi-ethnic cities like Sarajevo and Tuzla will be reduced to a couple of enclaves, squeezed between annexes of Croatian and Serbian states. Probably areas of eastern Bosnia historically Muslim-dominated will become Serb territory, and areas of western Bosnia historically Serb will become Croat, in line with the results of "ethnic cleansing".

The whole arrangement, if it can be negotiated through, will be policed and secured by a huge 60,000 strong NATO, or NATO/Russian, occupation army.

The US approach here is a direct continuation, in different circumstances, of the common US/European Union line when



ex-Yugoslavia started to collapse in 1991. As Laura Silber and Alan Little put it in *The Death of Yugoslavia*:

"International mediators behaved as though the war has no underlying structural causes at all. They came... to 'bang heads together', as though the conflict was caused by no more than some ill-defined... Balkan temperament, a south Slavic predisposition... towards fratricide." In June 1991, they counselled everyone to stay still and leave Yugoslavia as it was; now, they counsel everyone to settle down and accept "ethnic cleansing" and conquest as they

are. Anything will do, as long as it restores conditions for profitable trade and investment.

No force, however, can produce anything better unless it already embodies the principle of something better — of some element of Muslim-Croat unity across the war lines, of workers' unity, of consistent democracy. No force embodying such alternatives to Holbrooke's "vague principles" yet has anywhere near enough power to change the military and diplomatic map. We should do what we can, through solidarity, to help such a force emerge and grow.

## Israel: the myth of Rabin and the prospects for peace

Adam Keller, editor of the Israeli peace journal, *The Other Israel*, reports from Tel Aviv

I WAS at the Tel Aviv rally attended by tens of thousands of people at which Rabin was killed. He was killed only 100 metres away from where we were standing, but we didn't hear the news of his death until we got home as we were the other side of the municipal buildings. Yesterday I went to his funeral, which was also attended by thousands.

There has been a big change in the balance of forces on the ground. There has been the biggest mobilisation of the peace movement we have seen here for years.

Thousands of young people have been sitting out at the place where Rabin was murdered, and outside his house in Jerusalem. Thousands of candles have been lit for him.

We are almost seeing a sort of myth created in front of our eyes — of Rabin,

the man of peace and the martyr of peace. Politically this is a hopeful phenomenon. These youth are showing a real commitment to peace.

And although Rabin was quite a nasty character — even in the last week of his life he ordered the assassination of Fathi Shkaki (leader of Jihad movement in Palestine). But it is also a fact that if he had not made an agreement with Yasser Arafat he would still be alive today.

It is not just nonsense to believe he was a martyr for peace.

The big question here is, will there be an election? I don't expect it, and I'm not sure I'm in favour of it. An election would take months to organise and things could change a lot in a pre-election period. The right are now on the defensive, but that does not mean things could not swing back towards them.

I think it is vital that Labour stay in government until at least March 1996, when the army is finally due to pull out of most of Hebron. I want any future government to be left with a *fait accompli* which could only be reversed at the expense of a major war.

● *The Other Israel* can be contacted at

# South Africa: Victors don't commit war crimes

By Anne Mack

THE former South African Defence Minister General Magnus Malan and ten other retired military officers are to face trial for murder.

The eleven appeared in court in Durban at the beginning of November on charges of organising under the old regime a "third force" hit squad responsible for a township massacre.

Theoretically, if Malan and his accomplices are found guilty and refuse to plea for clemency then they could die.

But the idea that Malan will face the same fate that he and his underlings dished out to thousands of opponents of apartheid is absurd.

The General will walk free. He has to. The alternative is civil war. The African National Congress dare not allow the due process of law to operate because that would risk upsetting the delicate political compromise that ushered in the "New South Africa", while keeping the old apartheid state machine.

The state is, in the last instance, armed bodies of men. Its basic purpose is to preserve a given set of property relations on which it in turn rests.

