



SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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Inside

Thatcher's stormy state

Fighting the poll tax

NHS pay battle

Whose blood vote?

Mexico in turmoil

L A T I N A M E R I C A S U P P L E M E N T



PHOTO: Julio Etchard/Reflex

Mexican troops uphold a usurping president

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LETTERS

Poland: Spot the counter-revolutionary

IT WAS NOT a pretty sight: thousands of militant Polish workers giving enthusiastic applause to Margaret Thatcher in Gdansk. How could they be so wrong?

Of course, the television coverage was selective. It did not highlight the leaflets distributed by left wing Solidarnosc activists opposing the Thatcher visit and Lech Walesa for inviting her. It did not headline the Solidarnosc steering committee statement denouncing the sacking of GCHQ trade unionists. And it downplayed the extent to which Polish militants were simply using the Thatcher visit as a pretext for their own mobilisation, especially since the Lenin shipyard faces closure. But the applause was definitely there, and represents a real problem.

We must remember that Solidarnosc exists – despite brutal repression – because in Poland the official trade unions are simply organs of management and state control over the workers. More than forty years of a stalinist police state pumping out ‘communist’ propaganda and obligatory bureaucratic ‘marxism’, together with vicious repression of independent political currents, have totally disorientated many sections of Polish workers.

Their experience of life in the ‘socialist camp’ – of queues, shortages and bureaucratic privilege and corruption upheld by tanks and baton charges – is not one which engenders tender affection. Polish workers’ well-founded mistrust of all official pronouncements and their lack of independent information leaves them vulnerable to the politics of the crude populist right like Thatcher. The confusion is compounded by the role of the catholic church, which has been carefully nurtured by the Polish bureaucracy as a useful diversion from class struggle.

There is no basis for the British left to look scornfully on the Polish events. The soft line on stalinism which led to the timid refusal of many would-be socialists to support the Solidarnosc struggles in 1980-81, or mobilise to oppose General Jaruzelski’s military crackdown, created the bizarre and baffling spectacle of Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill opposing strikers while Thatcher and Reagan shouted hypocritical support: how should we expect Polish workers to understand that?

If any of these same timid socialists now claim they were right all along, and that the welcome for Thatcher is ‘proof’ that Solidarnosc is nothing but a counter-revolutionary church conspiracy, they should ask themselves the difficult question: why did Jaruzelski invite her to Poland in the first place? Why is it Jaruzelski who most vocally praises Thatcher’s ‘free market’ approach, and his industry minister who praises her hard line against the miners’ strike?

The fact is that despite its nationalised economy, far from having developed as a ‘socialist’ state, Poland is reaping the bitter harvest of decades of bureaucratic misrule. The Warsaw bureaucracy, like those in most of eastern Europe, is composed of ‘communists’ who have never led or supported a revolution, ruling countries where the working class has never (as it did in the 1917 Russian Revolution) held power in its own hands.

The expropriation of the old east European capitalists in the years after 1944 was carried out from above by a powerful, bureaucratised state machine, under the watchful eyes and guns of Stalin’s Red Army. Though the direct subordination to the Kremlin has gradually been relaxed, and certain rivalries and differentiations have occurred, the political base of the bureaucracy in each country remains the suppression of any independent movement of the working class; this means steadfast opposition to any genuine workers’ control.

Instead, the bureaucracy itself has been managing the creaking

and increasingly inefficient economies, following the traditional stalinist conception of seeking to build ‘socialism’ in a single country. The result has been not a defence but an undermining of the pretence of a planned economy; the east European countries have plunged ever deeper into debt with imperialist bankers, offering ever-greater concessions to encourage major capitalist firms to set up new businesses there – with profits guaranteed by the ‘workers’ state’. Though the bureaucrats understand that their power and privilege rest on their control of a nationalised economy, and would be eliminated were capitalism to be restored, they are incapable of running the system efficiently or democratically.

At the same time the predominant foreign policy of the Kremlin and major communist parties, seeking a ‘peaceful coexistence’ with capitalism – and therefore opposing or restricting revolutionary struggles – has helped keep the stalinist states isolated, compounding the crisis.

While the working class has been held back, capitalist inroads and ‘market’ mechanisms are being encouraged, creating precisely the kind of confusion that led to Thatcher’s reception in Gdansk, and stoking up new crises for the future.

A ‘socialist’ system that creates the illusion that individual and political rights and freedoms, economic dynamism and enhanced living standards are to be found only by the import of capitalist ideas and methods does nothing but miseducate a whole generation of workers.

Even now, behind Gorbachev’s courtship of West German chancellor Kohl, of Thatcher, Reagan and Bush is the craving for western technology to boost the flagging soviet economy; that’s why Gorbachev is also removing the top limit on the size of capitalist investments in the USSR. Though few east European bureaucracies have felt sufficiently confident to offer anything like the liberalisation of Gorbachev’s *glasnost*, similar economic moves are taking place elsewhere in eastern Europe. Even in China, new figures show the much larger than expected growth of private enterprise as a major element in the economy. Neil Kinnock and the TUC leaders are not the only ones to have effectively given up on socialism and embraced the ‘market’ instead!

So the answer to the Polish riddle is much less complicated than it may first appear: Polish workers hate the Polish state because it is not a genuine workers’ state which they control, but something qualitatively different; a grotesque, bureaucratised deformation – a parody – of a workers’ state. Many of them see Thatcher as a figure of freedom primarily because they see Jaruzelski as an oppressor.

The chief counter-revolutionary force in Poland today is not the working class – which has shown its strength in struggle after struggle, and must be the driving force for any socialist perspective – but the state bureaucracy, which keeps the working class in chains and cruelly miseducates it.

The solution – in Poland and other stalinist-ruled states – must be a class struggle solution, building on the workers’ instinctive and healthy opposition to bureaucratic power and privilege. This means developing a new leadership in the Solidarnosc current based on a clear, internationalist and proletarian programme for the revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracies and the establishment of genuine working class power as a foundation for workers’ management of the economy and solidarity with revolutionary struggles. Interestingly, it is on the kind of forces ignored by the western press – the left of Solidarnosc, including the Polish Socialist Party, that such a new leadership can begin to be built.

Last chance for Viraj Mendis

VIRAJ MENDIS has become a symbol in the fight against the immigration laws. That is why the Home Office wants to deport him. For the last two years Viraj has been in sanctuary in the Church of Ascension in Hulme, Manchester to avoid being deported to Sri Lanka. The Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign has become the best known anti-deportation campaign in the country. But the Home Office (backed by sections of the press) are determined to go ahead with the deportation despite widespread fears for his safety in Sri Lanka.

All legal procedures to keep Viraj Mendis in the country have now been exhausted. The Home Office has made it clear that as soon as the House of Lords turns down a petition for an appeal the police will be ordered to arrest and deport him. This could happen any day now. All efforts should therefore be made to build up the maximum pressure through letters to the press and petitions and delegations to the Home Office.

If the Home Office succeed in deporting Viraj Mendis it will be a setback for all other anti-deportation campaigns. It will make sanctuary more difficult as a last resort to avoid deportation. With the new immigration law, so-called 'overstayers' will no longer be able to appeal on compassionate grounds for the right to

stay in the country. It will be a criminal offence to be an 'overstayer'. Such people will have no alternative but to seek sanctuary.

With the deportation of around 50 people every week from Britain trade unions are increasingly being forced to take up the issue. The National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) has organised successful campaigns to protect its members from deportation. The Manchester branch of NALGO (with 9,000 members) have decided to organise a national labour movement conference on immigration and nationality in early 1989. Such a conference can become an important step forward in involving the the whole labour movement in the defence of Black people against racist and sexist immigration and nationality laws.

The campaign for Viraj Mendis' right to stay is the number one priority at the moment. But a labour movement conference on immigration and nationality can become a step forward for all anti-deportation campaigns.

Finn Jensen

Contact: Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign, North Hulme Centre, Jackson Crescent, Hulme, Manchester M15 5AL. ☎061-234 3168. Rena Wood, NALGO Manchester Branch Office, 1st floor, Elliot House, 3 Jacksons Row, Manchester M2 5NJ. ☎061-834 6564

Political Asylum



PHOTO: John Harris/JFL

Women's support groups: key to P&O battle

Linking up the struggles

THE CONTINUING P&O seafarers' strike was the topic of the major speaker at the second Solidarity Network conference in Leeds last month. Becky Sawbridge from Dover gave the 120-strong conference a moving account of the dispute and the need for continuing support.

As with the miners and others, some of the striking seafarers have lost their homes because they have refused to give up or be bought off. The media and the official trade union leaderships are silent about the P&O strike, hoping we will just forget that it is still going on.

Other key contributions to the conference came from postal workers, striking nurses, and a Bradford councillor. The common theme throughout the day was the lack of any will by the trade union and Labour party leaderships for a fight.

