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**US and  
Britain out  
of the Gulf**

**The new North-South  
wars begin**

# Comment

## The new era of North-South wars

The US intervention in the Gulf confirms that we are entering a new period in world politics. Not, unfortunately, that proclaimed by Gorbachev — a new era of peace and human values — but precisely the opposite: unbridled imperialist aggression against semi-colonial countries, wars and immiseration of large parts of the world's population. Therefore an era of increasing imperialist military violence.

In less than 12 months the US has invaded Panama, deployed troops in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, carried through the contra war against Nicaragua, intervened in Liberia and launched in the Gulf its biggest military intervention since Vietnam.

Imperialism is applying a pitiless economic squeeze to the Third World by international debt and other mechanisms. Since 1980 real living standards have fallen in Latin America, the Middle East and Africa — Africa's living standards have been rolled back 30 years.

Large parts of the Third World are now getting poorer in absolute terms. Virtually all is growing poorer relative to the imperialist countries.

The result is an end of the bourgeois reformist regimes of the type which existed in the 1930s to the 1960s — the era of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico, Peron in Argentina, Nasser in Egypt, Sukharno in Indonesia, Nyerere in Tanzania, or Torrijos in Panama. While engaging in anti-imperialist rhetoric the real basis of these regimes was the outflow of capital from the imperialist countries — above all the United States. The rhetoric was anti-imperialist but the regimes benefitted in dollars.

Today imperialism has no such luxury. It is not exporting capital, producing distorted and unequal economic growth, but sucking vast quantities of capital out of the semi-colonial countries — spreading economic destruction and chaos. The basis for stable reformism in the semi-colonial countries is being progressively destroyed.

With the collapse of bourgeois reformism in the third world two trends emerge. The first are regimes representing lapdogs of imperialism — who are literal traitors to the oppressed nation, selling it out utterly to imperialism. These are the Latin American presidents responding to Bush's proposal for a free trade area with the US, the government of Panama, Mubarak's in Egypt, the regime in Saudi Arabia. They mount more and more vicious attacks on their own population — culminating in extreme right wing terrorism.

The second trend is a sharp shift to the left — either through the masses moving to the left, as with the rise of the PT in Brazil, class struggle unionism in South Korea, or the rise of the struggle in South Africa — or by left bourgeois regimes resting on marginal strata of the capitalist class — Noriega's collaboration with both the Sandinistas and drug cartels, or Saddam Hussein colliding with the whole of world imperialism in the seizure of Kuwait. In addition the desperation of the masses leads to a base being gained by ultra-Stalinist currents aimed at ripping countries out of the grip of the world market — as with Sendero Luminoso in Peru. The entire reformist accumulation of capital as it has existed in the third world since World War II is breaking down.

In those circumstances, with its previous system of capital accumulation breaking down, imperialism has only one choice: increasing resort to direct military intervention. The sharply stepped up US military action of the last year is the product. And if the break up of the previous system of world accumulation leads to imperialism *needing* to step up its military intervention the *opportunity* is created by the huge swing to the right by the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev. In Panama and the Gulf imperialism now believes it can take military action without the resistance that Soviet support previously gave to regimes in confrontation with imperialism. The new aggressivity by imperialism will therefore increase.

It is creating a new world situation. A new period of North-South wars has begun.

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## Can the imperialist economies take the strain?

The imperialist offensive commenced in the 1970s is now entering its climactic period — which, as in the 1930s, may be a crisis lasting many years. After 1975 imperialism threw back its own working classes — defeating the working class offensive which started in May 1968 in France and which culminated in defeat in Portugal in November 1975. Imperialism, in particular since the new course of the US under Reagan, then turned to smashing the colonial revolution — which had continued to advance until 1979 (Grenada, Nicaragua, and the overthrow of the Shah of Iran) — and to destroying the workers states.

In Eastern Europe this has brought spectacular success. Germany has been reunited into the second most powerful imperialist state in the world — with immense implications for Europe and world politics. Capitalist governments have been installed in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Pro-capitalist forces in the USSR, organised around Yeltsin, are stronger than since the 1920s. Major victories for imperialism were gained in Grenada and Nicaragua. The living conditions of the semi-colonial masses have been thrown back 10, 20, and in some cases 30 years. Social disintegration, reaching paroxysm in cases such as Liberia, has set in in parts of the semi-colonial world.

But the problem for imperialism is that it is now throwing itself against the strongest forces in the world. The masses of the semi-colonial countries are the majority of the world's population. The Russian working class is the second largest in the world. Confronted with a clash with these gigantic forces the imperialist economies are coming under the strain.

The dialectic is that in order to contain the working class in the imperialist countries an intensification of the imperialist character of the capitalist system took place.

From the end of the 1970s onwards the entire post-war relation of the imperialist countries with the semi-colonial states was overturned.

From the 1930s onwards in the case of the US, and from the late 1940s in the case of other imperialist countries, what might be termed a 'reformist epoch' opened in relations between the imperialist and semi-colonial countries. This was not in the sense that there were only reforms in the semi-colonial countries, there were revolutions and wars, but overall the policy of the imperialist countries towards the semi-colonial ones was reformist — unlike the 1870s to 1941 when there was a eruption of imperialist aggression.

Starting with the US's 'good neighbour' policy to Latin America in the 1930s imperialism commenced a policy of reformist economic development in the semi-colonial countries. Its base was that the surplus value generated by the working class in the imperialist countries following its defeats in the 1930s was so colossal that it sufficed not simply to lay the basis for an economic boom, and reformism, inside the imperialist countries but to permit export of capital for reformist projects in the semi-colonial world. A major outflow of capital to the semi-colonial countries accompanied political decolonisation.

Since 1979, as discussed on the opposite page, the reverse has taken place. In addition to the traditional mechanisms of unequal exchange imperialism is sucking capital out of the semi-colonial countries at an annual rate of \$50 billion a year and rising. The result is growing economic chaos in the third world but a significant aid for stabilisation inside the imperialist countries.

The problem is that this mechanism only works if the surplus value extracted is greater than the costs of gaining it — or put more brutally if the profits exceed the mili-



tary and political expense of maintaining that exploitation.

From 1979-1989 the positive balance sheet of this policy for imperialism was clear. From 1980-88 \$800 billion flowed into the US from other imperialist and semi-colonial countries. The minor imperialist powers recouped at least some of their losses to the US at the expense of semi-colonial countries. No large scale US military action was needed. The gain from intensified exploitation of the third world was clear.

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait has sharply changed that. No other imperialist political enterprise is as expensive as war. Vietnam crippled the US in the 1960s. While the Gulf crisis is not on that scale its costs are still astronomical — the best estimates are well over \$1 billion a month, in addition to \$10 billion for aid to Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan. The US budget deficit, in consequence, is spiralling skywards. Under the Gramm-Rudman Act the deficit should have been \$64 billion this year. It was running at around \$200-\$240 billion, including the Savings and Loans debacle before the Gulf crisis and has now risen to \$250-\$300 billion.

Financing this huge deficit is made harder because of the side effects of the collapse of the Japanese stockmarket, itself a symptom that Japan could not stand the strain of propping up the US, and by the fact that German capital is absorbed in reunification. With external sources of finance cut back the US ruling class has therefore been forced to move sharply towards attacking its own working class.

This started before the

Gulf expedition — with Bush's 'no tax increase' pledge abandoned. Now he is forced to attack the US working class while pushing towards war.

The result will be a political crisis in the US. Externally it is the unedifying spectacle of the US Secretary of State visiting imperialist capitals for donations to finance the Gulf task force. Furthermore, apart from the Gulf oil states, the aid received has been negligible — as the other imperialist countries themselves face problems of one type or another (Japan's assets crash, Germany's reunification costs, Britain's balance of payments deficit).

The result is the Gulf crisis has produced huge strain in financial markets. World stockmarkets have fallen 22 in 1990. Furthermore the crisis is most severe in the most important imperialist economies — Japan where share prices have fallen 40 per cent since January and the US where the Savings and Loans crisis and the budget deficit are acquiring the dimensions of an economic disaster. To add to the problem oil prices have risen by 80 per cent. A US heading into recession has been struck a further blow.

These developments are the inevitable outcome of the course imperialism has pursued since 1979. It has spread chaos throughout the third world in pursuit of intensification of imperialist exploitation. Now the cost of policing the consequences are overstraining even imperialism. Its new aggressivity is based on economies far feebler than they appear and with far less ability to sustain prolonged conflicts than in the 1960s.

We are entering an explosive period in world politics.

## Imperialist offensive into the Gulf

The massive US military intervention in the Gulf brings together three decisive trends in world politics — the rising social disintegration in the 'third world' and the increasing military drive of imperialism to smash resistance to the consequences of this, the way the increasingly deep capitulation of the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev is leading imperialism to adopt a more and more aggressive course, and the specific character of the Middle East as the most economically decisive area of the semicolonial world. The war with Iraq therefore is the first of the new 'North-South wars' — accompanying the collapse of the basis of any stable reformism in the third world and thus an increasingly direct military drive by imperialism to stabilise its position. The attack on Iraq is not simply aimed at Saddam Hussein, but intended as a deadly warning to the entire 'third world',  
explains SYLVIA ASHBY.

The nakedly imperialist character of the world capitalist system has been made even more brutally clear to the people of the 'third world' in a new and more devastating way since 1979. In most of the post-war period the wealthiest imperialist nations of the world were net exporters of capital to the 'third world' — this influx of capital laid the material basis for bourgeois reformist projects in a number of semicolonial countries. This led some to wrongly believe that the entire world system was becoming less imperialist and more generally 'capitalist' due to the development of the semicolonial world. But such fantasies have been brought face to face with reality since 1979, when the capital flows to the semicolonial world stopped, and capital began to be sucked out of these impoverished countries to prop up the crisis-ridden economies of the imperialist states, particularly into the US. As we have outlined before, this has led to absolute falls in living standards in these countries: in the Middle East, between 1980-85, GDP per capita fell by 7 per cent, in Latin America by 14 per cent, in Africa by 10 per cent.

However, the social and political impact of this economic draining of the semicolonial world is now beginning to undermine the stability of the system itself. The impoverishment, starvation, plummeting living standards and social disintegration is reaching such levels that more and more desperate solutions are being sought. With less and less resources for stable capital accumulation, there is no possibility of stable independent bourgeois reformist regimes, hence the bourgeoisies in the semicolonial countries are faced with the need for a radical new course.

For most this means more and more supine capitulation to the demands of imperialism, as with Collor and Menem in Latin America, which mean attempting to force the populations of these countries to accept greater impoverishment while capital continues to flow into the imperialist centres. There is today no Peronist 'middle way', just abject capitulation.

But as imperialism has nothing to offer these societies, nor their ruling classes by way of economic sweeteners, these regimes are deeply unstable. The US is forced to step up its military intervention to shore up the situation, hence the growing trend to direct US military involvement in the 'third world'.

Since the beginning of the year the US has had troops engaged in Panama, Colombia and Peru, the Philippines — to shore up Aquino against a coup at-

tempt — Liberia, and now the Gulf.

Other semicolonial regimes have turned to desperate adventures in an attempt to turn the attention of the masses away from effects of social collapse — the new Pakistani regime's adventurist course towards India over Kashmir, Galtieri's attempt to confront British imperialism over the Malvinas or Saddam Hussein's seizure of Kuwait. In other cases the society just begins to collapse in on itself, as in Liberia.

Sometimes this thrashing about leads to confrontations with imperialism, as in the case of Galtieri's Argentina, or in Panama. In Panama the Noriega regime made attempts to claim real Panamanian control over the canal, collaborated with Sandinista Nicaragua, both of which were an affront to US imperialism, and at the same time was evidently involved in drug-running and brutal repression of opposition inside the country.

The actions of Saddam Hussein fit into this pattern. Having tried to solve the internal economic problems of Iraq through an imperialist-backed war with Iran, which met failure, the economic aid from imperialism dried up, and in an act of desperation Kuwait was seized, an action that is totally unacceptable to imperialism.

Its background is this disintegration of vast sections of the semicolonial world, due to being bled white by imperialism — \$200 billion was sucked out of the 'third world' from 1980 to 88. Imperialism's reply is more and more direct colonial type intervention, through military force. The US and British intervention in the Gulf should be understood as simply the first of a new wave of North-South wars, wars conducted by imperialism against the consequences of its economic destruction of the semi-colonial world.

It is in the framework of this new political turn in the policy of imperialism that the line of Gorbachev in seeking a new global accord through capitulating to imperialism's demands in Eastern Europe, over German reunification, and on the so-called 'regional conflicts' should be seen. The shift by Gorbachev immensely facilitates the offensive by imperialism.

The ending of the 'Cold War', rather than opening a new era of 'peace' — as the ruling class echoed by liberals and sections of the erstwhile left have claimed — has therefore simply accelerated this new and more aggressive phase of direct imperialist intervention in the 'third world' — a period which could be dubbed a new era of direct colonialism as the US



and its allies intervene militarily, and establish garrisons in an increasing number of regions.

This shift in strategy has been in preparation since the mid-70s, with the creation of the Rapid Deployment Forces by the US. However it is the changes in Eastern Europe that has eased the way for this new directly aggressive military policy.

Furthermore, the capitalist penetration of Eastern Europe has involved a redirection of funds by imperialism towards these countries — the tiny amounts of aid that were going to the 'third world' has now been switched to the countries of Eastern Europe as part of a strategy of winning them back to capitalism.

In addition, the countries of Eastern Europe themselves played a role in directing economic and military aid to the semicolonial world. This has now dried up.

Gorbachev's policy of abject capitulation to every demand of imperialism simply means selling out all those people who are fighting back against the devastation that imperialism has wrought on their countries and their peoples. In Southern Africa this policy is clear: the USSR has ended military aid to the ANC, its cutting of aid to Cuba and Angola forced a settlement in Namibia that was considerably less than could have been achieved. In Central America Gorbachev withheld support from the Sandinistas, and made no more than a token protest at US military intervention in Panama;

*'The actions of Saddam Hussein struck at the interests of imperialism in the Gulf'*

the pressure is now being placed on Cuba, with aid being cut, and capitulation to US demands for a complete end to economic support being prepared. But the most spectacular and grotesque capitulation so far has been the vote for the UN resolutions on sanctions against Iraq and action to enforce them, which have been the cover for the US to undertake its biggest military operation since the Vietnam war.

This is not only a betrayal of the peoples of the semicolonial world involved in these struggles, but has resulted in a massive weakening of the strategic position of the USSR itself and of its political influence. The present operations by the US in the Gulf have resulted already in over 200,000 imperialist troops being stationed to the south of the USSR, and will result in the system of US bases ringing the USSR being extended into the Middle East. Gorbachev's line will almost completely destroy the political parties linked to Moscow in the Middle East.

The actions of Saddam Hussein, in annexing Kuwait, with the announced intention of forcing up the price of oil, struck at the interests of imperialism in the Gulf — control over the supply and price of oil.

There can be absolutely no doubt about imperialism's intentions in response to this. The only possible rationale for the build up of troops on this scale, which was envisaged from the outset, is to engage in a bloody and major war with Iraq, the goal of which

is not a tactical retreat by Saddam from Kuwait, but the total destruction of the entire military capacity of Iraq. The aim of imperialism is that Israel should be the only state with the capacity for chemical and nuclear war in the Middle East.