The function of what was called the apartheid state was not, strictly speaking, to protect apartheid but to protect the most basic structures of racial capitalism of which Grand Apartheid was just one transient form.

The maintenance of a supply of cheap black labour for Anglo American and the other monopolies was thus a far more important goal for the apartheid state apparatus than the maintenance of the laws against mixed marriages, the pass laws or the Group Areas Act.

Malan was absolutely central to that brutal apparatus of repression. His units, both regular and irregular, ranged across the sub-continent from Angola to Mozambique as well as carrying out "special operations" in metropolitan capitals like London and Paris. But, as head of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), Malan's main theatre of war was within South Africa itself.

This modern day barbarian took personal charge of apartheid's dirty war. He is directly responsible for the development of the "Third Force" strategy in which the apartheid state deliberately recruited, trained and armed gangs of mercenaries whose purpose was to fan the flames of so-called "black on black" violence.

Starting from already existing and often violent conflicts between Inkatha and the ANC, Xhosa and Zulu speakers or township residents and hostel dwellers, Malan's

hit squads would set about fanning the flames of full-scale civil war. Their initial goal of building up Inkatha and other conservative black groups into a force that, in alliance with the National Party, could hope to inflict electoral defeat on the ANC was never realised. Nevertheless, the DMI's basic strategy worked.

Malan and his associates succeeded in destroying any semblance of normal life in the townships. They intimidated and demoralised the majority of the black population, creating an overwhelming desire for "peace" at almost any cost though they failed in undermining the mass electoral support for the ANC.

The hit squads created the bloody backdrop against which increasing repression of the liberation movement, and the end of the Cold War made possible South Africa's "historic compromise." A compromise that was premised on the defeat of the semi-insur-

rectionary township rebellion of the mid-1980s.

When Mandela was released in 1990 it was the regime that was taking the initiative. A weakened ANC was drawn into a long process of negotiations leading to a "transfer of power" in which the ANC agreed to share power with the National Party until the next millennium while all the old apartheid generals and bureaucrats kept their jobs and their pensions.

Malan himself was made a sacrificial lamb by De Klerk in 1991, to help along the negotiations. This time his court appearance boosted the ANC's showing in the local elections — the message was that, at last, or so it seemed, Mandela was getting tough. But in the end the ANC will find some device to ensure that the former Defence Minister is never convicted of anything. Mandela may be in office, but Malan won the war.

## After Yeltsin, what?

BORIS Yeltsin's days are numbered. After his second heart attack in a year the drunken dictator has been forced to hand over responsibility for Russia's key ministries, Defence, Security, Foreign Affairs and Interior to Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin.

It is unlikely that Yeltsin can ever recover sufficiently to regain the power he once held.

This poses two questions: what or who will fill his place? And will they be any more successful than Yeltsin in transforming the core of the old USSR into a fully blown capitalist society?

One possibility is the emergence in the wake of next month's Duma elections of a Stalinist-Nationalist bloc dedicated to halting privatisation and cracking down on the mafia. Such a bloc could be led by either former general Alexander Lebed or the leader of the Russian Communists (Old Stalinists) Gennady Zyuganov.

The problem for such a formation would be the fact that they have no economic programme that could deliver the kind of improvements in working class living standards that they have promised in order to win electoral support.

The so-called "liberals" are in a worse state. Their main electoral bloc, Yabloko, supposedly the third biggest party in Russia has been banned on a

technicality from participating in the Duma elections next month. It is difficult to see what the "liberals" can do in the medium term other than put their support behind Chernomyrdin who represents that sector of the old apparatus who have done best out of privatisation.

*"The only way out of the impasse is the development of a political movement of the working class"*

With the west economically incapable of providing the kind of "Marshall Aid" regeneration programme that is required and with few venture capitalists willing to sink their all in shares in the USSR the economic prognosis is bleak.

The only way out of the impasse is the development of a political movement of the working class, independent of all sections of the once monolithic bureaucracy, including the new capitalists.