In Bradford, where working class people face massive cuts, increased school meal charges, and loss of basic services - and council workers face the sack - the District Labour Party strategy is to call a 'mock election' - in the ward they lost in the *real* election!

Afternoon workshops, on the NHS, local government, GCHQ, women's struggles and building support groups, took forward the themes from the morning and produced positive suggestions for building support for struggles locally and keeping the national link-up growing.

The Solidarity Network itself was launched in autumn 1987 following a request from the Silentnight strikers who were sold out by the leadership of the Furniture Trades Union (FTAT), and left isolated in their fight for union conditions and rates of pay. They had already made their own links with miners, printworkers, the Hangers strikers, Women Against Pit Closures and many other disputes.

The feeling after the wave of disputes in 1986-7 was that a network should be kept going to help organise support for future strikes.

The Solidarity Network does not intend to substitute itself for mass action or to become an alternative to fighting the frustrating trade union bureaucracy. It is a support structure for workers and for communities in struggle, helping them link up, spreading information, and giving advice on

things strikers have learned during their disputes – such as information on benefits, the law, and organising demonstrations, rallies and lobbies.

The Network is also attempting to link up with the Labour left, who often regard trade union struggles as secondary to the crisis within the Labour party. It has jointly organised rallies and meetings with the Chesterfield movement.

The Network is not a talking shop: it consists of activists who have been strikers themselves or involved in support groups or community organisations (such as tenants' groups or nursery campaigns). It produces a regular bulletin giving information about current struggles, and is an open, democratic and accountable organisation that does not push any one organisation's political line.

A new steering committee was elected at the conference, and will meet regularly (all meetings are open); an editorial group was also elected to supervise the production of the bulletin.

The next year will provide us with plenty of opportunities for action. Local authorities – whether Tory or Labour – are now making cuts that hit the poorest and most vulnerable, and there is a need to link campaigns in areas like Bradford, Brent and Hackney, where people are organising to fight for jobs and services.

The Tories are planning even more anti-union measures, while privatisation of local government departments will decimate jobs and services. Bosses are cutting their workforce, speeding up production lines and closing factories (Austin Rover, British Aerospace).

There are battles in the NHS; battles by council tenants against compulsory transfer to private landlords, and the perennial fight of workers against victimisations of militants. Women face even more pressure to choose between low paid, low status part time jobs or staying at home on poverty level benefits caring for children or handicapped, sick or elderly relatives.

The Solidarity Network cannot promise to win on all of these issues: but it can begin to support those who are fighting, and make the links between the campaigns.

For affiliation, copies of the bulletin or more details of local contacts, write to the Secretary, Andrea Campbell, 6, Chertsey House, Arnold Circus, London E2.

Andrea Campbell

GCHQ – TUC bottles out

RECENT developments around the fight to defend the jobs of trade union members at GCHQ contrast the timidity of the TUC leadership and the willingness of union members to take action.

Thousands of trade union members took strike action on November 7th, by no means all of them civil servants, and demonstrations and rallies took place in many major towns, often organised independently of the TUC.

For its part, the TUC called on union members to do no more on 'GCHQ Day' than turn up in their breaks to the rallies. Many TUC unions circulated nothing more than this appeal, though the civil service unions balloted their members and NALGO local government conference voted for a one-day strike.

Ever since the ban on union membership was announced in January 1984 (to be enforced from March) the TUC and civil service union leaderships have avoided the scale of fight needed to force the government to back down, despite fine speeches about democratic rights. They have preferred to become enmeshed in

appeals to British and European courts and the International Labour Organisation.

In choosing to make their main focus countering the government's arguments in courtrooms rather than mobilising for action, the TUC and CCSU (Council of Civil Service Unions) have conceded large parts of the Tories' argument.

They have quoted Tory statements on how industrial action by civil servants never disrupted operations at GCHQ as 'proof' of how unnecessary the ban is and have argued that there is no contradiction between TU membership and 'defence of the national interest', that trade unionists are as patriotic as the ruling class (or more so).

Despite winning the support of all opposition parties to a commitment to restore trade union rights at GCHQ, all of this has (predictably) not prevented the government moving ahead with its policy, sacking union members, or union membership dwindling to a small hard core.

If union membership means anything, then ultimately it means taking industrial action, and if such action is to achieve anything it has

to be effective and hit the employers. The right to union membership without the right to take effective action is only half a right.

Similarly, acceptance of a common national interest concedes the argument to the Tories. If there is such a common interest then it makes sense for the 'elected government of the day' to decide what it is at any one time. Of course, challenging the idea of such a common interest also means questioning the need for spy-centres like GCHQ Cheltenham and arguing for alternative employment.

TUC and CCSU pussyfooting has considerably weakened the fight to defend trade union rights, but it doesn't mean the fight is lost. The response to even the limited call on November 7th shows the possibilities. Union activists have to step up support for the further actions called by the CCSU and TUC, but also demand they go beyond their present policy to calling all-out action, the only way to stop the Tories taking away more and more of our democratic rights.

Pete Firmin

Strange line-up in Austin Rover pay sell-out

AUSTIN Rover's 23,000 hourly paid workers have voted by a two to one majority to accept a two-year deal recently offered by management and promoted by a curious alliance of the Communist Party and the hard-line right wing.

The negotiations and the agreement at the end of them were extraordinary. The JNC were taken to a plush residential conference centre for three days. Management put £500 behind the bar for their drinks in the evening.

At the end of the negotiations, acceptance of the offer was proposed by the Electricians' (EETPU) representative, and supported by Jack Adams, the TGWU national officer, a member of the Communist Party. He was backed on this by the

Longbridge delegation, who are strongly influenced by Adams.

More surprising still was the spectacle of the deal being opposed by the regular right wing, including every representative from Cowley, among them Ivor Braggins, convenor of the Cowley assembly plant, who is a right wing opponent of General Secretary Ron Todd on the TGWU executive.

In selling the deal to the membership, both the management and those (including the *Morning Star*) who supported it exaggerated the size of the offer by including the shift allowances in their figures.

The settlement represents a four percent increase on basic rates plus sizable increases in shift allowances. In cash terms it is worth £7.50 for the first year

and £8.50 the next: it falls far short of the unions' claim, submitted three months ago, for an eight percent (£15) per week increase in a one-year deal.

The wording on the ballot paper held out no possibility of further negotiations if the offer were rejected, saying that: 'The only alternative is to take industrial action, and therefore if the deal is not accepted there will be an immediate ballot for strike action'.

However wages were not the only thing at stake in this pay review. Austin Rover stands on the brink of massive redundancies and the threat of closure of its Cowley body and assembly complex. A successful campaign on the wage review could have radicalised the membership for action to defend jobs as well.

Alan Thornett

PHOTO: Piers Cavendish/Reflex



Gillespie looks smug – before the Govan result

Govan by-election: a warning to Kinnock

AS THE Labour party in Scotland begins to take stock of the party's by-election defeat in Govan, all the signs are that the result has only served to deepen the divisions over party strategy which have been developed since last year's general election.

Jim Sillar's victory, which the Scottish National Party has hailed as a 'sea-change' in Scottish Politics, was indeed impressive, if sadly predictable, achievement for the nationalists. Overturning a Labour majority of 19,000, Sillars increased the SNP's share of the vote to forty-eight per cent. Labour's vote slumped from 24,000 at the general election to just over 11,000.

The SNP mounted a high profile campaign, flooding the constituency with activists. They emphasised opposition to the Poll Tax and support for a campaign of non-payment, while pouring scorn on the ineffectual conduct of Labour's 'feeble fifty' MPs.

By contrast, Labour's campaign generated little enthusiasm. The candidate, Bob Gillespie's stance on the poll tax – personal non-payment, combined with a refusal to call on others to do likewise – epitomised the timidity and incoherence of Labour's official position.

In response to the defeat, the party leader has called for an enquiry into why Labour lost. Scottish organiser, Jimmy Allison has already ventured to suggest that the Govan electorate enquiry is unlikely to identify the real factors

which underlay Labour's spectacular defeat. The problem is certainly not that Govan's overwhelmingly working class electorate failed to understand the party's policies. Rather it is those policies themselves – not least of refusing to organise any serious resistance to the poll tax – which have been tested and found wanting.

Two months ago, the Scottish Labour party held a recall conference to decide the party's attitude to the poll tax. The conference was organised – presumably by someone with a strong sense of irony – in Govan town hall. At the conference, in the face of strong opposition from the left, the party leadership reaffirmed the strategy of the 'dented shield'. Surrender to the Tories now; hope for a Labour government sooner or later.

It is little exaggeration to say that the Govan by-election was lost two months ago in Govan town hall, and the explanations which concentrate on the personal calibre of the candidates or the technical details of the campaign simply obscure as basic fact of Scottish political life. As the prospect of a Kinnock led Labour government in Westminster recedes into political make-believe, and in the absence of a serious fight, the SNP's vision – of an independent Scotland within the EEC – will continue to gain ground. In this respect, the Govan by-election should stand both as a challenge and a warning to the Scottish left.