Moreover there can be no ambiguity about imperialism's longer term intentions, it has no intention of militarily withdrawing from Saudi Arabia once Iraq is obliterated. Obviously it will not maintain a force of 250,000, and there will be much trumpeting that the troops are going home, but the truth will be that the US is in the Gulf to stay. *Time* magazine on 27 August proposed that a 'trip-wire' force of 25,000 troops in Saudi Arabia would be adequate for US purposes — adding that the cost for this should be borne by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Europe and Japan!

Since the 1950s the CIA has argued that the Middle East is far too strategically significant for it to be left open to the influence of regional political developments, arguing for everything from the permanent stationing of garrisons of troops, to the occupation of the entire Gulf area. It is this strategy which is now being implemented.

Alongside the creation of the state of Israel, in the post-war period imperialism depended on the Shah of Iran as its chief gendarme and bulwark against the threat of rising Arab nationalism across the Middle East. The post-war wave of Arab nationalism, led by the Arab bourgeoisies, began with Nasser's confrontation with imperialism over the Suez Canal in the 1950s. It was powerfully deepened by Algeria's war of independence against France. The directly Nasserite wave included the coming to power of Gaddafi in Libya, who took the first steps in leading the oil-producing Arab nations into a quadrupling of the price of oil in 1973 — although US imperialism was able to exploit this against its own imperialist rivals. The republican movements in Yemen — North and South — Oman, and Bahrain in the 60s, the coming to power of the Baathist regimes in Syria and Iraq were all part of this Arab nationalist wave. The general instability in the Middle East was added to by the Iranian revolution of 1979.

The replacement of the Shah with the regime of Khomeini, with its sharply anti-imperialist rhetoric, threatened imperialism's delicate balance in the entire Middle East, but especially in the crucial oil-rich Gulf. The Iran-Iraq war was inspired and financed by imperialism to drain Iranian resources and contain the

spread of the Iranian revolution.

As regards the immediate causes of the conflict in the Gulf, Saddam Hussein was supplied with weapons, including chemical weapons, to prolong the war against Iran, and brutally suppress the Kurdish national rebellion along its North and North Western borders. Without this imperialist aid there is no doubt that the more populous and better armed Iran would have emerged the victor from the conflict.

However, despite emerging from the war undefeated, the Iraqi economy was rapidly revealed to be on the brink of collapse. The indications were that Rafsanjani, the new Iranian president, would be more compliant than Khomeini, seeking some kind of agreement with imperialism, demanded in particular by the Iranian bourgeoisie. Less worried by the threat from Iran, imperialism maintained artificially low oil prices in order to prevent the US economy being dragged more sharply into recession, ignoring the disastrous impact on Iraq's economy.

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, controlling the majority of the world's oil reserves, ensured a level of oil production and prices which met the needs of imperialism, but this was destroying the Iraqi economy. Therefore Iraq demanded an end to the pro-imperialist oil policy of the chief Gulf states. The dispute over oil prices lay behind the worsening relations between Kuwait and Iraq, prior to the Iraqi invasion. Emergency meetings of the OPEC countries were called to mediate between Kuwait and Iraq over the disputed issues, but these came to nothing.

The other Gulf producers refused to budge from the low price policy demanded by imperialism, or to compensate Iraq in any other form, so Iraq took the matter into its own hands by invading Kuwait.

Oil is the decisive element in this entire conflict in the Gulf. President Bush has described the present military intervention as the most important since the Second World War — while this exaggerates, it is by far the most decisive since Vietnam.

The entire policy of imperialism in the Middle East, particularly since oil was discovered in the mid-1920s, has been totally determined by the need to dominate the world's oil supplies. The Soviet Union has also had a vital interest in the area, firstly because of the strategic significance of Iran, and then the Middle East on its southern border, and secondly because of oil.

The present shape of the Middle



*'Oil is the decisive element in this entire conflict'*

East, dictated by oil, was grafted onto an imperialist structure that predated its discovery. The region first came to the attention of British imperialism as a consequence of its empire in India and the need to control the Indian Ocean. Piracy from the semi-nomadic peoples of the shores of the Gulf, and control of the Mediterranean route to the East via Egypt and the Red Sea — and later the Suez Canal — were the determinants of British policy in the region.

Kuwait and the other tiny states along the Gulf were created by Britain through a series of treaties with the local sheikhs — nominally under the control of the Ottoman empire — to prevent piracy. These treaties pledged British imperial arms to defend the local rulers in return for an end to Gulf-based piracy of British shipping in the Indian Ocean — and resulted in the ossification and stagnation of their outdated social system until oil dollars brought them sharply into the 20th century in the 1960s with a baggage of sheikhdoms and ruling families with pre-feudal rights. After the First World War the rag bag of sheikhdoms were established as independent — though tiny, and inviable — states along the shores of the Gulf, through the offices of imperialism, with only one aim — to ensure the existence of regimes that were totally compliant to the interests of imperialism as they depended upon it for their existence.

In Egypt Britain established a military presence to protect its routes to the

East after control of these was challenged by France — which sponsored the building of the Suez Canal. Egypt became a de facto British colony while maintaining its de jure status as an administrative district of the Ottoman empire.

When oil was discovered in the deserts of Saudi Arabia it was the US that negotiated control over the valuable rights to explore and exploit Saudi oil — a concession for which it paid \$50,000. The British only offered \$5,000 — which proved to be an exceptionally costly mistake for the British government as Saudi Arabia proved to be a far richer source than Iran, which Britain was mainly interested in, and moreover the close involvement of the US in Saudi Arabia became the bridgehead for US dominance of the Middle East (replacing both Britain and France during the 50s and 60s).

US dominance of the Middle East is now unchallenged, and consequently Arab hostility has turned from centrally focussing on Britain and France as the imperialist intruders, to the United States. This hostility was scored even deeper into Arab society following the key role of the US in sponsoring the establishment of the state of Israel.

The creation of the Zionist state of Israel, involving turning the entire population of Palestine into refugees, was a key aspect of US strategy in the Middle East. Armed to the teeth and

economically aided by imperialism, the Zionist state is a fundamental bulwark against any threat from rising Arab nationalism in the region. That is why, while imperialism may sponsor a limited withdrawal from parts of the Occupied Territories to appease Arab opinion, it will never support any policy that fundamentally weakens Israel by meeting Palestinian national demands.

*Time* magazine on 27 August reflected the total cynicism of US views of the Palestinians in its proposed (totally unrealistic) 'settlement' for the region: '...a settlement should involve the creation of a demilitarised Palestinian state in some, but not all, of the West Bank.' Together with a permanent US army of occupation on the border: 'a...trip-wire force of troops along the Israel-Palestine border would add muscle' to US pledges of Israeli security. And the quid pro quo for this great concession? 'The Arab states ... should sign peace treaties with Jerusalem', in other words not only accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel but accept its annexation of at least part of the West Bank, and the other Occupied Territories! Of course, *Time* proposes no such deal for Iraq over Kuwait.

Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq were also carved out of the Middle East by British, French and later US imperialism. The borders of Lebanon and Jordan in particular are a completely artificial creation. The borders of Lebanon were fixed to cover the largest amount of territory possible while trying to maintain a Christian majority in the state, which was a French 'protectorate'. Jordan was created as a distinct administrative region to provide a kingdom for a branch of the Hashemite family after the family of Ibn Saud had forced them out of their ruling position as Sharifs of Mecca and Medina. Iraq's borders are arbitrary, particularly in relation to its access to the Gulf — due to the creation of Kuwait — but its position straddling the Tigris and Euphrates, the old Mesopotamia, has historical legitimacy throughout Arab and pre-Arab history and as an influential administrative area of the Ottoman Empire. Similarly Syria, although with a more stormy and fought over past, has real continuity, although the carving out of territory to form Jordan and increase the size of Lebanon by imperialism has distorted its more recent development.

Each of these countries were carved up by imperialism and their borders determined between Washington,

London and Paris after the Second World War. In Iraq, Syria and Jordan the monarchical British imposed, or tried to impose, 'kings' — not part of any Arab tradition of political organisation! The 'royal family' was again chosen by the British, the Hashemite, from what is now Saudi Arabia, with no connection with the region they were henceforth to rule by right of blood. They were quickly expelled from Syria, and later kicked out of Iraq, but the crushing of the Palestinians — particularly bloodily — by Jordan's King Abdullah, ensured the Hashemites long survival in Jordan.

The Soviet Union made periodic alliances with emerging Arab nationalism throughout the post-war period, especially with Nasser's Egypt, and with the PLO, and at different points with the regimes in Syria and Iraq. However this has failed to materialise into any permanent strategic position for the USSR in the region because at each point it subordinated support for Arab nationalist regimes in their conflict with Israel, to detente and seeking a role for itself by agreement with the US.

Given the strategic importance of Middle East oil, any role for the USSR in the region is completely unacceptable to the US which has diplomatically outmanoeuvred the Soviet Union

*'Gorbachev's craven capitulation to imperialist war-mongering marks the end of any independent Soviet influence in the Middle East'*

at every point, most decisively when Kissinger negotiated the new agreement between imperialism and Egypt's president Sadat — Nasser's successor — which excluded the USSR at one blow from the chief power base it had built up in the area.

The key reason these gains were possible for the US was because although the USSR armed Egypt it refused to do so to a degree where it could defeat Israel. The USSR pressed instead for recognition of Israel, and a 'peaceful solution' to the Arab-Israeli conflict guaranteed jointly by the US and USSR. In the stalemate that this provoked only the US — with influence in Israel — was able to play a real role. Therefore the USSR ended up with the 'peaceful solution' it had advocated in the Camp David agreements, but with no role for itself, and with the US having replaced it as the chief influence in Egypt.

However, despite the USSR's position of advocating recognition of Israel, Palestine remains the stumbling block to completely excluding the USSR from the region. The Arab regimes, under the pressure of the Arab masses, will not completely abandon the Palestinians or recognise Israel, so the US cannot completely tie up the politics of the region.

The present conflict has revealed more clearly than for years that the current Arab regimes are totally tied to imperialism, and their opposition to Israel is little more than rhetoric. In this war the Arab states will be lined up with Israel and the US against Iraq. This evidently severely weakens the Palestinians, and will tremendously strengthen Israel.

Gorbachev's craven capitulation to imperialist hypocrisy and war-mongering, confining his critical comments to calling the US-British force to be transformed into a UN force — in which the USSR might presumably participate — is politically in line with the USSR's position in previous Middle East conflicts, what is new is that the Soviet bureaucracy has actually voted for UN resolutions, and totally abandoned its Arab allies, totally destroying what remained of its strategic position in the Middle East. In this conflict, even more than in 1967 or in 1973, the USSR has excluded itself from any influence on the outcome of the events — except to cheer on the United States.

The outcome of the Helsinki summit, where Gorbachev agreed to pull Soviet advisors out of Iraq, and essentially stand by while the US takes whatever military action it chooses in



the Gulf, marks the final collapse of independent Soviet influence in the Middle East.

There is no doubt that the US is prepared to take whatever action is necessary to force Iraq out of Kuwait. Dominant circles in the US, and also in Israel seek the elimination of Iraq as a regional military force.

The most crude economics indicate the US's determination. Gulf oil currently constitutes 20.1 per cent of world oil production, and 40 per cent of this is controlled jointly by Iraq and Kuwait. A unified Iraq and Kuwait would rapidly become the premier economic power in the Gulf region, and this would strongly reinforce Iraq's military superiority over the other Gulf states, making it the determining political power in the region. Moreover, if the Kuwait monarchy can be overthrown then all the other ruling families in the Gulf would fall.

The US is determined not to allow a force like Hussein's Iraq to attain such an influence for strictly economic reasons. Moreover it is determined that, if possible, Iraq will not have the military possibility to take such action again. In order to create a new stability in the Gulf the US proposes that only Israel should have a modern attacking army, and that Saudi Arabia should be occupied by US bases, with the Saudi regime guaranteed from revenge for its betrayal of the Arab people by US troops.

Imperialism indeed now scarcely disguises its intentions. Murdoch's *Sunday Times* — which Thatcher has said is the paper best informed on the Gulf — on 12 August outlined the real aims of the US and its allies.

'The reason why we will shortly have to go to war with Iraq is not to free Kuwait, though that is to be desired, or to defend Saudi Arabia, though that is important. It is because President Saddam is a menace to vital Western interests in the Gulf, above all the free flow of oil at market prices, which is essential to the West's prosperity'

This is why imperialism has never had the intention to simply force Hussein into a tactical withdrawal from Kuwait. Dominant forces in the US and Britain have been announcing since the outset that a military strike is called for. Their sole concern is the scale of the world backlash against this and the degree to which this would threaten their interests.

Despite the hypocritical talk about 'imposing UN sanctions', all the UN resolutions have served for is to provide the cloak for the US military decision to position a force in the Gulf

sufficient for a military strike against Iraq.

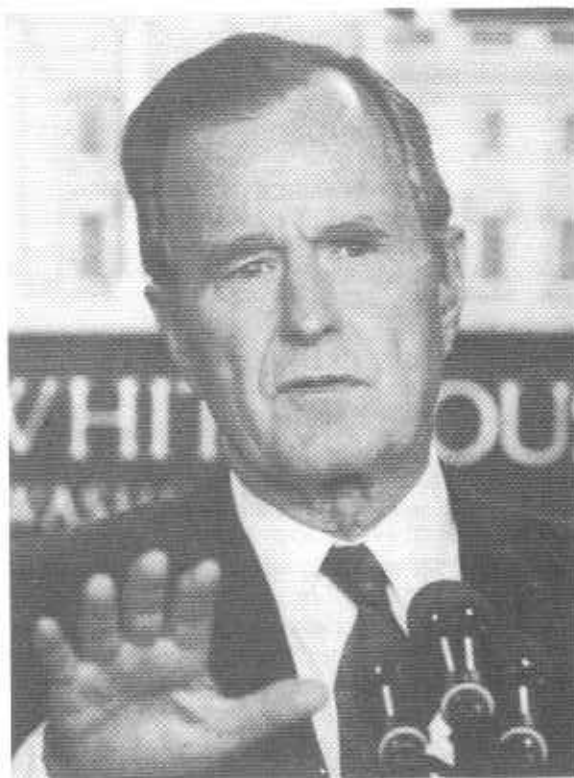
The *Independent* on 28 August spelled out the reality in a report from Dahrhan, the main Saudi military base: 'Anyone who has watched the continuing build up of US forces — the thousands of troops of the 24th and 101st divisions arriving each day, the hundreds of tonnes of ammunition still being unloaded from the C-5 Galaxies — is left with the deep impression that "peace momentum", which is receiving only second billing in the Saudi press, has merely provided the United States with further precious days in which to reinforce its army in Saudi Arabia.

'...Listening to the man who is running the entire US logistics operation in the Gulf it is difficult to regard the current peace initiatives as anything more than a necessary ritual to be gone through before an armed conflict.'

The bloody war to be launched against Saddam Hussein, as the *Sunday Times* correctly stated, has nothing to do with the rights of Kuwait, still less to do with democracy, but with 'vital Western oil interests'. As the whole left has pointed out, if imperialism cared anything for democracy or national rights it would have implemented real sanctions against South Africa, or taken action against Israel for its annexation of the Occupied Territories. All imperialist talk of 'democracy' is sheer hypocrisy — the Saudi's is one of the few absolute monarchies left in the world!

The US intervention in the Gulf is the first of the new wars that arise out of the disintegration of the semicolonial world. They move the world back to an era of direct colonialism. What response there will be to that will determine the nature of the new world order. A condominium of the world imperialist powers — the 'League of imperialist bandits' as Lenin rightly called them — have decided to wage war against anyone who attempts to resist the consequences of their attack on the majority of humanity. They have been joined in that by the pro-capitalists who now head the state created by Lenin which was once the greatest aid in the struggle against imperialism.

The trouble for the forces currently moving their armies into the Gulf is that their own economic system is unstable and, most importantly, those who they intend to attack, the working class and oppressed of the semicolonial countries, constitute the majority of the world's population. Even if they crush Saddam Hussein the economic



effects of the imperialist system mean they will merely produce another hydra that will strike back against them in a few years time. The Gulf is the first, not the last, of the new imperialist wars.

In this struggle the place of socialists is clear. It is with the semicolonial countries fighting back against a system of colonialism and imperialism which has now endured for over five centuries and is the most evil force that has ever existed in world history.

Saddam Hussein is a murdering butcher of the Kurds and Iranians. But Iraq's lack of power, compared to the US and Britain, means this pales into insignificance in historical terms compared to those now sending their fleets to the Gulf. More to the point the regime the US and Britain will install in Iraq if they can, the suzerainty of nuclear and chemically armed Israel and the direct involvement of the US military in the region, will reduce the Arab people to a far greater enslavement than anything Saddam Hussein could ever undertake.

In this struggle socialists stand with the Arab people against the onslaught being launched upon them. We demand all US and British forces out of the Gulf and utterly condemn the involvement of Gorbachev in this murderous enterprise.

It will only be the first time in the coming years that socialists will have to stand up against the new offensive of imperialism.

*'Imperialism has never had the intention to simply force Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait, they are preparing a military strike against Iraq'*



## Marxism and imperialist wars

The starting point of the struggle against imperialist wars, such as that in the Gulf, is, in class terms, the division between oppressed and oppressor nations. In terms of political tactics it is how to rally the widest and most effective political force against imperialist aggression. That means dispelling the arguments used to justify not opposing the imperialists when they go to war — whether that opposition comes from the open right wing, arguing that the war is about democracy, or combatting aggression, or, in an ultra-left guise that socialists cannot dirty their hands in alliances with pacifists, or cannot find themselves fighting on the same side in a war with colonial dictators etc. ANDREW JAMES shows how the issues which have come up in the struggle against the Gulf war have surfaced in innumerable previous conflicts.

The starting point of the Marxist attitude to all wars was first stated by Clausewitz: 'All know that wars are caused only by the political relations of governments and of nations; but ordinarily one pictures the situation as if, with the beginning of the war, these relations cease and a totally new situation is created, which follows its own laws. We assert, on the contrary, that war is nothing but the continuation of political relations, with the intervention of other means.' As Lenin stated: 'With reference to war, the main thesis of dialectics... is that "war is simply the continuation of politics by other [ie violent] means"... it was always the standpoint of Marx and Engels, who regarded any war as the continuation of the politics of the powers concerned — and the various classes within these countries.'

An imperialist war does not show itself by the fact that it always starts by an act of imperialist aggression — as with Britain's almost continual seizure of colonies from the 16th to the early 20th centuries. It may start by rebellion, violence, by an oppressed people against imperialism — as with the Algerian war of independence from France. It may start with the imperialists fabricating an incident to launch a war — as with Johnson creating an attack by Vietnamese vessels on the US fleet in the Bay of Tonkin to justify unleashing the Vietnam war. All matters such as who fired the first shot, who attacked who, whose geographical boundaries were crossed and so on are strictly uninteresting — they are the incidental surface of events. The core of the matter is which force is fighting who. As Trotsky put it: 'A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning or violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!'

Or again: 'Imperialism camouflages its own peculiar aims — seizure of colonies, markets, sources of raw material, spheres of influence — with such ideas as "safeguarding peace against the aggressors", "defense of the fatherland", "defense of democracy," etc. These ideas are false through and through. It is the duty of every socialist not to support them but, on the contrary, to unmask them before the people. "The question of which group delivered the first military blow or first declared war," wrote Lenin in March 1915, "has no importance whatever in determining the tactics of socialists. Phrases about the defense of the fatherland, repelling invasion by the enemy, conducting a defensive

war, etc., are... a complete deception of the people."

Socialists do not condemn a slave for taking up arms against a slaveholder — anyone in that situation who concentrates on 'condemning violence' by the slaves is merely a defender of slavery. If, as unfortunately occurs in such revolts, massacres of slaveholders, or even innocent bystanders, takes place by the slaves socialists point out that the responsibility for such events falls totally with, and indeed is made inevitable by, the system of slavery (and that this is a supplementary reason it must be brought to an end immediately). Furthermore the cumulative violence carried out by the slaveholder is invariably a hundred times worse than the individual acts of violence carried out by the slaves.

Likewise if a semicolonial country rises up in arms against an imperialist state socialists do not condemn the semicolonial country but demand that imperialism be brought to an end. Furthermore the killings and atrocities carried out by a semicolonial dictator such as Saddam Hussein, because of his more limited means, completely pale into insignificance compared to the crimes and violence of the imperialists — organisers of such events as the First and Second World Wars, the carpet bombing of Cambodia, the killing of 500,000 Communists in Indonesia, the coup in Chile, the death squads in El Salvador, poverty and starvation on a world scale etc.

When it comes to relations between states the fundamental division, resting on class relations, is that between imperialist, oppressor, states and oppressed states. As Lenin put it in his 'Report on the National and the Colonial Questions' to the Second Congress of the Communist International: 'What is the cardinal idea underlying our theses? It is the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations. Unlike the Second International and bourgeois democracy, we emphasise this distinction... The characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world... being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and powerful armed forces. The vast majority of the world's population... belong to the oppressed nations, which are either in a state of direct colonial dependence or are semicolonies, as, for example, Persia, Turkey and China, or else, conquered by some big imperialist power, have become greatly dependent on that power by virtue of peace treaties. This

idea of distinction, of dividing the nations into oppressor and oppressed, runs through the theses.'

From this flows the fundamental Marxist principle of the attitude towards struggles between imperialist and semicolonial countries. *In a war between a semicolonial and an imperialist nation what is at the root of the conflict, and what causes the war, is not the type of political regime — the imperialists are indifferent to the type of regime provided it pays their profits and 'democratic' imperialists routinely support the most barbaric dictatorships in the third world — but the exploitative economic relations that exist.* As Trotsky scornfully put it: 'It is... sheer fraud and charlatanism to transfer mechanically the laws and rules of the struggle between different classes of one and the same nation over to an imperialist war, that is the struggle waged by one and the same class of different nations...

'Mussolini and his closest associates, so far as one can gather, are atheists, that is, they believe in neither God nor the devil. The king of Britain and his ministers are mired in medieval superstitions and believe not only in the devil but in the devil's grandmother. Yet this does not mean that a war between Italy and England would be a war of science against religion...

'In the calendar of human progress, a republic rates above a monarchy. But does this signify that a war waged by republican France, say, against monarchist Holland for colonies would be a war of a republic against a monarchy? We shall not even dwell on the fact that in the event of a national war waged by the Bey of Tunis against France, progress would be on the side of the barbarian monarch and not that of the imperialist republic.

'To substitute political... abstractions for the actual aims of the warring imperialist camps is not to fight for democracy, but to help the brigands disguise their robbery, pillage, and violence.'

The fact that it is the nature of the states, imperialist or oppressed, not the nature of the regimes that is decisive is all the more true because in its claim that 'democracy' is the key criteria — thus the US and Britain are democracies whereas Iraq is a dictatorship, therefore we should support the US and Britain — a double fraud is involved. First the US and Britain can remain democracies only because they rest on imperialist exploitation. Secondly the oppression to which imperialism condemns the semicolonial countries is the fundamental reason



*'The counterpart of democracy in the imperialist countries is dictatorship in the semicolonial countries, comprising the majority of the world's population'*

why they cannot develop as democracies — not to mention that imperialism directly props up a whole series of unspeakable dictators (Pinochet, Somoza, the Shah of Iran, in the earlier period Saddam Hussein etc)

As Trotsky noted: 'The coercive imperialism of advanced nations is able to exist only because backward nations, oppressed nationalities, colonial and semicolonial countries, remain on our planet.

'The struggle of the oppressed peoples for national unification and national independence is doubly progressive because, on the one side, this prepares more favorable conditions for their own development, while, on the other side, this deals blows to imperialism. That, in particular, is the reason why, in the struggle between a civilized, imperialist, democratic republic and a backward, barbaric monarchy in a colonial country, the socialists are completely on the side of the oppressed country notwithstanding its monarchy and against the oppressor country notwithstanding its "democracy."

More precisely: 'The political form of democracy... has been preserved only among the great powers... the richest, traditionally the most predatory and privileged countries, which have long since concentrated in their hands a lions share of the colonial possessions and the chief natural resources of our planet.

'It is not hard to find the explanation for this "natural selection". Democracy can be maintained only so long as class contradictions do not reach an explosive state. In order to mitigate social frictions the bour-

geoisie has been compelled to provide feed for a broad layer of petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and the bureaucracy and aristocracy of labour...

'The reformist feeding trough has... been preserved only in those countries which were able in the past to accumulate vast wealth, thanks to the exploitation of the world market, and their pillage of the colonies. In other words a democratic regime is accessible... only to the most aristocratic bourgeoisie. The basis of social patriotism remains colonial slavery.'

The counterpart of 'democracy' in the imperialist countries is therefore dictatorship in the semicolonial countries comprising the majority of the world's population. Anyone who defends an imperialist country against a semicolonial one is *in fact* defending a system which creates democracy for a few at the expense of suppression of democracy for the majority.

Imperialism both indirectly creates and typically directly sustains semicolonial dictatorships or 'fascism' — Hussein's Iraq, which was financed by the West to attack Iran, is just one example. As Trotsky explained in a passage worth quoting at length.

'Modern humanity without exception, from British workers to Ethiopian nomads, lives under the yoke of imperialism. This must not be forgotten for a single minute. But this does not at all mean that imperialism manifests itself equally in all countries. No. Some countries are the carriers of imperialism, others — its victims. This is the main dividing line between modern nations and states. From this viewpoint and only from this viewpoint should the very pressing problem of fascism and democracy be considered.

'Democracy for Mexico, for instance, signifies the desire of a semicolonial country to escape from bonded dependence, to give land to the peasants, to lift the Indians to a higher level of culture and so on. In other words, the democratic problems of Mexico have a progressive and revolutionary character.

'And what does democracy signify in Great Britain? The maintenance of what exists, that is, above all the maintenance of the rule of the metropolis over the colonies. The same is true in relation to France. The banner of democracy covers here the imperialist hegemony of the privileged minority over the oppressed majority.

'In the same manner we cannot speak of fascism "in general." In Germany, Italy, and Japan, fascism and militarism are the weapons of a greedy, hungry, and therefore aggressive

imperialism. In the Latin American countries fascism is the expression of the most slavish dependence on foreign imperialism. We must be able to discover under the political form the economic and social content...

'Had the British government loved democracy so, it would have given freedom to India. The same is true of France. Great Britain prefers the dictatorship of Franco in Spain to the political rule of the workers and peasants, because Franco would be a much more pliant and reliable agent of British imperialism. England and France have given Austria to Hitler without resistance although war would be inevitable if he so much as dared touch their colonies.

'The conclusion is that it is impossible to fight against fascism without fighting imperialism. The colonial and semicolonial countries must fight first of all against that imperialist country which directly oppresses them, irrespective of whether it bears the mask of fascism or democracy.'

*In a struggle between a 'democratic' imperialism and a 'dictatorial' semicolonial country socialists are therefore on the side of the semicolonial country — because the 'democracy' of the former rests on the enslavement of the latter. As Trotsky pointed out of the situation of the 1930s: 'In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will... be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain.'*

*It also follows from this that socialists oppose not simply war but also any other measures taken by imperialist countries against semicolonial ones — for example sanctions.*

*If refusal to oppose imperialist war within the labour movement comes in the straightforward rotten disguise of those claiming support for the 'democracy' of the imperialist states against the 'dictatorship' of semicolonial ones (a position perfectly summed up by Ghandi who, when asked what he thought of Western civilisation, replied 'it would be a good idea') nevertheless the same position is also presented in the ultra-left guise that socialists should not support a semicolonial country in such a conflict because it is led by (anti-working class) dictatorships — a good illustration of the adage 'scratch an ultra-left and*

*you'll find an imperialist'. Trotsky's demolition of such ultra-left, that is pro-imperialist, positions in the 1930s is also worth quoting at length — he was dealing with the war between China and Japan in the 1930s.*

*'During the past few days I have been reading some of the lucubrations of the Oehlerites and the Eiffelites on the... Sino-Japanese war...*

*'In my declaration to the bourgeois press, I said that the duty of all the workers' organizations of China was to participate actively and in the front lines of the present war against Japan, without abandoning, for a single moment, their own program and independent activity.*

*'But that is "social patriotism" the Eiffelites cry! It is capitulation to Chiang Kai-shek [the Chinese bourgeois leader]! It is the abandonment of the principle of the class struggle! Bolshevism preached revolutionary defeatism in the imperialist war...*

*"Our position on the war in China is the same. The only salvation of the workers and peasants of China is to struggle independently against the two armies, against the Chinese army in the same manner as against the Japanese army."*

*'These four lines, taken from an Eiffelite document of September 10, 1937, suffice entirely for us to say: we are concerned here with either real traitors or complete imbeciles. But imbecility, raised to this degree, is equal to treason.*

*'We do not and never have put all wars on the same plane. Marx and Engels supported the revolutionary struggle of the Irish against Great Britain, of the Poles against the Czar, even though in these two nationalist wars*

*the leaders were, for the most part, members of the bourgeoisie and even at times of the feudal aristocracy... at all events, Catholic reactionaries.*

*'When Abd-el-Krim [in Algeria] rose up against France, the democrats and social democrats spoke with hate of the struggle of a "savage tyrant" against the "democracy." The party of Leon Blum supported this point of view. But we, Marxists and Bolsheviks, considered the struggle of the Riffians against imperialist domination as a progressive war.*

*'Lenin wrote hundreds of pages demonstrating the primary necessity of distinguishing between imperialist nations and the colonial and semicolonial nations which comprised the great majority of humanity. To speak of "revolutionary defeatism" in general, without distinguishing between exploiter and exploited countries, is to make a miserable caricature of Bolshevism and to put that caricature at the service of the imperialists.*

*'In the Far East we have a classic example. China is a semicolonial country which Japan is transforming, under our very eyes, into a colonial country. Japan's struggle is imperialist and reactionary. China's struggle is emancipatory and progressive.*

*'But Chiang Kai-shek? We need have no illusions about Chiang Kai-shek, his party, or the whole ruling class of China, just as Marx and Engels had no illusions about the ruling classes of Ireland and Poland. Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible. It is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels, or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle...*

*'If Japan is an imperialist country and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favour China. Japanese patriotism is the hideous mask of worldwide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of "social patriotism" can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin, who have understood nothing of the attitude of the Bolsheviks during the imperialist war, and who can but compromise and prostitute the teachings of Marxism...*

*'Can Chiang Kai-shek assure the victory? I do not believe so. It is he, however, who began the war and who today directs it. To be able to replace him it is necessary to gain decisive*

*'In a struggle between a "democratic" imperialism and a "dictatorial" semicolonial country, socialists are on the side of the semicolonial country'*



influence among the proletariat and in the army, and to do this it is necessary, not to remain suspended in the air, but to place oneself in the midst of the struggle. We must win influence and prestige in the military struggle against the foreign invasion and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, and the internal betrayal...