Ian Gault

Thatcher's Britain No right to speak – or stay silent!

WITH THE announcement of a media ban on the expression of republican views and the removal of the historic right to silence, it is clear that the Thatcher government has become one of the most repressive this century.

Coming in the wake of other developments in recent years – the total erosion of trade union rights, the ban on the 'promotion' of lesbian and gay sexuality, shoot-to-kill policies and the frame-up of black and Irish prisoners (causing Amnesty International to attack British justice three times in the past year) there is an urgent need for a broad political movement in defence of democratic rights.

The right to silence is an ancient right than can be dated back to the abolition of the Star Chamber in 1641. Under the star chamber, and the European inquisitorial judicial systems, the accused were forced through the use of torture to incriminate themselves. The development of rules preventing those accused from being compelled to appear as witnesses in their own cases, and barring the prosecution from commenting adversely on the exercise of this right – became basic elements of any system in which there is a presumption of innocence and the onus is on the prosecution to prove guilt.

Although the current proposals do not appear to affect the defendant's right not to be a witness *in court*, the abolition of the pre-trial right to silence is in many ways more dangerous. It is while in custody – often denied access to lawyers, questioned for lengthy periods, denied sleep, isolated and vulnerable – that prisoners are most exposed to pressure to make confessions. The government has responded to the concern over the Tottenham Three, Guildford Four, and the Birmingham Six cases – all heavily based on false 'confessions' under such cir-

cumstances – by saying: 'the best way to ensure there is no denial of justice is to make such practices official and legal'.

The media ban has similarly been implemented through the wholly undemocratic structures of the British state. Self-censorship was already widespread in the media, with dozens of programmes on Ireland altered or withdrawn since the early 1970s. The ban itself is being described by TV and radio newscasters as applying to 'Northern Irish organisations linked to terrorism': in fact the ban is a broad political sweep aimed at clamping down on the growth of any public debate on the government's handling of the Irish issue.

Within weeks, those banned included the late Miriam James of the Labour Committee on Ireland, Bernadette McAliskey, a radio programme about the Guildford Four, featuring Errol Smalley (one of their relatives) and Sinn Fein councillor Dodie McGuinness on the closure of a Derry maternity unit. Suppression of public support for the IRA is thus a very small part of the ban's aim.

This will make official a double standard in electoral politics – in which different rights are accorded to voters, representatives and parties according to whether they support or oppose the government on key issues. Today it is Ireland. Tomorrow it may be extended to those advocating defiance of the Poll Tax, Section 28, or trade union laws.

The current attacks on civil liberties will most certainly not be the last: it is well known that further measures on the cards include enabling convictions for IRA membership to be obtained solely on the word of an RUC officer; and the introduction of an oath against violence for electoral candidates.

The widespread opposition to the measures is very positive. Despite its apparent strength, the government is taking a big risk.

This is the first time such repressive measures have been taken in the absence of cross-party or public consensus. Operating outside of such a consensus poses real dangers for wider British government on 'law and order' and Ireland.

But there is also a possibility that measures will succeed. Already, despite the official Labour opposition to the measures, 'civil libertarians' such as Kevin McNamara have responded by proposing alternative repressive measures instead. The framework for the discussion is already moving to the right.

The broadest possible campaign must be built in defence of basic democratic rights: to defend silence in the courts and to break the silence in the media. Every opportunity to challenge and highlight the measures must be taken. International campaigns are essential as they were in response to internment, Bloody Sunday and the hunger strikes.

Broadcasters must be encouraged to challenge the ban. Banned videos and republican speakers must be offered a platform everywhere. A campaign must be waged in the labour movement against its leadership's servility to the British 'rule of law' - whether in Belfast, Govan, Tottenham, Winchester or Gibraltar. Irish self-determination and the fight to get Britain out of Ireland has to become a central plank of the socialist agenda - or the British working class will be paying a bigger and bigger price in the years to come.

Piers Mostyn



PHOTO: Carlos Guarita/Reflex

Home Secretary Douglas Hurd: using gag and thumbscrews

in Washington, Gorbachev is planning an initiative on the Middle East, and desperately needs formulations that are acceptable to the USA. Despite some cliff-hangers in the most difficult sessions, Soviet diplomats worked tirelessly in the corridors and finally achieved the flexibility they needed from the PLO before they begin to unfold their new game-plan.

For the *intifadah*, the declaration of independence was a major boost in as much as it strengthens the authority of the united leadership of the uprising. However, the recognition of the state of Israel can only be a serious setback.

In fact, far from 'electrifying the world', as the US media suggested, the declaration is not an unprecedented gesture. Arafat has, for many years now, jumped at every opportunity to meet whatever conditions US imperialism has imposed before 'talking' to the PLO. In speech after speech he has proposed direct, explicit, *de facto* recognition of the Zionist state. But to impose this position, as he did in Algiers, on all the other PLO factions, was no mean feat.

It is here that Soviet diplomacy tilted the balance. George Habash's Popular Front and some sections of Fatah battled throughout, but in vain. They could not walk out for fear of jeopardising the unity of the *intifadah*. Nor did they offer a credible strategic alternative.

Arafat's victory at the Palestine National Council is an important step for Gorbachev's plans for peace in the Middle East. But while questions on the Arab side are moving towards some resolution, the Israeli election quagmire remains still to be settled.

The worst possible scenario for Gorbachev would be the formation of a rightist coalition who will look to extreme solutions - expelling the Palestinians en masse from the West Bank.

This would increase the likelihood of a fourth Arab-Israeli war, and throw Soviet plans into disarray.

Jack Goldberg

Palestine 'parliament' adopts Moscow line

AFTER three months of discussions and consultations, and a further eight weeks of vacillations, the 19th Palestine National Council finally took place in Algiers.

The unilateral declaration of an independent Palestinian state, and the final political declaration explicitly recognising the state of Israel were widely known even before the inaugural session started.

However differences between the main factions of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) still prevailed until the last minute

over how and whether to include recognition of Israel without compromising the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Unlike the old sterile debate in the 1970s over the concept of 'government in exile' versus 'provisional government', the PLO leaders could not afford the time to bicker for ever against the background of the *intifadah*, the historic uprising in the occupied territories which has entered its eleventh month.

The mass struggle, having resisted the mighty iron fist of the Zionist state, has developed a powerful and united leadership - a

leadership grounded in new forms of resistance: civil disobedience, a self-help network, and strikes. This the PLO factions could not ignore.

Apart from internal Palestinian considerations, there was also a wider, even global dimension to the debates, as the Soviet Union played a leading role in giving support to the pragmatism of PLO leader Yassir Arafat. Moscow pressure pulled into line its direct allies - the Democratic Front and the Palestine Communist Party - and neutralised the only pole of opposition - the Popular Front.

With an eye on the new regime

Join the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine

Details: BM Box LMCP, London, WC1N 3XX

Soviet Union Glasnost under threat

THE struggle over perestroika – restructuring the economy and the state – is hotting up in the Soviet Union. While Gorbachev is showing growing impatience with the speed of the implementing the perestroika reforms in the economy, there is increasing evidence that the 'Moscow Spring' of glasnost may be short-lived.

During Gorbachev's Black Sea summer holiday, his leading critic in the Politburo, Yigor Ligachev, utilised the opportunity to make a detailed speech in the city of Gorky which almost amounted to a counter-manifesto to Gorbachev's programme of reforms.

While backing the general programme of economic perestroika, Ligachev warned of the dangers of too much marketisation, too many concessions to imperialism and too much freedom for non-party, informal, political associations like the Socialist Clubs. It was a declaration which was sure to get a good reception in lower levels of the bureaucracy, which see themselves as threatened by Gorbachev.

Gorbachev's response was swift. Following a melodramatic visit to Siberia, where many people complained about the slowness of the reforms, Gorbachev summoned a special Central Committee plenum which removed Ligachev as politburo number 2, and shunted him into the agriculture ministry.

Three new Gorbachev cronies were brought onto the politburo, and a decision taken to end the function of regional Communist organisations as economic managers – a sort of parallel state apparatus. This latter decision will threaten the role of thousands of lower party officials. Finally, President Gromyko was asked to resign 'for health reasons', to be replaced by Mikhail Gorbachev himself.

Gorbachev's coup against the Ligachevites was carried out in a manner totally at variance with the methods espoused by the official

glasnost propaganda. There was no debate on Gorbachev's report, and, apart from Gromyko's pathetic speech asking to be relieved of his duties, there were no other speakers. The whole meeting was over in less than 2 hours.

The CC plenum revealed that progress on perestroika reforms is painfully slow because tens of thousands of lower level bureaucrats nationwide, who are expected to put it into effect, are extremely reluctant to change their old privileged ways.

Second, the CC plenum showed Gorbachev's penchant for accruing personal power in a rather vulgar and open way, which has nothing whatever to do with glasnost! But there are other straws in the wind indicating that glasnost may be under threat.