'In my declaration to the bourgeois press at the beginning of the recent conflict between Tokyo and Nanking, I stressed above all the necessity of the active participation of revolutionary workers in the war against the imperialist oppressors. Why did I do it? Because first of all it is correct from the Marxist point of view... And I added at the same time: without abandoning either their program or their independence.

'The Eiffelite imbeciles try to jest about this "reservation." "The Trotskyists," they say, "want to serve Chiang Kai-shek in action and the proletariat in words." To participate actively and consciously in the war does not mean "to serve Chiang Kai-shek" but to serve the independence of a colonial country in spite of Chiang Kai-shek. And the words directed against the Kuomintang are the means of educating the masses for the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek.

'In participating in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command in the war for independence to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek... that is the only revolutionary policy.

'The Eiffelites counterpose the policy of "class struggle" to this "nationalist and social-patriotic" policy. Lenin fought this abstract and sterile opposition all his life. To him, the interests of the world proletariat dictated the duty of aiding oppressed peoples in their national and patriotic struggle against imperialism. Those who have not yet understood that, almost a quarter of a century after the world war and twenty years after the October revolution, must be pitilessly rejected as the worst enemies on the inside by the revolutionary vanguard.'

**I**ndeed in a number of circumstances socialists are the most resolute pursuers of the wars waged by semi-colonial countries. Again in Trotsky's words: 'We have a war. The first question is, should our Chinese comrades and with them all the others accept this war as their war or reject it as a war imposed upon them by the ruling class?...

'We know Chiang Kai-shek well



Casualties of the Vietnam war in Hanoi

enough as the hangman of workers. But this same Chiang Kai-shek is now obliged to lead a war which is our war. In this war our comrades should be the best fighters. Politically they should criticise Chiang Kai-shek not for making war but for making it in an ineffective manner, without high taxation of the bourgeois class, without sufficient arming of workers and peasants, etc.

'Our comrades in different countries scarcely know that the most important slogan of our Chinese section in the previous period was: "Prepare the war against Japan." And this was correct...

'The Japanese worker must say: "My exploiters imposed this dishonest war upon me." The Chinese worker must say: "The Japanese robbers imposed this war of defense upon my people. It is my war. But unfortunately the leadership of the war is in bad hands. We must survey its direction severely, and we must prepare to replace it." This is the only one real plan for agitation and propaganda.

'I have heard the following argument: "The Chinese army is a bourgeois army, but we can sustain only a proletarian red army." This argument is a "militarized" expression of the lack of understanding of the difference between a bourgeois (semi-bourgeois—semi-feudal) colonial country and a country of imperialistic slaveholders.

'As a bourgeois army the Chinese army can of course suppress workers' strikes and peasant rebellions in the interest of the owners. In all these cases we oppose it by all possible means. But in the war against Japan the same army defends — not sufficiently, not conscientiously, etc. — the progressive national interest of the Chinese people. So far we support it.

To identify the Chinese army with the Japanese signifies simply identifying the oppressors and the oppressed, the robbers and their victims.

'Chiang Kai-shek cannot assure the liberation of China, it is clear; but he tries to stop the further enslavement of China and it is a small step to further liberation. With all our energy we take part in this small step.'

**H**owever if fake ultra-leftism consists in refusal to support semi-colonial countries in struggles with imperialism another form of ultra-leftism — sometimes genuine, sometimes fake, but always damaging — is the refusal to see the need to fight against imperialist wars alongside pacifists and other forces. The first task for socialists is to take a decisive position against the imperialist state and, in a war with a semi-colonial country, to support the semi-colonial country under attack. But after that the task is to not simply to 'take a position' but to practically mobilise the maximum possible forces to fight against the imperialist war.

Thus as Lenin put it regarding World War I: 'At the beginning of the war we Bolsheviks adhered to a single slogan — that of civil war [against the imperialist exploiters], and a ruthless one at that. We branded as a traitor everyone who did not support the idea of civil war. But when we came back to Russia in March 1917 we changed our position entirely. When we returned to Russia and spoke to the peasants and workers, we saw that they all stood for defence of the homeland, of course in quite a different sense from the Mensheviks, and we could not call these ordinary workers and peasants scoundrels and traitors. We described this as "honest defensism". I intend to

*'Another form of ultra-leftism is to refuse to fight alongside pacifists and other forces against imperialist war'*

write a big article about this and publish all the material... Our original stand at the beginning of the war was correct: it was important then to form a definite and resolute core. Our subsequent stand was correct too.'

The issue for the Bolsheviks was not, of course, changing the position on the war, Lenin was as opposed to World War I in October 1917 as in August 1914, but of mobilising the greatest number of forces to stop the war by breaking this struggle down into concrete tasks in which united practical action could be taken with those who did not share the Bolsheviks full analysis. As Trotsky wrote regarding the line of the Fourth International in the struggle against imperialist wars: 'It is necessary to interpret these fundamental ideas by breaking them up into more concrete and partial ones, dependent upon the course of events and the orientation of thought of the masses. In addition, it is necessary to differentiate strictly between the pacifism of the diplomat, professor, journalist, and the pacifism of the carpenter, agricultural worker, and charwoman. In one case, pacifism is a screen for imperialism; in the other, it is the confused expression of distrust in imperialism...

'Bourgeois pacifism and patriotism are shot through with deceit. In the pacifism and even patriotism of the oppressed, there are elements which reflect on the one hand a hatred of destructive war, and on the other a clinging to what they believe to be their own good — elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions.

'Using these considerations as its point of departure, the Fourth International supports every, even if insufficient demand, if it can draw the masses to a certain extent into active politics, awaken their criticism and strengthen their control over the machinations of the bourgeoisie.'

This also, in particular in imperialist countries, defines the attitude to pacifism. Pacifism is a hopeless (finally petty bourgeois) doctrine. But what role it plays in a particular conflict depends on which war is being opposed — ie the petty-bourgeoisie precisely vacillates between the fundamental classes. Someone who in China in the 1930s preached pacifism in regard to the war against Japan was an objective or subjective agent of Japanese imperialism. Someone who at the same time in Japan preached pacifism, and therefore opposed Japan's pursuit of the war, was playing a progressive role. As the theses of the

Communist International on 'The Struggle Against Imperialist War' put it: 'Imperialism is the capitalist reality, bourgeois pacifism the capitalist illusion. Pacifism is as incapable as bourgeois social reform of overcoming the contradictions, the evils, and the crimes of capitalism. But it will introduce dissension and uncertainty into the ranks of the bourgeoisie, the middle and petty bourgeoisie, and hence weaken the class enemy of the proletariat. Communists must take advantage of any such weakening by using the opportunity of every bourgeois pacifist initiative to lead the working class into struggle, in the course of which they will learn that militarism and imperialism cannot be abolished by the gradual triumph of reason and love of peace.'

The task is not merely to protest against imperialist wars, but to put every single practical obstacle in the path of the imperialists going to war against semi-colonial countries — that is to make it as hard as possible for them to launch war. This determines the attitude to various partial demands in the struggle against war.

Thus for example in the 1930s various sectors of American public opinion demanded that the power to declare war should be taken from the President and Congress and that war could only be declared after a referendum. Trotsky pointed out that this was an absurd illusion. The monopolies that dominated US society would never permit such a decisive matter as declaring war to be subject to democratic control. But nevertheless this proposal would obstruct, make it marginally harder, for the imperialists to go to war and therefore should be supported: 'our American section, for example, critically supports the proposal for establishing a referendum on the question of declaring war. No democratic reform, it is understood, can by itself prevent the rulers from provoking war when they wish it. It is necessary to give frank warnings on this.

'But notwithstanding the illusions of the masses in regard to the proposed referendum, their support of it reflects the distrust felt by the workers and farmers for bourgeois government and Congress. Without supporting and without sparing illusions, it is necessary to support with all possible strength the progressive distrust of the exploited towards the exploiters. The more widespread the movement for the referendum becomes, the sooner will be the bourgeois pacifists move away from it; the more completely will the

betrayers of the Comintern be compromised; the more acute will distrust of the imperialists become.'

This equally applies, of course, to other such demands. In the current situation in the Gulf the demand that no offensive military action be taken against Iraq without a resolution of the United Nations is utopianism — no such resolution will stop the US and British imperialists going to war. But this demand, raised by many on the left, makes it harder for the imperialists to go to war — incites public opinion against their war threats and reveals their aggressive intention.

The Marxist position in the struggle against imperialist wars is clear. In a war between a semi-colonial state and an imperialist one socialists unconditionally support the semi-colonial country regardless of its type of regime, the pretexts given for the struggle to break out, or the methods the two sides chose to employ — that is it does not take the position, adopted by, for example *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser*, in the war between Britain and Argentina over the Malvinas of refusing to support Argentina. It fights against the war by seeking to create the widest possible united action including all forces prepared to fight the imperialist war — whatever their confused, or pacifist, positions on other issues.

The issues which come up in the Gulf conflict, and those of the series of imperialist wars that are to come, have been fought over many times. It is fundamental that socialists understand them at the beginning of the era we are now entering.



## The gyrations of the Morning Star



Mikhail Gorbachev has allowed the United States to use UN resolutions as a cover for its biggest military operation since Vietnam and, by its political support to Washington, has disorganised international opposition to the US plan for war on Iraq. At the same time Cuba has been attacked in *Pravda* for campaigning against the intervention in the Gulf.

The *Morning Star* has placed itself firmly, alongside Gorbachev, within imperialism's united front against Saddam Hussein. It has given credence to the ludicrous claims that US is in the Gulf to uphold the rights of small nations against 'aggression'. As a result it has been caught in a tangle of contradictions, provoking a furious reaction from readers horrified at the cover given to a blatant act of imperialist intervention.

The *Morning Star* started on 3 August demanding Iraq withdrawal from Kuwait, supporting UN sanctions, but saying: 'Similarly it is not up to the US, veteran of equally unjustified military invasions of Grenada and Panama, or anyone else, to use military muscle to drive the Iraqis out.'

But by 11 August the *Star* no longer opposed British and US deployment of troops. Instead it called for them to be placed under the auspices of the UN: 'But this has not been done, and the longer it is delayed, the more the US forces appear to be part of a strictly US or pro-Western enterprise.' (!) The same editorial went on to argue:

'If the UN is kept out there is the risk of creating divisions

within the united front against Saddam Hussein (sic), achieved within the security council.'

It went on to demand not only Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait but also: '...the legitimate government restored... The implementation of these demands stands in its own right. It would be wrong to make it dependent on an overall solution to all the problems created by the decades of imperialist intervention in the Arab world.'

On 14 August the *Star* got down to pleading with the US to see reason: 'The present overwhelmingly US force, controlled by and responsible to the US president, cannot be above suspicion. It must arouse doubts, fears and open hostility among the Arab population which has suffered so much in the past from US and British imperialism.'

These positions provoked a storm of protest in the letters page with readers pointing out the utter hypocrisy of US imperialism's claim to be remotely interested in the rights of small nations, as shown in Panama, Grenada, Nicaragua, and innumerable other cases.

The *Star* responded on 21 August with an editorial specifically opposing the demand for the withdrawal of the British and US forces from the Gulf and explicitly justifying the biggest US military operation since Vietnam: 'The right of Saudi Arabia to ask for assistance from US to protect it from what appeared to be possible preparations for invasion cannot be challenged, and obviously any withdrawal before other mat-

ters giving rise to the invitation to the US would be seen by Saudi Arabia as premature.'

'But the US has a history which marks it out as responsible for the imperialist exploitation of the region along with Britain. For that reason the presence of such a large US-controlled force must give rise to suspicions that it has its own agenda going beyond the demands of the UN resolutions.

'The only way to resolve the dilemma and restore confidence is for agreement to be reached without delay to bring the US, British and other forces in the region under UN control. This must mean more than a UN umbrella giving legitimacy to whatever the US may decide to do. It must mean the establishment of a properly constituted UN force under UN control. This should be the key demand raised by the left in Britain...

'At this moment, it is important to put all efforts into this demand and not to be sidetracked by calls for the withdrawal of US forces which leave out of account Saddam Hussein's forces and their potential for further aggressive acts.' (our emphases).

The *Star*'s reasoning was simple. Gorbachev's shameful support for Washington had to be dressed up as a great achievement for world order, peace and human values. Thus on 27 August after the Soviet Union and China agreed to the UN support for military action to impose their blockade, the *Star* wrote: 'The degree of unity achieved there has been remarkable, and

reflects the dramatic improvement brought about in relations between the major powers over recent years, for which the Gorbachev leadership must be given its fair share of credit.

'This unity was seen in the initial UN security council resolution imposing sanctions. There were justified fears that precipitate action by the US and British navies in the Gulf might destroy this. For the time being at least that danger has been averted by the latest security council resolution, which authorises a blockade and in effect brings it back into the framework of the UN.'

In the same editorial the *Star* no longer rules out force altogether, simply saying: 'any use of force that does take place must be strictly limited to what is justified in order to implement UN sanctions.'

At the same time for the first time, with a committee to stop war in the Gulf getting off the ground in Britain, the *Star* felt constrained to call for a halt to the US military build-up.

However, at the Helsinki summit Gorbachev acquiesced to the US action taken so far and the joint statement said: '...if the current steps fail to end it [Iraq's occupation of Kuwait] we are prepared to consider additional ones consistent with the UN charter.' Meanwhile the US military build-up continued.

The *Morning Star* declared: 'The results of the Helsinki summit constitute an important success for all who want to see the Gulf crisis resolved by political rather than military means.'

Still the *Star* could not ignore the growing organised opposition to war in the Gulf and so it tried to square the circle: 'Public opinion must be mobilised to back the summit's commitments to peaceful solution. That is why this Saturday's demonstration in London is so important.'

The *Morning Star* is caught between Gorbachev's diplomatic support for Bush and the fact that this is giving the US cover for its preparations to slaughter tens of thousands of people in a war on Iraq. Its appalling refusal to oppose a US imperialist intervention is rightly leading to a revolt by its readers.

# Yeltsin declares war on the October revolution

Boris Yeltsin has now presented the first significant platform standing for the direct restoration of capitalism, overturning the 1917 revolution, to emerge within the Soviet Union since the civil war. Yeltsin, president of the Russian Federation together with Gavrii Popov, Mayor of Moscow, and Anatoly Sobchak, Mayor of Leningrad, left the Communist Party after its 28th congress in July, and now constitute an open pro-capitalist party in all but name.

This is what lies behind the differences on economic reform which have raged throughout the summer since Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov's proposals for big price increases, including tripling the price of bread, were shelved by the Supreme Soviet in June. GEOFFREY OWEN analyses developments.

Ryzhkov proposes a transition to what he calls a 'regulated market economy' which boils down to price increases on basic necessities, legalising the operations of small and medium capital and big concessions to foreign capital within the framework, at least for the present, of planning and state ownership of the major means of production.

Yeltsin's plan, which was drawn up by Stanislav Shatalin, a member of Mikhail Gorbachev's presidential council, is instead for an attempt to restore capitalism by the privatisation of 70 per cent of Soviet industry in 500 days. Yeltsin has exploited deep popular opposition to Ryzhkov's proposals to make the people pay for the impasse into which Stalinism has taken the Soviet economy through price increases. Instead Yeltsin proposes to freeze prices of basic necessities till the completion of the programme over 500 days — by which time 70 per cent of industry and 90 per cent of construction and retailing are planned to be in private hands. As the *Financial Times* noted Yeltsin now: 'seeks to re-instate private property as the very foundation of Soviet society. It calls for absolute freedom of economic activity for all Soviet citizens, and massive privatisation of state ownership throughout the economy... the authors say: "Property in the hands of each individual is a guarantee of the stability of society and one of the main factors for preventing social and national cataclysm. A person who has his own house and his own plot of land ... a person who owns shares and other financial instruments, objectively is interested in the stability of the society and in social and national harmony."

"The plan calls for what amounts to a Domesday Book type census and inventory of all state and public property prior to privatisation... the plan says: "Everybody should be free to choose for himself his own role: to be an entrepreneur, to work for the government or to work as a manager in a private company." (6 September)

This is accompanied by devolution of economic power to the republics breaking up the institutions of central planning.

Yeltsin has declared that if this plan is not adopted by the Soviet government it will be carried out unilaterally by the Russian Federation.

The character of the Russian republican government appointed by Yeltsin to implement this programme is also clear. His information minister, Mikhail Poltoranin, for example, told the *Financial Times* in July: "What

unites us the restoration of Russian morality, of the Russian spirit. The Russian character has been disappearing under the repeated blows of Bolshevism. Russians lived like pigs." He enthusiastically agreed that "the restoration of Russian morality" involved the revival of the Russian church. "Without belief," he said, "you are just an animal... Bolshevism has stubbed out the cigarette ends of its ideology in our soul."

Yeltsin's Minister of Finance, Boris Fyodorov, interviewed in the *Wall Street Journal* described 'the free market philosophy of Thatcherism' as 'a guiding force': "I want to create an infrastructure that will enable any three people to get together and start a corporation. The spirit of enterprise should be as free as possible... we can and will use lots of elements from the British economy." (31 July)

Yeltsin's draft constitution for the Russian Federation drops all references to socialism, including in the republic's name, and bans political activity by any party in factories, the army, the police and even the universities and other educational institutions. It outlaws parties that propagate not only racism or war but 'social hatred' and provides no clause for the national minorities which have their own autonomous entities within the republic to secede.

Indicating his attitude to the international development of class struggle, and imperialist attacks on countries such as Cuba, Yeltsin proposes a 75 per cent cut in foreign aid.

The emergence, in Yeltsin, of openly capitalist restorationist political forces is the logical outcome of the course pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev for the past five years. Yeltsin has taken sections of the bureaucracy, particular at city and republican level, with him. For example, the Institute of the Economics of the World Socialist System, has seceded from the Communist Party and is now functioning as 'an advisory body for Boris Yeltsin'.

The emergence of a force controlling decisive parts of the Soviet state with a direct programme of the restoration of capitalism is the logical outcome of the course pursued by Gorbachev in the last five years. The results have been catastrophic: bringing the Soviet Union to the brink of its greatest crisis since 1941. The imperialist unification of Germany, pro-capitalist governments in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia and unbridled imperialist aggression against the Third World with direct US intervention in Panama, Liberia and the

Gulf will simply tighten imperialist encirclement of the USSR. Every cent of imperialist aid is tied to Soviet political concessions, like German unification within NATO, which far outweigh any short term economic gain.

Internally the Soviet economy has increasingly succumbed to chaos — as elements of planning are dismantled and nothing put in its place. In the first five months of 1990 overall production fell 1.1 per cent compared to 1989 and a big increase in barter between enterprises has commenced as central planning was undermined. The most recent crisis is a bread shortage in Moscow.

In agriculture a massive crisis is brewing with collective farmers refusing to sell grain to the state even for foreign currency because there is nothing to buy with the proceeds.

Politically, in order to drive through his policies against the resistance of sections of the bureaucracy, Gorbachev has tried step by step to free the government and state from Communist Party control. Elections to the Congress of Peoples' Deputies and then local soviets decimated the conservatives. The executive presidency freed Gorbachev as head of state from Communist Party control. In July the majority of government ministers left the politburo and it was downgraded to a coordinating body of CP leaders in the 15 Soviet republics. Since the party congress in June Gorbachev has decreed that in future the political organisation in the army, police and KGB will promote state, that is his, not party, policy.

The only prototype for Gorbachev, and Ryzhkov's, own course in Soviet history was that of Bukharin in the 1920s — who also favoured releasing forces of petty capitalism and market relations, within the framework of socialism in one country, to attempt to develop Soviet society.

But Gorbachev's policy goes far beyond anything proposed by Bukharin. Furthermore it takes place under conditions where imperialism is far more coherently organised internationally than it was in the 1920s.

However, as Trotsky explained, even in the 1920s, a long lasting Bukharinite regime, the bureaucracy promoting capital, is objectively impossible — it would merely be a short prelude to capitalist restoration.

Yeltsin has therefore taken the next logical step down this path in breaking with the CPSU altogether and openly promoting the restoration of capitalism.

Gorbachev represents the right wing of the bureaucracy promoting its

*'Having routed the ultra-Stalinists Gorbachev proceeded to seek a bloc with Yeltsin'*

alliances with imperialism internationally and pro-capitalist forces within the USSR. Gorbachev has now allied himself to the forces openly promoting capitalism. In such a bloc Yeltsin is naturally the winner.

The decisive task Gorbachev has been assigned is to weaken the resistance of the bureaucracy to capitalist restoration and disorient the working class to prevent its intervention. Having routed the ultra-Stalinist 'conservative' wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy at the 28th party congress in July Gorbachev almost immediately proceeded to seek a bloc with Yeltsin on economic reform.

The conservative Stalinist wing of the bureaucracy finds itself paralysed in that situation as it has no coherent programme other than the status quo — which has become intolerable. As a result, even although the conservatives were a majority at the CPSU congress in July — which was punctuated by angry attacks on Gorbachev's policy in Eastern Europe — it was routed by Gorbachev. Its impotence and loss of all belief in itself was shown in the ignominious defeat, then pathetic retirement from politics, of its leader Yigor Ligachev following

the congress. Nonetheless the 'Stalinists' remain the most powerful force within the bureaucracy — which is why Gorbachev has to extend his alliances outside it and deal blows against it. Moreover, in the right circumstances the Stalinists are capable of trying to make a come back through a through a Tiananmen Square type crackdown or military coup to 'restore order'.

But for the moment the 'Stalinists' are paralysed and having defeated them at the 28th party congress Gorbachev moved even further to the right almost immediately seeking a bloc with Yeltsin on economic reform and meeting Helmut Kohl to agree to capitalist unification of Germany within NATO — an outcome with which Kohl, understandably, said he was 'absolutely delighted'.

But every 'success' Gorbachev notices up in strengthening the position of capital, weakening the working class, and undermining the bureaucracy confronted with the rising capitalist forces ultimately undermines his own position — because he remains part of the bureaucracy. The immense public relations exercise on behalf of the free market and capitalist private property in the Soviet press simply le-

## The left's illusions in Yeltsin

The eulogies by many on the left to Yeltsin over the past three years simply show the complete disorientation which results from judging political forces in the USSR simply by the yardstick of the vigour of their opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy and abstraction of simply 'democracy' without enquiring whether that is proletarian or bourgeois democracy — that is on what property forms, nationalised or bourgeois, that democracy rests.

Because, as Trotsky pointed out, against Stalinism stands not only the working class, objectively interested replacing Stalinism by socialist democracy, but also Capital, which aims to restore capitalism. Thus *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, headlined: 'Boris Yeltsin speaks — interview with Gorbachev's chief critic from the left'. Tariq Ali dedicated his book *Revolution from above* to Yeltsin.

Unfortunately, Ernest Mandel seemed to entertain similar illusions, writing of the election to the Congress

of Peoples' Deputies in *International Viewpoint* in April last year: 'And regardless of the fact that the positions of most of the oppositionists elected are still vague and not very political, three general progressive threads emerge from the programs of many of them, especially Yeltsin and Sakharov against privileges for the bureaucracy, for more equality (Sakharov calls for free food coupons for the poorest 40 per cent of the population); for opening up a debate on the multiplication of political platform — and the possibility of a multi-party system.' This is thoroughly false.

Trotsky always violently opposed a bloc between the left and the right oppositions to Stalinism under the banner of 'democracy' for the very reason that it duped the working class into an alliance against Stalinism with its more fundamental opponent — Capital:

The most heterogeneous elements sympathise with the struggle against Stalinist bureaucratism. The Mensheviks, too, are not averse

to applauding this or that attack by us against the bureaucracy... For a Marxist, democracy within a party or within a country is not an abstraction. Democracy is always conditioned by the struggle of living forces.'

He specifically ruled out a bloc with the Bukharinite Right Opposition, let alone those seeking the restoration of capitalism, against Stalin: Two irreconcilably opposed tendencies are usually listed under the label opposition: the revolutionary tendency and the opportunist tendency. A hostile attitude to centrism and the "regime" is the only thing they have in common. But this is a purely negative bond. Our struggle against centrism derives from the fact that centrism is semi-opportunist and cover up full-blown opportunism, despite temporary and sharp disagreements with the latter. For this reason there cannot even be talk of a bloc between the Left Opposition and the Right Opposition. This requires no commentary.'





gitimises its most consistent supporters, Yeltsin and friends, against Gorbachev. Carrying through a 'Bukharinite' policy to the end will simply destroy the basis of the bureaucracy and therefore also of its right wing — precisely the fate of Imre Poszgay in Hungary.

Gorbachev's further shift to the right, trying to reconcile the Ryzhkov and Yeltsin plans whilst making known his preference for the latter, simply enabled Yeltsin to take the political offensive — saying the plans were irreconcilable and demanding the sacking of Prime Minister Ryzhkov and the government. Anatoly Sobchak, Mayor of Leningrad, called for Ryzhkov to be replaced by someone who can command "the trust of foreign investors and governments whose help is needed to make perestroika succeed."

An opinion poll on 7 September found 60 per cent of people approving of Yeltsin's work compared to 28 per cent for Gorbachev.

The uncontrolled element in all this is twofold. Firstly imperialism has literally nothing to offer Russia. The Russian state is too vast for any practical amount of imperialist aid, even if it were on offer, to finance. Secondly is the position of the Soviet working class itself. All reports indicate virtually universal working class opposition to price increases and other results of the proposed market reforms. There are growing threats of new miners' strikes and strikes in the oil fields. These forces are expressed politically by what is at present by far the weakest current of all — the socialists, such as Boris Kagarlitsky's group.

Some sections of the bureaucracy are themselves coming under the direct pressure of the working class — above all the leadership of the official trade unions motivated by fear of loss of their positions. In June they demanded a referendum before any economic reform was enacted and full compensa-

tion of wages for price increases. This was originally accepted by the government but quietly dropped by the Supreme Soviet which understood that the result would be a massive rejection of the proposal. Discussions and worry have been expressed by the staff of the Soviet army as Gorbachev progressively destroys the military positions of the Soviet Union — the party congress was punctuated by interventions of military officers denouncing Gorbachev's policy in Eastern Europe as a disaster.

The problem for Gorbachev and Yeltsin is that the latter's programme — smashing the October revolution — would require a total historic defeat of the Soviet working class and its domination by foreign imperialism.

As Lenin pointed out the October revolution would not have occurred in the first place if Russia could have developed further on a capitalist basis. Or as Trotsky put it: 'A capitalist Russia could not occupy even the third rate position to which czarist Russia was predestined by the course of the world war. Russian capitalism today would be a dependent, semi-colonial capitalism without any prospects. Russia number 2 would occupy a position somewhere between Russia Number 1 and India. The Soviet system with its nationalised industry and monopoly of foreign trade, in spite of all its contradictions and difficulties, is a protective system for the economic and cultural independence of the country.'

Capitalism was overthrown in Russia and China precisely because it could not take the economies of those countries forward. It could not even maintain their unity — without the October revolution Russia would have been dismembered between the rival imperialist powers and China was a mere object over which imperialists fought and tore off their own pieces. The attempt to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union would result in an economic catastrophe making the present situation in East Germany or Poland appear as one of prosperity. It would mean not simply the dismemberment of the present Soviet Union but the reduction of large parts of it to semi-colonial status.

The problem for Yeltsin is that this is literally all his programme can offer the Russian working class. Landsbergis can offer to turn Lithuania, or other Baltic states, into capitalist enclaves subsidised by imperialism to threaten Russia. But no such proposal can be made to Russia — imperialism does not have remotely the resources. And as that reality works its way through gigantic class struggle is beginning in

Russia.

It is scarcely necessary to comment on the stakes of that struggle. The overturning of the Russian revolution would be the greatest defeat of the working class in human history. It would almost certainly be followed by a war with China to reimpose capitalism there and then a nuclear arms race between the victorious imperialist powers themselves. Under those circumstances not merely the prospects for socialism but that for the survival of human civilization would be somber in the extreme. For that very reason, the scale of what is at stake, this struggle is not going to be resolved quickly. But that is what is now at issue in Russia. Boris Yeltsin has now announced his determination to destroy the October revolution.



## Women pay the price in Eastern Europe

The last few months have demonstrated the inevitable cost to women of developments in Eastern Europe. Beginning devastatingly with massive unemployment among women as they are deliberately driven out of the workforce first, every single aspect of their social and political rights is under threat.

In East Germany three out of every four people becoming unemployed are women. Women have been targeted with the aim of saving on childcare and maternity pay.

In Poland women — 46 per cent of the workforce at the beginning of this year — are the majority of the new unemployed. Women have consistently predominated in the lowest skilled sectors, earning on average 65 per cent of average male wages. Eighty per cent of those dismissed, up to June 1990, were women. The rising cost of childcare is forcing women to give up work and more will lose jobs due to legal changes permitting employers to sack women during parental leave. The leadership of Solidarnosc has publicly promoted dismissing women first.

There is also fear that social benefits such as statutory three month paid maternity leave and three year parental leave, with an allowance of 40 per cent of former salary in first 18 months, will soon be lost in the process of attracting capitalist investment.

In East Germany unification means legally guaranteed social provision will be wiped out: the West has made clear it 'cannot support such extensive and expensive measures for mothers' as the right to 26 weeks paid maternity leave or the scale of childcare and creches in the East.

The prediction in the manifesto of the Independent Women's Movement (UVF), formed in December, is being proved true daily: 'From the point of view of women, reunification would mean three steps

backwards. In summary form these would mean: the return of women to the home. We would have to fight once more for the right to work, for a place for our children in a kindergarten, and for canteens. That would be the same as selling off hard won rights instead of going onto a new stage.'

Alongside this systematic attack on the social gains of women there is a clear process of the reintroduction of images of women as sex objects. In Poland, although still officially illegal, newsstands are full of pornography. In Hungary the first editions of *Playboy* sold out instantly. 'Beauty contests' are now held in every East European state and 'sex tourism', i.e. prostitution, is a growing industry. In the west Hungary is being promoted as the new sex zone of Europe.

The response in the Soviet Union to prostitution, made an administrative offence in mid-1987, is typical. In sharp contrast to the Bolsheviks' slogan 'struggle against prostitution not prostitutes' Gorbachev's policy has been to blame the supposed moral failings of women involved while intensifying the economic crisis which has stimulated its growth, in particular aimed at the tourist and foreign business market.

Elections ousting the ruling Communist Parties have seen a dramatic decline in women's representation. In Czechoslovakia women in parliament fell from 29.5 per cent to 6 per cent, in Hungary from 20 per cent to 7 per cent and to 20 per cent in East Germany.

But, it is abortion rights which have provoked the most bitter disputes and intensive mobilisations of women.

The last eighteen months have seen an unremitting attack on women's abortion rights in Poland. Abortion has been legalised in Poland, on specified grounds, since 1956 and has evolved to permit abortion essentially on demand. The rate

is high — on average 700,000 women per year out of a total 19 million — primarily due to inadequate, poor and unavailable contraception.