There were persistent rumours over the summer that the politburo had taken a decision to clamp down on non-party organisations and events. In August a demonstration in Pushkin Square commemorating the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was brutally broken up by an array of security forces, including a new riot squad not seen in public before.

The party leadership has had no choice but to accept the legitimate continued functioning of the 'popular front' in Estonia, which includes the Estonian party leadership. The front has held demonstrations for Estonian self-determination which have mobilised over a million people – a huge percentage of the adult Estonian population.

But an attempt in November to emulate the Estonian example in Byelorussia was crushed by the violent dispersal of demonstrations in Minsk. Unofficial clubs in Byelorussia, including the socialist clubs, reported that they were no longer able to book public



Do great minds still think alike? The old Politburo

halls which had previously been used for meetings.

On the domestic level therefore Gorbachevism seems to be in a period of uneasy equilibrium, with few real advances in the economy working their way through, or new initiatives in freedom or openness being apparent. But it should not be thought that by sidelining Ligachev, Gorbachev has inflicted a final defeat on either the man or the very large forces that he represents.

Internationally however Gorbachev has undoubtedly scored a major new success with the October visit of Federal German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to Moscow. Kohl took an entourage of 500 with him; many of them top German businessmen, hungrily eyeing the 240 million-strong Soviet market. Dozens of new trade and aid deals were done.

Thatcher, in evident pique at this success, has launched a 'don't pay for perestroika' crusade, probably in cahoots with the United States, aimed at discouraging precisely those economic links

being built by Kohl's Moscow visit.

Moscow's policy in Afghanistan has, however, come under renewed pressure as the US and Pakistan have increased their military aid to the Mojahedin guerrillas, taking advantage of the Soviet withdrawal. The Soviets have replied by halting their troop withdrawal and supplying the Afghan government with long-range missiles.

There is no doubt that the USSR is prepared to see the present Afghan government replaced, but wants a political solution which prevents a hard line anti-Soviet group coming to power. Thus the Soviet Union wants desperately to bolster the Afghan government's forces to prevent a complete rout when the military pull-out is complete.

Still, it seems only the most catastrophic turn of events would reverse Gorbachev's determination to complete the Red Army's withdrawal by the end of next February.

Phil Hearse

Nurses' pay battle

Tories put the boot in

Another 'winter of discontent' seems a real possibility in the NHS. Has the government miscalculated? HARRY SLOAN argues that the Tories may be deliberately stoking up the conflict in order to attack the National Health Service.

At first sight, the Tory strategy is crazy. Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke has embarked what seems on another unwinnable confrontation with the nurses. By inflaming new levels of militancy among previously inactive and poorly-unionised sections of the workforce, who enjoy massive public support, he appears to be on a hiding to nothing.

Short of an unexpected about-turn by the government – putting much more money onto the table to fund a fair and proper implementation of the regrading of nurses' pay – or an abrupt and massive betrayal by the health unions, which have again been propelled by their rank and file into action, the dispute over grading seems set to run and run.

As this issue of *Socialist Outlook* goes to press, union militancy, (work-to-grading action, sometimes coupled with overtime bans, and token or even all out strike action) is spreading through every region of the NHS. The no-strike Royal College of Nursing, which has opposed any form of collective action to challenge contested gradings, is losing members in large numbers to TUC-affiliated unions.

Management, who in many cases were unhappy at being obliged by rigid cash limits to limit the numbers of nurses they could afford to put onto higher grades, are becoming increasingly cheesed off as Clarke deliberately winds up the nurses and forbids any local concessions. Indeed the threat of disciplinary action does not only apply to militant nurses but also to managers who step out of line.

Meanwhile ministers have begun to step up the media propaganda offensive against the health unions, exploiting events such as the temporary closure of the intensive care unit at Birmingham Children's Hospital and patients sleeping on floors at Leavesden Hospital. Some staff have already been suspended for working strictly to the grades imposed on them by management: others have defied management threats and forced limited concessions. Others have taken the individual course of resigning in disgust. The scene seems set for a 'winter of discontent' created by deliberate government policy.

However a closer look at the way Clarke has provoked the current escalating dispute with tens of thousands of nurses suggests there may be a degree of method in his madness. The

Tories would not be too unhappy to be able to turn the tables for the first time on the nurses, who have been able to enlist public sympathy to force repeated concessions and embarrass ministers into holding back on their real plans. They may have decided this is their chance to use the media to attack 'militant' nurse action.

We must remember that the Tory government is not simply looking towards short-term questions: it still holds a long-term ambition to 'reform' the National Health Service and massively privatise the provision of health care.

Thatcher knows well enough that to attempt such a project at present would be politically unacceptable. It would antagonise not only the public at large, but also big sections of the Tory electoral base, who are also dependent on the NHS.

The top-level 'review' of the NHS, promised by Thatcher at the beginning of the year (after the government had been pressurised into conceding additional funding for hospital services), has still not appeared, and no date has yet been named for publication of its findings.

It seems certain that the cabinet now want first to do some preparatory work on 'softening up' public opinion to weaken support for the NHS and create conditions where brutally reactionary 'radical' proposals could get a hearing. We have already seen this procedure applied to education policies, before the government moved in for the kill with Kenneth Baker's 'reform' proposals.

The straw in the wind demonstrating that the Tories are still determined to press home their attack on the NHS was Clarke's dogged fight to impose swingeing new charges for eye tests and for dental check-ups, despite Tory back-bench opposition. The amounts of money involved (£150m a year) are puny compared to the £20 billion NHS budget; the motive is not economic but to register a political declaration of intent.

Significantly the row over the new charges was followed by Nigel Lawson's kite-flying



PHOTO: John Arthur/Reflex

Nurses – now facing threats of injunctions

exercise on new means-testing for pensioners. The same philosophy of 'targeting' is already making itself felt in discussions on the future of some NHS services.

Waiting in the wings, and apparently being strongly promoted by Health Minister David Mellor, are far-reaching plans to ditch NHS responsibility for much long-term care of the elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped.

These plans have been drawn up by Thatcher's chief advisor on NHS matters, Sainsbury chief Sir Roy Griffiths as a strategy for 'community care' services – especially those to the elderly. Griffiths proposes that all such services should be removed from the NHS, and run by local government, levying charges under a system of means-testing. Rigorous central government control would also ensure that all such community care services were put out to competitive tender.

The result could be hundreds of thousands more elderly people being forced to plunder their life-savings or sell their houses in order to finance their own care. Yet this policy has actually been welcomed, hailed as 'bold' and 'radical', by academics and naive elements in local government: a lobby grouping called 'Griffiths now!' has been formed headed by Labour boroughs. Though NALGO has recently published a heavy critique of the Griffiths Report, other health unions have been slow off the mark and reluctant to reject it outright.

The Tories have not yet announced an official government response to Griffiths; but his plan offers them a series of advantages. It simultaneously enables the NHS to shed the burden of providing costly free care to tens of thousands of elderly patients; lands increased,

PHOTO: Andrew Moore/Reflex



Clarke's tactics have revived militancy

but under-funded, responsibilities into the lap of local government which can carry the can for the inevitable foul-ups; puts a grasping government hand into the assets and savings accounts of the elderly; and offers the prospect of juicy profits for a host of unscrupulous private firms and individual providers of 'community care'.

It is in this context that we should see Kenneth Clarke's tactics. He has switched abruptly from the role of kindly uncle giving an 'extra' (but ludicrously inadequate) £138m to finance the nurses' pay deal, to the vicious, hard-line employer sticking the boot into the NHS unions. Perhaps he sees this entirely avoidable dispute as the way to swing public opinion against 'greedy' nurses, who are now the most powerfully-organised section of healthworkers obstructing future Tory schemes for the NHS.

The answer from the unions must be to recognise the seriousness of the fight, and strengthen the action. There are already signs that this is happening, with the spread of resistance at rank and file level. National officials must step up the fight, urging weaker sections into action alongside those already on strike or working to grade, and pledging strike action where necessary to hit back against individual or collective victimisations of nurses by management. If they do not fight now, they risk losing members and handing initiative back to the scab leaders of the RCN.

The stakes are high. Another victory by the nurses would represent an important setback for the government, who have ridden roughshod over most other sections of the trade union movement. A defeat for the health unions would line up the NHS for the kind of 'radical review' that the Thatcher cabinet has threatened.

But as well as fighting on clinical grading, the unions (and the Labour Party, which has also largely accepted the Griffiths Report) must sound the alarm and fight for the rejection of this far-reaching attack on the NHS, and all systems based on the introduction of new means-testing and charges.

So said the Labour Party's conference document on the poll tax. Despite the frantic attempts to find scapegoats, it is clear that the Govan electorate have given the lie to this absurd claim.

Whilst councils in Scotland are busy sending out £50 fines to poll tax registration refuseniks, local authorities in England and Wales are now setting up their registration and collection systems. What has been an abstract debate for many is now beginning to have a practical expression.