However legislation is pending in the Polish Senate which would ban abortion completely, with three year prison sentences for women and doctors breaking the law. This is a virtual repeat of a bill introduced in February 1989, to protect the 'unborn child'. While Solidarnosc did not take a public position, Walesa indicated support, saying that people would have to stop 'killing each other'. Under pressure he qualified this, saying abortion was a moral question better left to individual conscience. Due to the elections the bill fell before coming to a vote.

The outlook on the bill is worse than last year, since at the Second National Congress of Solidarnosc in April a resolution calling for protection for the 'unborn child' was passed. The seriousness of the anti-abortion campaign in particular stimulated organised protests, including the formation of the Polish Feminist Association in November 1989.

In January this year parliament eliminated the state subsidy to the Family Development Society, a private association offering the only 'family planning' service in the country. In April the Minister of Health issued regulations to require the approval of three doctors and a psychologist before an abortion can take place. This has not yet been voted through parliament, but it is already being implemented in certain areas.

The most substantial display of opposition by women has been seen in East Germany, where abortion has been attacked in the unification process. Abortion is available on demand in East Germany up to the twelfth week and on specified grounds thereafter. In sharp contrast, in the West abortion remains a crime under Para-



graph 218 of the Criminal Code, except if 'physical or social distress' can be shown and after a long process of vetting. Although the abortion rate is similar in East and West Germany, in the West this varies widely by region and is under constant attack by the right. In regions governed by the CDU/CSU there have been prosecutions aimed at intimidating women and doctors.

Consequently abortion law became the most contentious issue in drafting the unification treaty. On 16 June a demonstration of at least 10,000 women from East and West demanded the retention of liberal abortion laws in a united Germany.

Under intense pressure the SPD defended keeping the existing abortion law in the East and refused to support the unification treaty if West German women were barred from taking advantage of the law in the East. As a result, separate abortion laws will exist in East and West for the next two years, until a new single law is agreed, with no legal restrictions on women in the West taking advantage of the law in the East. This guarantees an intense struggle on abortion over the next two years.

The social gains of women in Eastern Europe, particularly abortion, cannot easily be wiped out, despite the determination of capital. Powerful alliances can be formed between women in East and West which have the potential of both defending women's rights and strengthening the position of the working class as a whole.

## Nicaragua: the FSLN resists from below

The ten-day general strike in early July paralysed Nicaragua, shook the UNO coalition, undermining its confidence and strengthened the FSLN and the mass movement.

The strike was launched by the Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (Sandinista Workers Confederation), the main trade union organisation, in alliance with non-Sandinista unions, in response to a government package of measures effectively rolling back key gains of the revolution.

Chamorro proposed to sack thousands of public employees, drastically increase prices of public utilities such as transport, telephones, etc, implement a comprehensive privatisation plan, cut back on health and education budgets, and erode significant gains of the peasants. This shock adjustment policy was put forward by Francisco Mayorga, president of the Central Bank.

Barricades were set up throughout Managua by workers and students, buildings were seized, as were radio stations and the state-run television station. Black-and-red Sandinista flags were seen on many government buildings.

Chamorro declared the strike illegal and called on the Sandinista army and police to restore order. This was set up as a test of FSLN intentions regarding the UNO government.

In fact both army and police skillfully avoided a direct confrontation with Chamorro. As the *Financial Times* on 11 July described it: 'Armed riot police have been escorting bulldozers to break down the barricades but no sooner do the bulldozers pass, than the barricades are re-erected'.

The extreme right-wing in UNO, led by vice-president Virgilio Godoy, began organising armed vigilante groups to break the strike. Most of the violence 'was attributed to these and other right-wing groups which suddenly sprang up in the capital, some armed with automatic rifles' (*FT*, 24 July). It is well known that many contras kept their

weapons despite demobilisation.

Godoy went further and declared the formation of a High Command of the Brigades of National Salvation, the aim of which is clearly to organise the contras inside Nicaragua itself. The violence of these thugs caused the death of at least a dozen people with hundreds more injured.

Despite the magnificent mass response to the CST-FNT strike call, the political context is still one dominated by the electoral defeat of the FSLN at the polls in February this year and the looming presence of the United States. The FSLN is clearly concerned not to force Chamorro's resignation in a situation where Godoy would assume the presidency.

However the mass movement is prepared to fight Chamorro to defend the gains of the revolution on the social and economic front.

The balance sheet of the ten-day general strike is positive. The UNO coalition is riven with contradictions, the differences between the Godoy and the Chamorro factions greater than since taking office. The FSLN has recovered the political initiative with a speed that has surprised many and is reasserting its political leadership over that section of the masses who voted UNO in February out of a desire for peace, while defending the revolution.

The Sandinista army and the police has survived its first major test without allowing the government an excuse to move against them. At the same time the mass movement has begun to regain its confidence.

The FSLN was clearly correct when, after the February elections, they declared the revolution was not dead. The mass organisations and the institutions of the Nicaraguan workers' state are exerting a real limit on government action. The government has been forced to backtrack on its frontal assault on the gains of the Nicaraguan people.

At the same time, the FSLN has begun an internal

discussion leading to a congress in February 1991. The FSLN leadership's view can be summarised as follows: gather social forces around the FSLN and its organisations to defend the gains of the revolution, creating the conditions for a return to power; that the revolution has suffered a significant, but by no means final, setback due to the pressure of imperialism. Mass mobilisation, alongside correcting errors in dialogue with the mass movement is the means to achieve this.

However the way ahead is not straightforward. The Sandinistas face an increasingly

aggressive US, aided by the abject capitulation of Gorbachev. Chamorro was testing the waters to see how far her government could go, and to avoid being outflanked by the Godoy faction. Godoy and his supporters will not abandon their objective of taking full control over the government. With Godoy's backing the contra vigilante groups have already begun a campaign of political assassinations.

However the strike showed the relation of forces in Nicaragua continues to be favourable to the FSLN and the mass movement.

JAVIER MENDEZ

## Brazil: elections for Sao Paulo governor

On 3 October Brazil will hold elections for both governors and MPs. It will be the first test of the political impact of Collor de Melo's horrific austerity package, introduced immediately after he assumed office.

However, all eyes will be concentrated on the state of Sao Paulo where there is a three-way contest: Mario Covas for the PSDB, a bourgeois populist formation, Paulo Maluf for the PDS, the party that supports the government, and Plinio de Arruda Sampaio for the PT.

The PT won the municipal elections in Sao Paulo not long ago in a display of electoral strength that shocked the bourgeoisie.

In the elections for the governorship Maluf of the PDS seems to be the most likely victor, with the polls so far giving him 42 per cent, with 18 per cent for the PSDB and only 4 per cent for the PT's candidate. Nevertheless, it looks unlikely that Maluf will obtain the absolute majority required to win, and therefore there would be a second round.

The PT's low percent-

age at the polls is a reflection of the fact that despite its recent electoral successes, the defeat of Lula in the presidential elections won by Collor de Melo, caused some demoralisation among the party membership. However it also reveals the party's lack of consolidation at both the organisational and political levels.

The election in Sao Paulo will be a big political test for the PT. The central political question it confronts is stopping Maluf, who is a very right wing element. Should there be a second round PT supporters will vote for Covas tactically against Maluf.

Covas represents a current within the PSDB which opposes Collor de Melo's policies but not consistently. This raises the possibility of some united front activity against Collor and against Maluf in Sao Paulo. It also explains Sampaio's electoral motto 'Sem mentir, sem vacilar' ('Without lying, without vacillating').

● This report was given to Socialist Action by a PT member currently in this country.

## The death agony of British Stalinism

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) is now writing the final chapter in its seventy year history. A Congress has been called for March 1991 with the recommendation from its executive to abandon any reference to 'Communist' in the party's title. Nina Temple, the CPGB's general secretary, expressed the hope that: 'The title of the new party is up for discussion. My personal preference is for the Radical Party — or something like that.'

MARK HOLLAND describes the latest stage in the death agony of British Stalinism.

Among those who cling to the organisation that has sustained their political activity for so long there is an undeniable sense of fatalism. The CPGB is now in its final phase of irreversible disintegration and liquidation. For those who champion the end of the party the debate has already been resolved. Tony McNally, the CPGB Midlands Organiser, writing in *News and Views*, states bluntly that 'the issue isn't one of proposing liquidation, this has already occurred...to the point where we have ceased to be in many respects a national political party'.

This crisis, while laid bare by the organisational collapse, is frankly conceived by most contributors to the debate as a thoroughly political crisis to which their *Manifesto for New Times* was the proposed response. The 'New Times' are seen as a distinctive phase of development, in which production, power and politics are becoming global, 'Fordist' methods of large-scale factory production are being dissolved, and therefore the ties of class which have bound individuals together are also dissolving. Class allegiances are being replaced by a shifting array of 'identities' to which socialists in the 'New Times' must respond.

Buried in some obscure jargon, and even more utopian dreaming, the manifesto formally secures some fun-

damental revisions in the party's programme. Any class analysis is abandoned in favour of surface sociology. Any fundamental distinction between capitalism and socialism is erased.

Finally the healing of the breach between social-democracy and communism is hailed as an historic opportunity. This means no more than the final collapse of the Communist Party back into social democratic politics and organisation.

This is hardly new. Since the first edition of the *British Road to Socialism* in 1951 the CPGB has been committed to reformism. Under the tutelage of Stalin it abandoned any notion of revolution and championed the peaceful transformation of parliament. Even before that it had for two and a half decades become an instrument not of revolutionary struggle but of the foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy.

The Eurocommunist episode in the 1970's deepened the CPGB's course further, by distancing the Communist Parties from the Soviet Union and Stalinism, and attempting to resolve the crisis of the Communist movement by deepening a social democratic course. It signally failed to resolve the decline in the Stalinist movement and led to a series of splits across the world.

The sharp right wing turn by Gorbachev, and the collapse of many ruling CP's has finally pushed the CPGB over the edge. Tony McNally expresses the extreme version of this collapse into social democracy. He writes that 'Eurocommunism...could not be other than a transition to the realisation that it had to face going beyond reform communism to face the end of separate communist parties — the end of state socialism and Marxism as an ideology.'

Three major currents of opinion have now emerged in the rapidly dying party. The most radical argues for the dissolving of the party into a



loose association, whose members would be free to join other political parties. A second current argues for the founding of a new radical democratic, eco-socialist party, and is projected to unite sections of the Labour left, socialist Greens, the Socialist Society and the Democrats. The third, with particular weight in the Scottish party, argues for the continuation of the CPGB in a 'modernised' form.

The party seems unlikely to arrive at a common solution. The positions advanced are mutually exclusive, and there is no attempt to hide the inevitability of a split. Tony McNally says that if the Congress were only to offer 'an extended lease of life to a revamped and redefined CP it would have no future'. Steve Munby, an advocate of a new party, declares that 'if the CP decided to continue a large section of its activists would leave'. Such statements are entirely representative of the mood among many activists who see the party as a 'nightmare'. 'All nightmares must end at some time. Now is the hour for radical democrats...to wake up, join together and leave this horror behind'.

Getting all Communist

Party members to abandon ship may not be easy for the *New Times* radical democrats. Among some long standing party members there is a deep feeling of betrayal. One argued 'Our members who died in Spain and elsewhere, because they were Communists, people who devoted their lives to the "cause of humanity" under the name of their Communist Parties, deserve that we not only honour their memory but under that same banner continue our struggle.'

There is no doubt that this is representative of a layer of activists. Their choices, however, are increasingly limited. Their historic reference point, the Soviet Communist Party, is incapable of providing leadership.

This current vigorously defended not only the continued existence of the 'socialist countries' in Eastern Europe, due to the real social gains they embodied and their role in defence against imperialism, but they also defended their bureaucracies and the bureaucratic politics of their governments. This defined their political framework. Developments in Eastern Europe have put an end to this. The bureaucracy has fi-

nally proved incapable of defending the workers' state in East Germany, indeed its activities were the cause of its demise at the hands of imperialism, and the similar bureaucracies in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia are collapsing.

The rival Communist Party of Britain (CPB), around the *Morning Star* has maintained loyalty to the line of Gorbachev. But the problem is that Gorbachev is going down the same path as the CPGB — the fact that he heads the strongest workers state in the world simply means that he meets infinitely more resistance. The CPB has therefore faced problems from those resisting this

course and, instead, supporting Cuba.

Indeed it is in relation to Cuba that the counterrevolutionary effects of Gorbachev's are creating particular internal problems for the CPB. Support for Gorbachev and attachment to the revolutionary goals of the Cuban revolution cannot be reconciled. Hence discontent with the line of the *Morning Star* — revealed also, for example, in a spate of letters denouncing its failure to oppose the US and British military build up in the Gulf.

This is a turning point for the left wing of the British labour movement. The Gorbachev effect has accelerated

the decline of the CPGB to such an extent that the disintegration of the party is the only possible outcome. Even if those committed to maintaining the CPGB manage to re-found a much weakened party a slow death is inevitable.

The political choice remains the same. Those who wish to keep their grip on the historic goal that has inspired them must find their way to struggle against imperialism and its allies — which includes the Stalinist and labour bureaucracies. As the consequences of Gorbachev's policy for the masses of Cuba, Nicaragua, South Africa and the Arab world become clear this choice becomes sharper

and sharper. For those seeking a way out of the collapse of the CPGB to see the solution in the CPB would merely be to repeat in ten years time all the same mistakes as the CPGB is making now.

The final disintegration of the CPGB should be the occasion for a fundamental rethinking by all those who joined it not because they wanted to support Stalinism or 'radical democracy' but to fight against capitalism. An enormous recomposition of the international working class movement is going to take place in the next decade. They have every opportunity to participate in it.

## Defend Scargill and Heathfield

No-one should misunderstand the decision of the Trade Union Certification Officer to bring charges against Scargill and Heathfield for 'failure to keep proper accounts' on behalf of the NUM. The aim is to secure a conviction which will lead to them being disbarred from holding trade union office. It is the latest step in a sustained witch-hunt with the aim of removing them from influence in the labour movement.

The campaign of the bourgeoisie, backed by the labour right has continued despite the total failure of the Lightman enquiry to substantiate any of the allegations against Scargill or Heathfield. Lightman totally vindicated them on all the disgusting slanders that they had personally used money of the NUM during the campaign against them continues.

The enquiry also failed to prove that money had been received from Libya, and reported that, in any case, if such funds had been received they had been spent on maintaining the fabric of the NUM during the strike. It also failed to substantiate the innuendo of fraud arising from the claim that #1 million had been donated from Soviet miners but had never reached the NUM —

indeed the enquiry showed that this amount of money was paid into the account of the Miners Trade Union International based in Warsaw. There is now a separate dispute over where this money should now go.

All these smears were paraded in the press — especially Robert Maxwell's *Mirror* — before and during the enquiry as solid facts.

Following the failure of Lightman to substantiate any of the allegations, a further attack on Scargill and Heathfield was introduced into its terms of reference — deliberately taking action to avoid sequestration and receivership. It was these actions that allowed the NUM to sustain the fabric of the union, repay loans from other unions and so on during and after the strike.

This allegation — defended completely correctly by Scargill and Heathfield as principled action to 'sustain our union through the most difficult period in its history' — has now led to the charges laid against Scargill and Heathfield.

Throughout this the Labour right has given credibility to the allegations and urged action. Des Dufield, South Wales NUM president, Kim Howells MP and Neil Kinnock have all vigorously attacked Scargill and Heathfield, immediately de-

manding an enquiry faced with the press allegations, calling — in Dufield's case — for resignations, and, in the case of Kinnock, turning the key address to this year's TUC into a prolonged and vicious attack on Scargill, mocking the 'strange set of principles' followed by the NUM leadership.

It is clear what lies behind these attacks. The leadership of the NUM during the 1984/85 strike and since has shown itself prepared to defend the membership and the interests of the working class by any means necessary, including all measures to evade rulings drafted to give legal sanction to the theft of trade union funds by the state.

The determined action of the NUM, and its willingness to unite and identify with the interests of all those facing exploitation and oppression, held the NUM membership together through twelve months of relentless assault by the ruling class, while inspiring and winning the solidarity of many thousands. This struggle and its politics shook the labour movement to its foundations.

For the ruling class the need to eliminate such a force is evident. But the explanation of why the leadership of the labour move-

ment is throwing itself behind this campaign is also clear. A Labour government on the economic course now promoted in the party will inevitably create enormous opposition from the trade union movement. Hence the insistence on the retention of legislation to shackle the trade unions, the attempt to remove the rights of unions to participate in the reselection of MPs, the attempt to render annual conference ineffective and to break the ties between the trade unions and the party.

To carry this through means eliminating the class struggle politics and alliances represented most clearly by the NUM leadership during its historic strike. Hence the determination to destroy Scargill and Heathfield by any means, however low, and dirty.

The Labour leadership's aim is to destroy the example of principled class struggle leadership, and its undoubted preparedness to give a lead in future action to defend the interests of the working class.

The pledge by Arthur Scargill at the miners' rally at this year's TUC to take action to defend the working class 'whatever government is in power' is one which is completely intolerable to the current leadership of the movement.

## The AIDS holocaust

'Everything about this epidemic has been predictable, utterly, utterly and completely predictable from the very beginning, from the first day', Dr Mathilde Krim (co-chair American Foundation for AIDS Research). **JIM WHANNEL** reviews a new book on the impact of AIDS on the gay community in the USA and responses to it.

*Reports from the Holocaust*  
By Larry Kramer,  
published Penguin 1990

The shocking truth, put so bluntly by Mathilde Krim, has spurred on countless thousands of AIDS activists throughout the last decade to not go quietly. Silence = Death.

Larry Kramer's book charts the activism around AIDS clearly, angrily and above all tragically. Some of the speeches in this collection cannot fail to leave you angered and saddened. This horrific wastage of life has touched such a huge range of issues that it seems overwhelming.

Social attitudes to gay men and lesbians, blacks, the poor and women have been displayed with all their vicious ugliness to the fore — 'faggots, niggers, junkies and prostitutes' have been 'guilty' victims of a ruthless virus and further stigmatised and dehumanised.

Kramer states that 'there is nothing in this whole AIDS mess that is not political', and readily and cogently lambasts the Right for conniving in the holocaust. The stench of

Pétain and Quisling exudes from the US establishment from Reagan, Mayor Koch (New York), Cardinal O'Connor, Jerry Falwell, and Phyllis Schlafly etc, etc.

This is a country amidst a huge health crisis which had a Secretary for Health (Margaret Meckler) who actually voiced to retain sodomy laws.

This is a country where new purpose-built hospitals lay empty as people could not afford to be treated in them whilst bedlam reigned elsewhere with young demented men lying in their own excrement.

This is a country where drugs were not released to the dying willing to take any chance (pharmaceutical companies have long been accused of playing the market, AZT has been quite a little money spinner).

This is a country where public assistance was not available to enable the dying to at least preserve some dignity. Here life long partners who happened to be of the same sex were turned out of hospitals, funerals and property by homophobic families supported by the state.

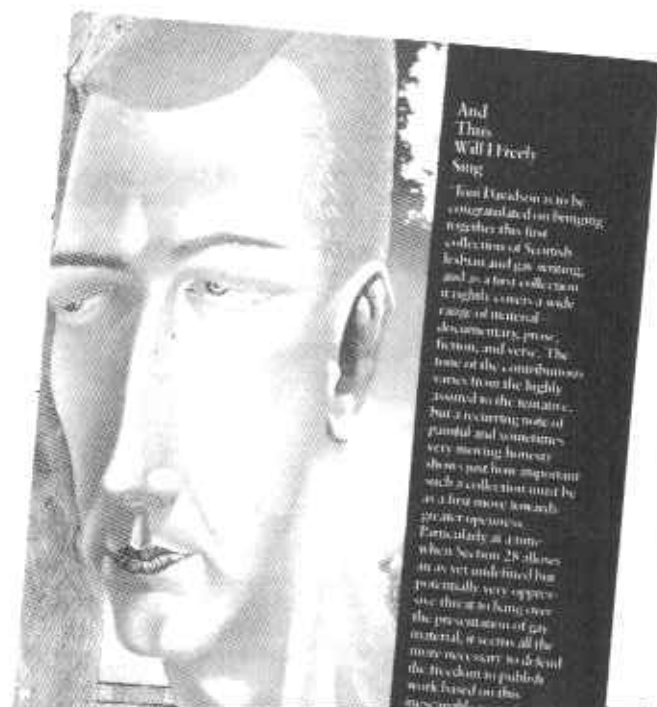
Kramer's rage blows hotter through the decade. As the crisis deepens

attention turns to wider debates ('whose constitution?' for example). Organising and activating the lesbian and gay communities is to the fore, advocating more confrontational tactics is the development. Thus Gay Men's Health Crisis in the early '80s seems eclipsed by ACT-UP at the end of the decade.

Despite the intricacies of Kramer's personality which occasionally distort his view the collection is absolutely essential if you wish to

understand the calamity that has befallen us — the gay community. The tragedy continues as the virus steadily spreads amongst heterosexuals.

In 1987 Kramer yelled at a gathering of lesbians and gay men celebrating lesbian and gay pride 'I can't believe you want to die ...' berating their lack of activism. Many of the men present then will now be dead. For them and the hundreds of thousands who have already died we should all start acting up.



*And Thus Will I Freely Sing*

Toni Davidson is to be congratulated for bringing together this first collection of Scottish lesbian and gay writing, and in a first collection it rightly covers a wide range of material: documentary, prose, fiction, and verse. The tone of the contributions varies from the highly ironic to the nostalgic... But a recurring note of painful and sometimes very moving honesty shows just how important such a collection must be as a first step towards greater openness. Particularly in a time when Section 28 allows us to see and feel how potentially very oppressive that is to be seen over the prosecution of gay material, it seems all the more necessary to demand the freedom to publish work based on this message.

*And Thus Will I Freely Sing — An Anthology of Gay and Lesbian Writing From Scotland*  
Edited by Toni Davidson. With an introduction by Edwin Morgan.  
Published by Polygon. Price £5.95.



This collection, including prose, poetry, personal recollections and political analysis, represents a much to be welcomed milestone in the articulation of the experience of lesbians and gay men in Scotland. Not least in ensuring the importance of this first collection of its kind is the contribution of poet Edwin Morgan, a pillar of the Scottish literary establishment who recently came out, at the age of 69. The title is taken from a work of the early twentieth century Scots-German poet John Henry MacKay 'Yet since you think it a dirty thing/Have dragged it through mud and infamy/And kept in the dark under lock and key/This love will I freely sing'.

## The return of Eva Luna

Fascinating, magical and delightful. In *Cuentos de Eva Luna* Isabel Allende has given us yet another product of her literary travails to enjoy, this time in the form of 23 short stories. JAVIER MENDEZ reviews this new book, that will delight all those who loved *House of the Spirits* and *Eva Luna*.

*Cuentos de Eva Luna*,  
By Isabel Allende,  
P&J, 1989, £9.70.

Each story has women as protagonists. Some of the characters have already figured in her previous novel *Eva Luna*.

By way of introduction there is a preface by the fictional Rolf Carle, the last lines of which gives us the taste of what is to come:

"Tell me a story" — I ask you. "Which one would you like?" — "Tell me a story you haven't told anybody."

The short story is one of the most difficult literary genres yet Allende's stories flow with breathtaking ease and sharpness.

Allende's style is grabbing, the plots are always startling, full of surprises and incredible turns.

Individual sentences evoke a whole world. Some of the lines are simply exquisite. '...we managed to get a glimpse of the Holy Father, magnificent inside a portable glass box, like a white porpoise inside a fish tank'. '...Hermelinda knew old love secrets and was capable of taking man to the threshold of his own death and bring him back turned into a sage'. 'Soon we learned that they were neither missionaries, soldiers or rubber tappers, they were crazy, they wanted to take the land and the timber away, they also looked for stones. We explained to them that the forest cannot be carried on one's back as a dead bird, but they would not listen

to reason.' '...we started the war with all its usual ceremonies. [But whites] are lousy warriors, they get easily scared and their bones are soft. They did not survive the blows we gave them in the head.' 'The absence of Amparo Medina overwhelmed him inside, as a malignant illness, he felt his blood turn into water, his memories fade away, his bones turn into cotton, filled his soul with doubts.' 'And there are secret stories which remain hidden among the shadows of our memory, they are like living beings, they grow roots, tentacles, get full of fungi and parasites which with time become the cause of nightmares.'

We are told of Belisario Crepusculario a woman wordseller. 'She charged the right prices. For five cents recited memorised verses, for seven improved the quality of dreams, for nine wrote love letters, for twelve invented insults for irreconcilable enemies.' Belisario is paid (one peso) by an illiterate Latin American military caudillo engaged in civil war to write a political manifesto; he wants to be loved by the people as a President — 'I need to speak as a candidate.' — and not feared as a man of arms. He succeeds in becoming popular by learning the manifesto by heart and delivering it as a speech at political rallies. His destiny is however to fall in love with Belisario.

Clarisa is a saintly woman married to a judge — who lives secluded in his room — who dies of astonishment when on occasion of the Pope's visit



he is welcomed by a demonstration of transvestites wearing heavy make-up dressed as nuns carrying banners in favour in abortion, divorce, homosexuality and the right of women to be ordained as priests.

Antonia Sierra and Concha Diaz, respectively wife and mistress of Tomas Sierra, a tight-fisted scoundrel, living under the same roof, evolve from a relation of antagonism and hatred to one of closeness and complicity joining forces to deprive Tomas Sierra of his buried treasury of gold coins as a result of which he dies. What causes the sorority between the two is the awareness they develop of Sierra's male chauvinist piggery following Concha Diaz's extremely painful pregnancy bearing his child. Sierra's death brings them happiness, freedom and prosperity.

Amadeo Peralta, offspring of a family of gangsters, becomes in old age a powerful patriarch, landowner and politician (a not unusual combination in Latin America). When he is about 80 it is discovered that he has kept Hortensia locked up in a cellar for 47 years. The journalists ask him why did he do it, he replies without understanding the fuss

about something that happened so long ago: 'Because I felt like doing it.' Amadeo is convicted to a long prison sentence. Every morning Hortensia walks to the prison with hot food for Amadeo. She explains to the prison guard: 'He never let me go hungry.'

Two exiles, a man and a woman try to make love unsuccessfully. The psychological scars left by torture whilst under interrogation by the security forces are too deep and too overwhelming. Under the pressure of torture he betrayed his comrades, including his partner.

Darkness brings horrible and painful memories to the surface. He breaks down and a cathartic conversation ensues. Her tenderness and understanding comfort him: 'Fear is stronger than desire, love, hatred, guilt, anger, stronger than loyalty.' Her wrists bear white scars left from when they tied her hands to the electric rack.

These are just some of the stories, which the reader will enjoy enormously. *Cuentos de Eva Luna* will be published in English in the near future. Those who enjoyed Isabel Allende's previous books will be waiting impatiently.

## Sexual violence, pornography and censorship

Over the last year the question of pornography has once again come to the fore in debate in the women's movement. ANNE KANE takes issue with theories that claim pornography is the cause of sexual violence and therefore should be banned. She argues both pornography and sexual violence are rooted in women's oppression in the family, and warns that bans and censorship nearly always rebound on those struggling to change the dominant sexual morality — in this case women and lesbians and gays.

'As recent feminism has become synonymous with the reclamation and establishment of a so-called female principle, it has come to reflect and reproduce dominant cultural assumptions about women'

Alice Echols, *The New Feminism of Yin and Yang*

Over the last year pornography has again become a central issue of debate and action for feminists. Debate ranges over the definition of pornography, its relationship to violence against women, and to women's oppression, whether there is a causal connection with a claimed increase in violent sexual crime, and in particular how, if at all, pornography should be further legally regulated.

While concrete measures, such as the precise proposal to ban 'page three' images can be progressive, in general calls for action have preceded political analysis. Consumer action oriented initiatives such as the 'Off the Shelf' campaign have very rapidly given way to discussion of comprehensive legal definitions of pornography, for use to vet and censor commercial material, but which potentially also hit wide ranging artistic and literary material. A weakness of analysis at the heart of the current anti-pornography campaigns is allowing a very disturbing political shift to take place. The feminist and progressive impulses behind these campaigns are in danger of being subordinated to proposals which would have profoundly reactionary results.

A more progressive debate on pornography requires addressing the analysis of women's oppression and the misreading of economic, social and political trends with regard to women which predominate in current feminist anti-pornography thought, which undermine both the struggle against degrading, dehumanising and offensive images of women and the struggle for women's liberation.

Pornography is not simply 'sexually explicit' material. Although it has a directly sexual function its crucial characteristic is as material which eroticizes domination. While pornography shares the cultural assumptions of all other dominant representations of women in our society — in literature, the media, advertising — where women are objectified, presented as sexually passive, and defined by their relation to men, pornography is directed at heterosexual male sexual arousal.

Pornography is an extreme reflection of a society where women are oppressed and where all social, personal and sexual relations are deeply marked by this. Pornography is a reflection of these real relations, in which sexual oppression and inequality are made to appear acceptable and, crucially, linked with sexual desire and arousal. It presents women, or bits of women, as commodities or objects for sexual consumption. Alison Assiter makes the point in her recent book: 'Even if

the desire [to treat people as objects] is never satisfied except in fantasy the man who constantly has such desires ... is gaining satisfaction from a person whom he has divested of personhood and turned into a slave.'

There is a view that, while this describes most pornography, pornography can also simply be erotic material depicting sexual fantasy and a progressive pornography or one compatible with feminism could be envisaged. But this simply empties the content from the concept of pornography. Sexually explicit erotic material which is non-discriminatory and non-oppressive is possible and valid — but this is not pornography in the sense used in this article.

By promoting desire for heterosexual relations which revolve around submission and domination pornography legitimises the oppression of women, reinforces sexist gender divisions, minimises and trivialises violence against women, and undermines women's struggle for equality. It is oppressive, but its power lies in the fact that women are *already* in an oppressed position in relation to men.

However this approach is not uncontentious. To the current which is setting the pace in feminist anti-pornography thought, epitomised by US feminist Andrea Dworkin, such views would be denounced for minimising the significance of pornography.

For Dworkin pornography is at the core of women's oppression. It is the purest example of violent male sexuality, which has been the constant and determining force in the history of society. The terror which men exercise runs 'the gamut from rape to battery to sexual abuse of children to war to murder to maiming to torture to enslaving to kidnapping to verbal assault to cultural assault to threats of death ... The symbols of terror are commonplace





and utterly familiar: the gun, the knife, the bomb, the fist and so on. Even more significant is the hidden symbol of power, the penis.' (*Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, The Women's Press, 1981).