Already we are seeing that many Labour authorities are refusing to go even as far as the Labour Party official position. In Brighton, for instance, the Labour group refused to discuss whether to use its discretion to write off debts which might arise in eighteen months time, on the grounds that this might be illegal.

Given that such write-offs were one of the mainstays of the Walworth Road-approved national strategy, one wonders what sort of opposition will be forthcoming through the official party machine. The Local Government Information Unit has been ordered to stop producing campaigning material.

Despite this defeatism the campaign to stop the poll tax is far from over. The Conference in Newcastle on December 10 called by the Socialist Conference marks not the end but a new beginning to the campaign. We must use it as an opportunity to discuss a new way forward, learning from the Scottish experience, bringing the campaign south of the border.

Detailed discussions will need to take place about the tactics to build a mass campaign to sink the Tory flagship. This means turning to the labour movement, and building collective action to defeat the tax. Building the demonstration called for April by the TUC into a real mass event, and planning local initiatives for around the same time (when collection starts in Scotland and registration in England and Wales) must be a key component of such a strategy.

At each stage of the battle it is necessary to operate at a number of different levels. Councils should be urged not to comply with the tax, as Lambeth council have recently agreed; not to buy the computer hardware needed to collect the tax; and to refuse to appoint staff to deal with the poll tax or to order other staff to hand over information collected in the course of their existing duties to such officers.

Despite the independent obligations of Finance Directors enshrined in the law there is

Poll Tax

Sink the Tory flagship!

"North and South of the border, inside and outside Parliament, nationally and locally, our campaigning efforts have already been successful."

no reason why councils should encourage implementation. Precisely what powers Finance Directors have must be tested out. At a minimum councils must protect staff taking action themselves.

Trade unionists should fight for the boycott of posts to do work on the poll tax, and a policy of refusing to do additional work connected with the tax. The poll tax reaches into every corner of council activity. It is not just finance departments which will be affected.

From housing officers handing over rent account details, to rubbish collectors being asked

"Already we are seeing that many Labour authorities are refusing to go even as far as the Labour Party official position..."

to snoop on who is living with who, or librarians being asked to hand over their records, council workers need to be organised to ensure they are not unwittingly cooperating.

It is quite possible to convince either council housing officers or workers in social security offices, for example, that it is not in their interests to take on additional work – not only because they are likely to be opposed to the tax, but because they cannot cope with their existing workload. As for rates officers whose councils will be proposing to redeploy to poll tax units, arguing that they would be more useful to all concerned working, for example, as housing benefit officers, sounds pretty convincing.

Whether it is college administrators or private industry personnel officers, many other workers will find themselves being asked to provide information and help enforce the tax – they can and should be won to boycott the work, on civil liberty grounds if no other.

But it is vital that both these approaches are combined with building a mass community-based campaign. Trade unionists and councillors are much more likely to stand firm if they know that the community stands behind them, and is itself taking action.

On registration, it is necessary to find

PHOTO: John Harris/IFL



mechanisms that will allow maximum participation and politicisation – through the organisation of 'return to sender' days for example. Through mass burning of forms, or the collective querying of the questions being asked, we should use non-registration activity to organise on estates and in specific communities, building up close networks able to support each other. Even if at the end of the day councils get the information they need, the obstruction and civil disobedience, if properly handled, can be an important mobiliser, laying the ground work for non-payment.

'Reckless adventurism', 'playing with other people's lives' have been the phrases used by the Labour leadership to attack the idea of non-payment. Despite this, some MPs and others have been encouraging the building of Committees of 100 pledged not to pay the poll tax. In some hands this has been an attempt to sidetrack other strategies now, and to limit non-payment itself to a few martyrs; but as part of an overall strategy of defiance such Committees can play a part. We must reject Kinnock's view of non-payment; but we can only do so if we are able to build a collective approach which does not leave individuals isolated.

The Newcastle Conference cannot in itself call into being a national coordination of poll tax campaigns. But it must set itself the target of providing a framework for discussion with other groups to pull together such coordination.

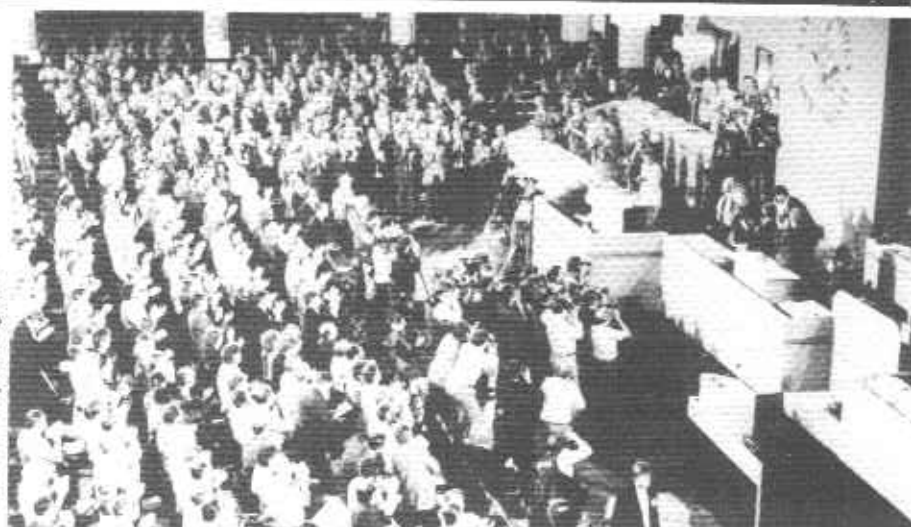
In that way we can properly pace the campaign. Timing will be of the utmost importance. We need to use the issuing of poll tax demands in Scotland, and the non-payment which results – whether from deliberate non-payment or inability to pay, to build the non-registration and non-implementation campaigns south of the border.

Getting campaigns off the ground south of the border – where many local groups exist in name only – must be used to give a shot in the arm to the Scottish campaigns.

A successful conference in Newcastle will give the movement the boost it needs in order to combat the poll tax, one of Thatcher's most vicious attacks on the working class.

Greg Tucker.

PHOTO: Wayne Edgington



Socialism is already off Labour's conference agenda

Chesterfield

Keeping socialism on the agenda

It is Thatcher's stated aim to remove socialism from the map. All potential outposts of resistance have come under attack: local government, strong unions, progressive social policies.

Unemployment, privatisation and redistribution of wealth from poor to rich by a strengthened state have been accompanied by a strong ideological offensive reasserting the values of the market, the family, patriotism and individualism. The socialist left has been marginalised, especially within the Labour Party.

But there is still a strong socialist current – in the party, the unions, in numerous campaigns and amongst sections of the intelligentsia. The value of the Socialist Conference movement is that it draws all these different components together, multiplying their strength in a way which the Labour left on its own could not do.

Since the June national conference of 2000 people in Chesterfield there has been a flowering of local activity and organisation. Regional conferences in South London and Newcastle attracted 200 people, and one in Taunton pulled in 100. Large organising meetings have been held in Scotland, Wales and the North West to plan activities, and regional conferences are planned for both the East and West Midlands and in East Anglia.

The Socialist Conference has also begun to take a lead on the key issues facing the labour movement. It has called the national conference against the Poll Tax in Newcastle on December 10, and has been instrumental in establishing many local campaigns and actions against the Poll Tax. It has also linked up with the Solidarity Network to build support for workers in struggle, and is discussing a major conference next autumn on developing the left in the trade unions.

At least three other major conferences are

scheduled over the next six months. An international conference on Gorbachev and the European left in April will debate the policy issues raised by the impact of Gorbachevism on both east and west Europe. A conference on democratic rights is also being organised to bring together those in the black and Irish communities with civil libertarians, trade unionists and lesbians and gay activists: the aim is to discuss a charter on democratic rights. A further green and socialist conference is also planned.

At the same time as taking the initiative on these campaigning issues, the Socialist conference is also linking up with the Campaign group of Labour MPs, with its 'Campaign for Socialism' specifically geared to providing a left alternative to the official Labour policy review.

There will be a series of public meetings around the country stressing key socialist policies such as public ownership and unilateralism. Unlike the official policy review, these will be aimed at involving trade unionists, women and black organisations in a real discussion.

On top of this there are plans for a series of Socialist Conference pamphlets to combat the official new realist drive in the glossy Walworth Road productions.

The hard left in the Labour Party has been on the defensive for the past few years as Kinnock has succeeded in driving the party to the right. The Socialist Conference provides a valuable opportunity to link the best forces of the labour left – the Campaign group, Black Sections, *Labour Briefing* and independent forces – to those socialists outside the party who are active in their unions, campaigns and struggles. As such, it could play a key role in projecting a serious socialist alternative into the 1990s.

Davy Jones

Whose block vote is it anyway?

'We are not going to get rid of the block vote and leave ourselves at the mercy of the constituencies', said one unnamed 'senior member of Labour's shadow cabinet', quoted in *The Independent* recently.

In this simple and honest statement, he (odds on it was a he) summed up the very complex constitutional problem facing Labour's leaders. They desperately want to respond to media pressure by doing away with the influence not only of the left in the party's policy making procedures, but with the trade unions' key role too. So far they have managed to marginalise the left, only with the reliable assistance of trade union top brass delivering the required votes at conference. Party managers know that they can't remove those votes without leaving more space for the much less reliable - as they are presently organised - constituency Labour Party (CLP) votes.

But the pressure is mounting. Hardly a week goes by without another leading Labour 'thinker' (in the *New Statesman* mould) or 'doer' (MPs and trade union leaders) rushing to pin their sail to the mast of constitutional reform. Most recently Robin Cook, Neil Kinnock, Bryan Gould, Michael Meacher, John Edmonds, Gavin Laird as well as Ron Todd and Tony Benn have all come out in favour of changes in principle, though with different formulations up for discussion. The media have already been at it for months, with political commentators surely caucusing to produce a remarkably consistent shopping list for their required Labour Party sell-outs on unilateralism and the trade unions.

Since October's Labour Party Conference the debate has gained momentum. With the leadership of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) looking like it might have mind of its own by opposing Kinnock on some questions, an attempt to weaken the trade union link is now being billed as a prerequisite for Labour's electability, strengthening the leader's authority over conference. Although historically, of course, supporting the leader at conference has generally been what the trade unions have been best at.

The party's constitution gives the trade unions their present voting strength of over ninety per cent at conference. It has survived virtually intact since its adoption at the first full Labour Party conference in 1918. The deal, drawn up by leading Fabian Sidney Webb, fobbed off the socialists with the never-to-be-implemented Clause Four and gave the much more conservative trade unions the controlling votes.



PHOTO: Wayne Edgington

John Edmonds: In favour of smaller block vote

As more unions have affiliated to the Labour Party over the years, their share of the votes on its policy making bodies, and particularly conference, has increased correspondingly.

By 1935 the trade unions and affiliated organisations held between them over 82 per cent of conference votes; by 1945 84 per cent, rising to 88 per cent by 1956. The present strength of the block vote is now around 91 per cent of all the votes cast at conference. This block vote is calculated on the basis of the affiliation fee paid by the unions - it is 'bought', rather than related to the actual number of affiliated members in each union.

The trade unions also effectively elect 20 of the 29 National Executive Committee (NEC) places, and have a 40 per cent share of the electoral college for the election of the party's leader and deputy leader. Between 60 and 70 per cent of the party's bills are paid by the trade unions.

So the unions' affiliations bring two important returns for Labour's leaders. They meet much of the party's running costs and they also make sure that decisions taken at conference (which is still, in theory, the party's sovereign body), are effectively in the hands of four or five union general secretaries.

Trade union delegations to Labour Party conferences are top heavy and largely undemocratic. Most are composed of a combination of unelected and therefore largely unaccountable paid full-time officials, and elected ('lay') executive committee members and usually regional and sometimes minority representatives too. However, these 'lay' individuals may, in some unions (like the GMB general union) themselves in fact be full-time paid of-

ficers of the union who have stood for these positions against lay members. Delegations to Labour Party Conferences must follow their own union conferences' policies which are never, of course, totally controllable, and some important victories have been won here which have then been carried through into Labour Party policy making. They may not always be strictly observed, but when they're blatantly breached, the membership may have some come-back. But, at the same time union general secretaries can also usually hold sway on controversial decisions (which might be defined as those they haven't managed to stitch up beforehand), fulfilling their role of controlling and containing their members' views and activities rather than representing them.

It goes without saying that despite all this there have been occasions when the block vote has been cast to the left's advantage - notably this year in the unilateralism debate. But in the vast majority of cases it is use simply to put a brake on anything left of the leadership - or even just a bit adventurous or unknown. Even if the unions don't follow the Labour leader's line every time, they're preferred by party fixers as much more reliable partners for cosy deals, as against leaving decision-making to delegates and votes among the ordinary members of the trade unions and the Labour Party.

The current arrangements are clearly undemocratic. This has led to a situation where not only are trade union members effectively disenfranchised and prevented from having any real influence over Labour Party policy because of the way their vote is cast, but at the same stroke, party members are carved out too. CLPs are basically irrelevant to national Labour Party policy-making, and they know it.

The case for allowing constituencies to take a fairer proportion of votes at conference has been raised in the past by the left in the party (prominently in recent years by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy) and from time to time the more progressive union leadership have been pushed into responding to these demands. So far though, most initiatives in that direction have met what is a common fate in the Labour Party. They have been swallowed up in a swamp of bureaucratic mismanagement and manoeuvring.

The issue was first raised in recent years at the 1979 conference. Consultation followed with decision in principle by the NEC in 1983, to redress some of the balance in favour of CLPs. This was followed by more consultation from which finally emerged the 'Kitson Proposals'. Under the outline drawn up by Alex

Kitson, then deputy general secretary of the TGWU and an NEC member, CLPs would have had about a 20 per cent share of the conference vote. Despite receiving wide support from the constituencies as a useful (if limited) first step forward, his report was shelved and never went to conference.

A subsequent initiative, a 'Balance of Votes Working Party' set up from the 1986 Labour Party Conference, met an even worse fate. It was wound up after only one abortive meeting.

Despite organised left pressure from within the constituencies to establish a fairer system, it's not surprising that progress has been slow in coming.

But clearly the new interest in reform expressed by the people who really count under the present system (that is, those who have the votes already) has got little to do with 'justice' or democracy.

The right have got their own, different, reasons for their sudden concern with conference voting. Whatever proposals (if any) are brought forward under their recently announced enquiries into the extension of one-member-one-vote and the reduction of the block vote, they are unlikely to result in handing over decision making power to the rank and file.

Because at the heart of what they're up to is this parallel concern with one-member-one-vote. Initial proposals which went through this year's party conference add up to a charter – not for members' rights – but for total control by the leadership over a passive, if massive, membership. Kinnock and more explicitly, right-wing GMB leader John Edmonds, want to trade off a reduced block vote (variously, 40, 50 or 60 per cent), if individual membership can be increased from the present 300,000 or so to their (unlikely) one million target. At the same time they'd like direct access through computerised records to those members. Member whose participation in the party will, they hope, wither to just filling in ballot forms (on as many opportunities, presumably, as the party can afford), rather than participating in building the party and policy-making.

That way conference can be kept safe, because, if it is left with any role at all, it will still be run from the top down. Such a move would also have two other advantages. First, it will answer recent media criticisms (the ever media-sensitive party managers don't seem to have twigged yet that there will always be more!). Secondly, it will leave wide open the party's options for future deals with the SLD/SDP (who have always paraded the block-voting system and more generally the trade union link as their sticking point). Failing this (the 'mass' membership/block vote trade off), moves will be made anyway to reduce the role of con-



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

ference to a media event – and proposals are already being considered by the Conference Procedures Committee.

So it's no great coincidence that at the same time there are now renewed calls recently from the *New Statesman*, and Ben Pimlott's nauseatingly mis-named 'Samizdat' project, for unity (deals) under the banner of 'non-Tory citizenship'. And a founder member of the SDP, writing in the press recently, explicitly cited trade unionism, unilateralism and Clause Four as the obstacles to such a pact.

With a conference which is potentially even more tame than under the present system, reckon the party fixers, 'unpopular' policies like unilateralism and Clause Four will be all the easier to ditch.

So the moves are aimed not just at the party's top structures. They go through policy, right to its roots. Under attack is the link – which, although it may be imperfect, abused and misused under the present system – ties the Labour Party to the working class. This is a fundamental feature of the British Labour Party which sets it apart from purely bourgeois parties.

It is the link too, that the left should be vigilant in defending. Removing the class-based structures of the party will make it all the easier to remove what class-based politics it has.

Such a defence need not imply a rejection of any moves to increase CLP's voting strengths in the party structures. There are a number of possible formulations under discussion on the left already, including a 50/50 split, an electoral college-type division, and 'proportional representation' of minority positions in casting of block votes.

All these options deserve serious attention, and the left more than anyone, should be discussing the alternatives and preparing to come up with some specifics. It must be ready to campaign hard for them too.

But it can't stop there.

Regular readers of *Socialist Outlook* will know that recent discussion in these pages has highlighted the need for socialists to tackle the block vote problem – and that of union

democracy and politics – more fundamentally. That is, from the bottom up. Because at the same time as we will be arguing for more votes for CLPs and defending the party's link with the unions against the right's attacks, we must be conscious of the urgent need to democratise the block vote.

It's an easy demand to raise, but it needs some detailed attention to address it seriously.

To the right wing, it means simply the 'rights' of members not to attend meetings (yes, really, this is point one of part general secretary Larry Whitty's 'member's charter'!), and to be asked to fill in a form every so often. The press is already demanding that 'Mr Kinnock should indicate that he does not intend to pay the slightest attention to future conference decisions... reached as a result of block votes being cast without adequate prior consultation' (ie balloting).