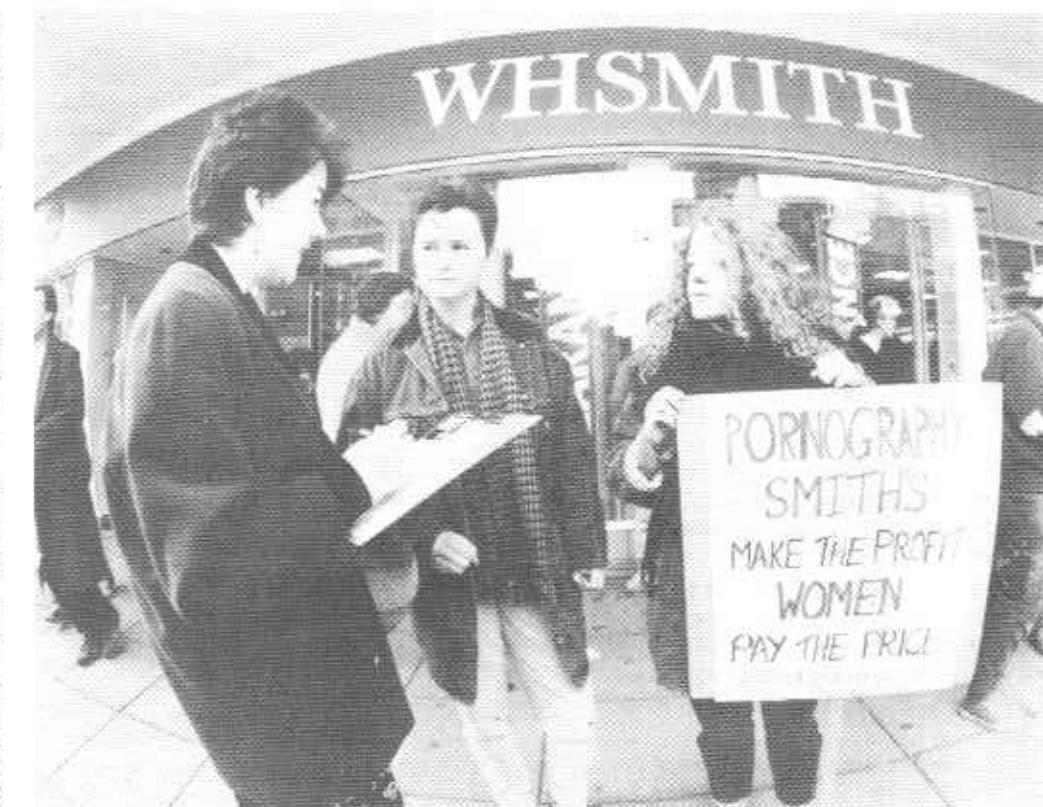
Pornography, in this view, is part of a continuum of male violence the roots of which lie in the male sexual drive and heterosexual sexual relations. Pornography is key to reproducing male violence and power and hence women's oppression, therefore it is seen as completely central to the feminist agenda: its eradication is the prerequisite for women's liberation.

Arising from Dworkin's view of the role of male sexual power in social development — though development is a misnomer since this analysis creates a monolithic, unchanging picture of society — the key political alliance must be forged by women against men. She states: 'The most cynical use of women has been on the Left — cynical because the word freedom is used to capture the loyalties of women who want, more than anything, to be free and who are then valued and used as left-wing whores...' For Dworkin such women have been simply colonised by men. Remove the conditioning, which pornography plays a key role in keeping in place, and an 'essential' real woman will emerge.

Following this logic the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and 70s was against women's interests due to encouraging promiscuity, lack of personal responsibility and greater sexual freedom for men to exploit women, thus standing the reality of the last two decades on its head.

Dworkin's ideas have had an instant attraction for many women and are very influential in the current anti-pornography movement. But the proposals which flow from this simplistic analysis — censorship, and sexual repressiveness — would not reduce violent sexual attacks or increase the status and power of women and are a dangerous diversion from tackling the real inequalities between women and men, in particular within the institution of the family, which allow violent sexual assault to take place and its importance to be minimised.

**I**mages do not produce reality, they are a product of it. Actual attacks on women are a product of the same inequality of power between men and women, institutionalised in the family, which lie at the root of pornography. Blaming pornography for violence against women simply shifts attention away from the institution and society which cause both.



Dworkin's view of an unchanging male sexual violence, exemplified and reproduced in pornography, ignores the history of rape and sexual assault as experienced by women and children and the historically changing codification and response to sexual violence.

Rape is not a result of an innate and uncontrollable sexual drive — this is what right wing apologists for male violence have been saying for years. Rape, as with the sexual abuse of children, is made possible both at the level of desire and the ability to act by the generalised social oppression and inequality of women which has material roots in the family in class society.

There has been an evolution in the ideology about rape, in the legal definition and in its punishment corresponding to fundamental changes in the structure of society, in the family system and in the social position of women.

When women were literally the chattels of men rape was viewed accordingly. Under Anglo-Saxon law, for instance, statutes on rape were concerned with the protection of male property, not the welfare of women. The notions of abduction and rape were used interchangeably reflecting concern with the theft of male property. Correspondingly 'consent' was not central — legal action could be taken under the Statute of 1285 (which dealt together with 'Punishment of Rape; of a married woman eloping with an adulterer; for carrying off a nun') even if a woman had will-

ingly eloped with a man not welcomed by her family for instance. These and other statutes on rape up to the end of the sixteenth century were concerned with the protection of the property of the wealthy, guaranteeing paternity and safeguarding inheritance.

Similarly Anna Clark's study of rape in late 18th century England showed 20 per cent of London rape cases which got as far as trials at the Old Bailey involved masters and women servants, as if rape was 'almost a ritual assertion of the master's authority'.

**R**ape laws changed in line with economic and social development, the outcome of a struggle between the changing social pressure of women and the concerns of the ruling class. While as far as can be ascertained women's experience of rape in the 18th and 19th centuries was similar, the legal response and social 'discourse' and morality of rape underwent sharp changes, and the pressure in the early 19th century from what Anna Clark has called bourgeois concern to impose 'the ideology of separate spheres'.

The pressure to impose this ideology of the separation of work and home on the working class — the latter being a safe haven for woman and her true place of duty and responsibility — came from the effect of rapid industrialisation in undermining the material basis and cohesion of the pre-existing family system in the new urban

*'Rape is not a result of an innate male sexual drive — this is what right-wing apologists for male violence have been saying for years'*

working class, a matter of extreme concern to the bourgeoisie.

The myth of rape as warning, as something which happened between strangers and which befell 'wanton' or somehow irresponsible women who strayed out of their correct place, at home with their family, became established at this time.

More recently, while rape and sexual assault continue to be realities on the most massive scale imaginable for women, the legal definition of rape, police and court attitudes, conviction rates, and the ideology of rape have undergone enormous, though obviously far from adequate, change in the last two decades. The most recent, significant development is the recommendation of the Law Commission in July that rape in marriage be made a criminal offence in England and Wales — and recent judgements along these lines in both Scotland and then England.

A recent Home Office study comparing sentencing policy on rape in 1973 and in 1985 showed a 30 per cent increase in the number of persons convicted of rape, in particular of rape by 'intimates' and where the offence took place in the home of the rapist or the victim, and an increasingly severe sentencing policy all reflecting in the view of the researchers 'a different attitude on the part of the victims, ... the police, or the courts'.

Although 'anti-pornography' feminists such as Andrea Dworkin claim an increase in sexual violent crimes, it is not clear whether there has been an increase in actual incidence in the recent past or simply a greater willingness of women to report in response to feminist arguments, campaigning and the possibility of more sympathetic legal treatment. Certainly while the number of reported rapes have increased in the last few years, so have reports of all violent crime. A 1985 survey by 'Women Against Rape' of women's experience of rape in London, demanded such measures as better transport, housing policies, legal reform to make rape in marriage a crime and improved compensation, but did not raise pornography as a significant factor.

Legal reform has not been straightforward or uncontradictory, and rape continues to be a general social threat for women. The point however is that there has been a process of change. The motor force for this has been the fundamental shift in women's economic and social position since the 1950s. The development whereby women are now approaching 50 per cent of the



workforce has wrought enormous changes in family structures, in women's legal rights and social status and in the political consciousness and participation of women.

While the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s was just a reflection of a crisis of social cohesion, the explicit rejection of sex as only moral and legitimate within marriage, and greater openness about sex did have an enduring progressive consequence for women.

Similarly Elizabeth Wilson is correct to say that the prevalence of pornography today can be read not as an intensification of male power over women but as 'the disintegration of male sexuality under the pressures of a commoditising, fetishising culture'.

These social changes have opened the privatised and oppressive sexual relations between men and women within the family up to scrutiny, for example allowing a challenge to the idea of a husband's 'right' to sexual relations with his wife. Women Against Rape's 1985 survey demonstrated what feminists have consistently believed: for women in the survey who were or had been married, rape by their husbands was more common than any other kind of rape (one in seven women, or sixty women, had experienced rape by their husbands). Taking into account common law marriages, 110 of the 214 women who had been raped by any man had been raped by their husbands.

The focus on the massive scale of child sexual abuse in the family, and increased awareness and condemnation of domestic violence, reflect the

same process. This is why there is now a serious campaign by the bourgeoisie to shift the focus of attention away from the family.

In recent weeks newspapers, television programmes and political commentators have discovered the 'paedophile', a scientifically classifiable type of man whose 'perverted' obsessions are fed by child pornography and snuff movies. Responsibility for child sexual abuse is being shifted onto this 'paedophile', who newspapers tell us 'may assault 100 victims' (Guardian 9.8.90). This shifts the focus away from those responsible for the vast bulk of abuse — figures of authority known to children. Moreover, such material is making an increasingly explicit link between this 'paedophile' and the male homosexual.

With the trend for a further entry of women into paid employment in the coming years, and therefore for a further undermining of 'traditional' family patterns, the repressive reality of the family will tend to come more and more to the fore. While recognising that some improvements in the legal response to sexual violence is inevitable, the bourgeoisie is seeking to cover up the reality of family violence. Campaigns which abstract pornography from its social roots and make it the cause of violence assist this shift.

Increasingly the anti-pornography campaigns in this country are promoting demands which are directly modelled on those put forward in the US by Andrea Dworkin and others over the

*'Social changes have opened up for scrutiny the private and oppressive sexual relations between men and women'*

last ten years, in particular for a comprehensive legal definition and new legislation to ban or censor material so defined.

A definition of pornography, which was adopted by this year's Labour Women's Conference and has found support in some trade unions, is being popularised by the Campaign Against Pornography:

'Pornography is the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words, that also includes women de-humanised as sexual objects, things or commodities, enjoying pain or humiliation, or rape, or being tied up, cut up, or mutilated, bruised or physically hurt, in postures of sexual submission or servility or display, reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenes of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised or hurt in the context that makes these conditions sexual. In addition, Conference recognises that men, children and transsexuals are also exploited in pornography.'

This definition was used by Andrea Dworkin and others in Minneapolis City Council in the US in 1983 during public hearings to consider passing a civil rights ordinance on pornography.

The wording of this amendment and the proposal for new censorship laws based on it raise serious problems. The inclusion of 'men' highlights the underlying confusion over what pornography is. Pornography is powerful and has an oppressive effect because of the actual oppression of women in society. The depiction of men in pornography relates to an entirely different reality, therefore it cannot be simply said that men are 'exploited' by pornography.

Pornography where men are the central objects is produced exclusively for a gay male market. To ban such images, particularly given the overall suppression of material of any sort depicting homosexuality, would simply be an anti-gay measure. It would be supported by the fundamentalist right for exactly this reason.

This is ignored by anti-pornography campaigners. Clare Short sees no distinction, these are simply 'ways of portraying sexuality in a degrading way that could be gay or heterosexual'. While stating this does not mean we should 'instantly' legislate she makes it clear that degrading images of men in pornography is just part of 'a continuum that goes into the violent'. (*Marxism Today*, July 1990)

Secondly there is an evident ques-

tion of the effect of censorship powers based on such a vague definition. It may seem that this is a comprehensive and exact definition of pornography — pornography is certainly covered by this definition, but the actual use of such a definition might include much other material which is not pornography as defined here.

For those seeking such legal rulings this is not a problem. *Everywoman* magazine's introduction to the published transcripts of the Minneapolis hearings, states that this definition 'would not in any way' have affected sexually explicit or erotic material. But this assertion is not substantiated.

Law is not abstract. Anything open to interpretation, and on such a wide definition it is bound to be, will be interpreted according to the dominant interests in society. Inevitably such a strengthening of censorship powers would be directed against that which is anti-sexist, challenging or subversive. Particularly open to attack would be feminist and lesbian and gay material, unless as Alison Assiter has said 'the lawyers, judges and juries who are responsible for implementing the law are educated not to discriminate against minority and oppressed groups'.

Leaving aside utopian hopes of re-educating the ruling class, the fight for women's and lesbian and gay liberation will not be helped by constructing laws which give greater powers of control to those who wish to silence us. Just as pornography flourishes in a society which represses sexuality, so material which is genuinely open about sexuality, unlike pornography, would be the target of such laws.

This is why MPs like the anti-woman, anti-gay Tory Jill Knight have thrown themselves behind proposals for such a bill.

Current developments in the United States show the ease with which the fundamentalist right can manipulate and control censorship. There, with growing success, fundamentalist right wingers like Senator Jesse Helms have been leading a campaign on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the main source of public funding for artists in the USA. The campaign is aimed at ending the funding by the NEA of artists whose work is controversial and often sexually explicit. The funding by the NEA of the work of the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, who died of AIDS last year, which often deals with homosexuality has particularly incensed Helms and the moral majority. In October 1989 Congress adopted legislation preventing the NEA from funding material including 'depictions of sadomasoch-

ism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals involved in sex acts, and which, when taken as a whole, do not have serious literary, artistic, political or scientific merit'.

The current campaigns against pornography have tapped into a huge pool of anger and opposition to degrading imagery amongst women. This progressive impulse must not be allowed to be pulled behind ill-thought out legislation which will just help push all debate about sexuality further underground.

Given the ongoing vigorous anti-gay campaign already being pursued in this country, with raids on lesbian and gay bookshops, Section 28, and over access to donor insemination, and with the backdrop of AIDS hysteria, there is every reason for concern about the effects of reinforced censorship powers as far as lesbians and gays men are concerned.

Certain concrete measures, not open to misinterpretation, are possible. Banning the use of sexual and sexist images of women in advertising is a case in point. A bill to prohibit 'page three' pictures is another. It is precise, not open to misuse and its positive effects in boosting women's confidence and challenging sexism would outweigh any potential to significantly boost repressive pro-censorship sentiment. Consumer action campaigns such as 'Off the Shelf', pickets of sexually violent films and 'Reclaim the Night' marches are all positive ways to create a pro-feminist climate of protest against degrading images and male violence.

Such alternatives can seem frustratingly limited compared to a bill which its supporters say would outlaw porn. But just as the history of rape law shows that extremely harsh penalties can co-exist with insultingly low conviction rates, a widespread and ignored incidence and a low social status of women, so the answer to pornography is not in the calls for censorship legislation now surfacing.

Contrary to Andrea Dworkin, and the easy alliance which the proponents of a new 'anti-pornography' bill have found with the likes of Jill Knight, the fight against oppressive images of women is very much a matter of 'left' versus 'right'. Male violence and dehumanising imagery of women are made possible by the institutionalised oppression of women in class society. Only a strategy which links opposition to pornography and sexual violence with the struggle to end that society can have any hope of success.

*'Pornography flourishes in a society which represses sexuality and oppresses women'*

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