But with a vision of a more genuinely socialist Labour Movement, the question of union democracy must be approached from the starting point of the need to build a participatory and genuinely representative movement, with its sights set clearly on the interests of the working class.

This, of course, raises many difficult questions: Like how can membership participation be increased? What realistic measures can be taken to enable members to make sure their voices are heard, their decisions count and carried out? How can the interests of minorities best be safeguarded, promoted even? How do you fight the tendency for a bureaucratic layer to develop, and at all levels of organisation?

As with all difficult questions, there are no easy answers. But the experience in some unions (of building shop stewards' committees, of the growing pressures representation of regional and minority interests) should be our starting point, and are useful building blocks for developing our strategies.

And of course an organised left at all levels of the movement will be an absolute prerequisite for building and developing that democracy.

Jane Wells

The soft left's dilemma

BEN JONES measures up the political elbow-room available for soft left critics of Kinnock's Labour leadership, and finds barely enough space to swing a cat.

In their different ways, the Ron Todd's speech at the *Tribune* rally in Blackpool, *Tribune's* own 'Hard Labour' conference, and Peter Hain's call for a new soft left organisation all highlight a growing disquiet on the soft left with the Kinnock-Hattersley leadership.

Unfortunately, these criticisms are raised in the context of support for the existing leadership: yet the soft left are up against the problem that it is impossible to make any criticisms of the leadership without the Walworth Road whispering machine labelling you an unacceptable oppositionist.

The media dwelt extensively on Todd's defence of unilateral nuclear disarmament and common ownership, and highlighted his rather weak criticisms of the policy review, together with his quotable views on people with 'sharp suits and cordless telephones, clipboards and scientific samples'.

What the media studiously ignored were Todd's efforts to distance himself from the hard left. He was scathing about 'the nostalgics who look back to a misty past', and leaned over backwards to soft pedal his attack on the Aims and Values document, allowing that 'it's not easy to define socialism in a small pamphlet'.

What happened to Todd illustrates the dilemma of the soft left. All his support for Kinnock counted for nothing; MPs queued up to voice their attacks on him to any television camera or reporter prepared to listen. Labelled a 'dinosaur', and with his speech writer hounded out of Blackpool, Todd received what the NUM's Billy Etherington called 'the Arthur Scargill treatment'.

The leadership's attitude to Todd proved beyond doubt that for this leadership there is no such thing as a loyal critic: you are either a Kinnockite or an opponent.

The *Tribune* 'Hard Labour' conference occurred in the wake of Todd's speech, and was aimed at those who feel 'torn organisationally between the party's right and the sectarian left'. Well-publicised at Labour conference, graced

by shadow cabinet and Labour NEC speakers, and extensively trailed in the press the week beforehand, it was billed as a major event with up to 500 people expected.

This was when Peter Hain launched his appeal for a new soft left organisation, slamming the *Tribune* group of MPs as Kinnock's 'payroll vote'. However, like Todd, Hain was careful also to attack the hard left, accusing the Campaign Group of offering little more than 'slogans' and 'attacks on the leadership'.

There is even a precedent for the kind of realignment Hain was advocating: in Scotland, parts of the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC) have broken away over the issue of non-payment of poll tax to form Scottish Labour Action.

However the *Tribune* conference proved a



PHOTO: Piers Cavendish/Reflex

Roy Hattersley: the choice is for him, or against

and those on the hard left such as the Campaign Group, Campaign 89 and the Socialist Conference.

Hain's hope of soft left realignment has failed. There is going to be no equivalent in England of Scottish Labour Action.

Ironically the LCC has a more coherent strategy than Hain: they have no intention of breaking or even loosening their ties to Kinnock. Instead they used Todd's speech as a pretext to launch their attack on Labour's links with the unions, and advocating further watering down of membership participation in the CLPs through introducing one member one vote.

At the *Tribune* conference, *Labour Briefing* argued that any realignment must be accompanied by a decision to oppose all further witch hunts. On this basis, *Briefing* welcomed the move away from Kinnock, and advocated joint campaigns in defence of unilateralism and common ownership.

Kevin Davey of the Socialist Society adopted a similar theme, encouraging wider participation in the Chesterfield process from which the soft left have excluded themselves rather than been excluded.

Socialist Outlook shares the view put by *Briefing* and Kevin Davey; but we would now go further. It is clear that there will be no serious realignments on the soft left for the foreseeable future.

In our view there is no way you can defend unilateralism and common ownership without breaking from Kinnock: individuals who try will simply be attacked as oppositionists. While the Socialist Conference may yet be able to welcome a few refugees from the soft left, its most important task will be working alongside those fighting back against the Thatcher offensive.

Fortunately the Benn-Heffer campaign and the Socialist Conference movement have kept socialism on the Labour party agenda. *Socialist Outlook* will continue covering the debates that develop.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Heffer: holding back new realism

flop. Only 150 turned up on the first day, showing any soft left momentum from the Todd speech had been lost; among those present there was little enthusiasm for the Hain proposals. The extent of Hain's isolation surprised even those such as *Labour Briefing* who had correctly argued that there was little space for manoeuvre between the Kinnock leadership



PHOTO: Carlos Guarita/Reflex

Mass support for Rock Against Racism: no such echo for Tom Sawyer's plans

Labours' disappearing youth

This year's Labour Party conference made constitutional changes which alter the party's youth structures beyond recognition. DAVID SHEPHERD asks: whatever happened to the Labour Party Young Socialists?

'Let's bomb Russia,' quipped Kenny Everett during the only national youth event of the 1983 general election campaign: a reactionary jamboree organised by the Young Conservatives. In that election more young people, in the 18-24 age group, voted Tory or Alliance than voted Labour – an historic low-point in Labour's electoral fortunes amongst young people. After 1983 the task of reversing the disastrously low youth vote for Labour was seen as a priority by the party leadership.

By 1986 Neil Kinnock had been seen in a pop video with Tracy Ullman (remember her?) and Red Wedge was touring the country, taking poppy, populist pro-Labour propaganda to the nation's youth. Labour had started to 'listen' to young people – or, at least to those who were listening to Billy Bragg and Paul Weller.

But, alongside the agitpop and PR, another process was initiated by the party leadership in 1986: a 'consultation' of all sections of the party on the subject of the party's youth organisation.

Was there a connection between the party's poor electoral performance amongst young people and its youth structures? The conventional wisdom amongst the Kinnockites was that, yes, an organisational restructuring was a prerequisite to regaining the youth vote. And at the heart of the organisational problem (as of so many problems according to the world-view of the soft left) was the supposedly pernicious role

of the *Militant* tendency – the leading force in the LPYS since 1970.

In the words of Tom Sawyer, NUPE deputy general secretary and chair of the party national executive's youth committee, 'The present style and approach of the YS, allied to complacency in the party as a whole, has meant that we have turned off large numbers of young people.' Generously, Sawyer pointed out in this 1986 *Charist* article, 'The blame for the party's inability to capture the youth vote cannot be placed solely with the YS.' (Emphasis added.) (The implication, of course, is that it can take most of the blame!) So what was the problem with the LPYS? Here is Sawyer again, 'We all know that the LPYS is dominated by the *Militant* tendency.' Case proven.

It is barely credible that these people believed, in all honesty, that the activities of the LPYS (7000-strong in 1983, according to generous estimates, and without a single party political broadcast, television interview or even major newspaper article to its credit) influenced negatively the voting intentions of hundreds of thousands of young voters. Surely the general presentation of Labour's policies by the party leadership during the campaign had more of an effect? Nevertheless, such was the 'common sense' upon which the 'consultation' was based.

In 1987 there was an improvement in Labour's youth vote: a marginal increase amongst young men and an 11 per cent increase amongst young women. According to Sawyer's logic this increase should properly be attributed

to the LPYS! Or perhaps it was due to the fact that young people were aware of the ongoing reorganisation of Labour's youth structures? A serious analysis of voting trends reveals, of course, a much more complicated web of causes and effects. But what of the results of the 'consultation'?

Conveniently enough, given the general witch-hunting policy of the Kinnock leadership, bashing the *Militant* in the LPYS emerged as a key way of winning back the youth vote. Conveniently also, given the leadership's attempts to create a more centralised, top-down party, national executive control of the party's youth campaigning emerged as a key way of making the party more 'relevant' to young people.

Labour's 1987 conference endorsed the establishment of a National Youth Campaigns Committee (NYCC) and provision for the setting up of regional youth campaigns committees. Membership of the committee was to comprise representatives of the LPYS, the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS), youth trade union representatives, Red Wedge and the chair of the national executive's youth committee.

To all intents and purposes this committee was to become the leadership of the party's youth campaigning work, under the direct supervision of the party's national executive. From being the party youth organisation, the LPYS was reduced to the status of a participant in the NYCC.

Any doubt as to whether the reorganisation

was an attempt to smash the LPYS was shattered by other agreed proposals and actions. All regional LPYS youth committees were abolished; the LPYS age-limit was reduced from 26 to '23rd birthday' (that is, 22); the LPYS paper *Socialist Youth* was effectively abolished and it was decided that the youth representative on the national executive would be elected not by LPYS conference but by a 'wider franchise' whose exact dimensions were left deliberately vague.

An annual 'broad' youth conference would be convened, involving the groups represented on the NYCC, at which the youth representative would be elected by 'electoral college'. A review of LPYS rules was commissioned, with the aim of bringing proposals for constitutional change, in line with the new structures, to the 1988 party conference.

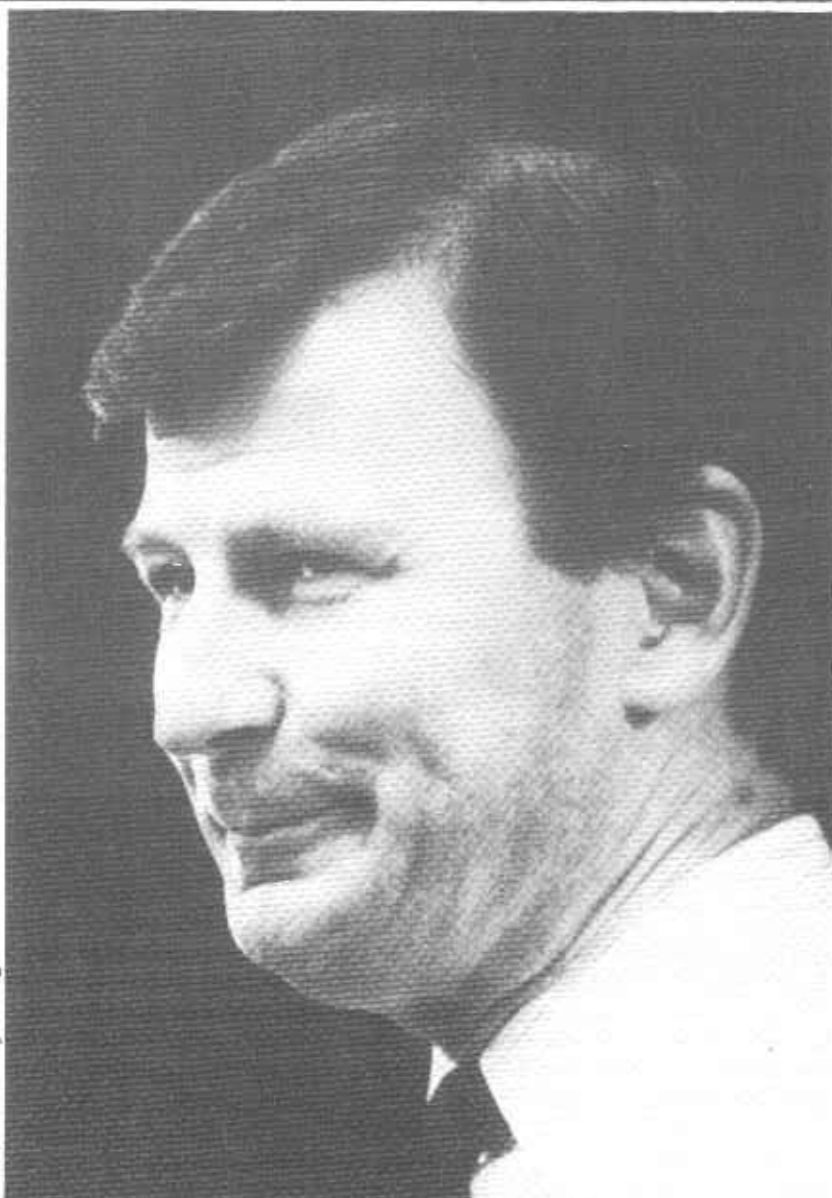
Soon afterwards the 1988 LPYS conference was cancelled by the national executive: for the first time for many years no LPYS conference took place.

Such an assault on the party's youth organisation is not without historical precedent. In 1936 a right wing Labour leadership moved against the left wing Labour League of Youth, closing down the National Youth Advisory Committee and the youth paper *New Nation* and reducing the age-limit to 21. Again in 1955 the League of Youth was disbanded, with the abolition of all national and regional structures. Predictably enough, Labour's youth movements have tended to come in for attack in times of right wing ascendancy within the party – and have bounced back when the left as a whole has been on the offensive.

This year's party conference brought the current chapter of the chequered history of Labour's youth movements to a close. Constitutional changes which destroy the LPYS as the national youth wing of Labour were carried on the leadership's recommendation.

The administration of the LPYS itself is no longer the job of the LPYS national committee, whose function is now to 'advise' the national executive on such matters. Standing orders governing the proceedings of LPYS national conference are now subject to approval by the national executive.

Even the rule which allowed the LPYS to organise 'summer schools, rallies and political



Appealing to youth? Bryan Gould, the new face of the party

activities' has been axed! (One wonders just what is the LPYS now allowed to organise?) The quorum for LPYS branch meetings has been raised from five to six for branches with less than 25 members and to eight per cent for larger branches; the minimum number of members required to set up a branch has been doubled from five to ten and a number of other rule changes in relation to branch functioning have the effect of putting branches very much at the mercy of constituency Labour parties and regional officials.

The role of the NYCC and the 'national youth conference' have been codified in the new rules. It is clear that this 'broad' conference is to have no policy-making function: its role is to 'organise workshops, debates, discussions, exhibitions, meetings and events of a political, cultural and sporting nature'. The view is clearly that youth in Kinnock's new model Labour Party are to be seen and not heard – especially on questions of policy.

There are some on the left who have argued that the *Militant* leadership of the LPYS have brought all of this upon themselves because of their undoubted sectarian propagandism and

their failure to build the LPYS into anything like the mass movement it had the potential to become (especially in the early 1980s). Such views are completely misplaced. Consider the Labour Party women's organisation.

For many years the women's conference was a pillar of the left, passing socialist policy positions on a range of issues. It was not *Militant*-led – and yet it was not spared the Kinnockite steamroller in the form of a reorganisation designed to marginalise the left and reimpose central control. It is clear that the party leadership would have moved, similarly, against any form of left leadership in the LPYS – and the duty of all principled socialists should have been unconditional defence of the LPYS against bureaucratic interference.

There is another parallel with the experience of the women's organisation. Sections of the left, including *Militant*, *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Organiser*, took the view that it was appropriate to participate in the 'consultation' process which led to the destruction of the LPYS as Labour's youth movement, just as *Socialist Action* argued, amongst

others, for participation in the 'review' of the women's organisation. This was wrong. It was also unprincipled. From beginning to end the 'consultation' was an exercise in witch hunting; participation by the left gave it legitimacy which it did not deserve. So what of the future for Labour's youth?

Despite the difficulties which they will face, young socialists should continue to participate actively in the new youth structures of the party – at every level. The demand for a real youth movement – with its own structures, campaigns and policy-making procedures – remains valid, and will be taken up increasingly in the future, especially when the left regains the initiative in the party. Meanwhile the task of regaining the youth vote for Labour is far too important to be left to the dead hand of the party leadership. It involves developing and fighting for socialist policies which really address the predicament of young people in Thatcher's Britain – and it must be done in the teeth of opposition from a party leadership which has shown itself to be more intent on silencing critical youthful voices than winning youth back to Labour.

PHOTO: Wayne Edgington

Union of Communication Workers Tuffin holds back the tears but fails to stem the tide

By a happy coincidence the Union of Communication Workers' (UCW) rules revision conference took place only a couple of weeks after one bout of industrial action, in the middle of a half-baked campaign (against crown office closures) and a series of one-day strikes by clerical and counter staff.

Bearing in mind how solid the action over the Difficult Recruitment Area Supplement (DRAS) had been – the national strike spread around the country horizontally through branch action, with only the retrospective endorsement of the UCW's executive – and given the intense anger felt against general secretary Alan Tuffin, he got off pretty lightly.

The anticipated public hanging did not take place, but Tuffin did lose votes on preventing bi-annual elections at branch and executive level, and seeking to cut the amount of money refunded to branches from the UCW's national office.

At the close of the conference came two very significant speeches. Les Hewitt announced that talks with the Post Office over DRAS had broken down – apparently irreversibly. Tuffin, literally choking back the tears, angrily complained about the "Thatcherism" of the Post Office Board, and congratulated himself and the executive for their previous moderation. He then announced that he, and they, were prepared to lead the next fight!

This will take place sooner rather than later. Both the government and the Post Office want to impose regional pay settlements, because while in Glasgow there are five hundred people on the waiting list for casual and temporary jobs as postal workers, virtually every office in the south east has vacancy levels of between ten and fifteen per cent for full-time jobs.

Although the Post Office management was as surprised as everyone else by how quickly the last strike spread, it is already provoking workers by limiting overtime for Christmas

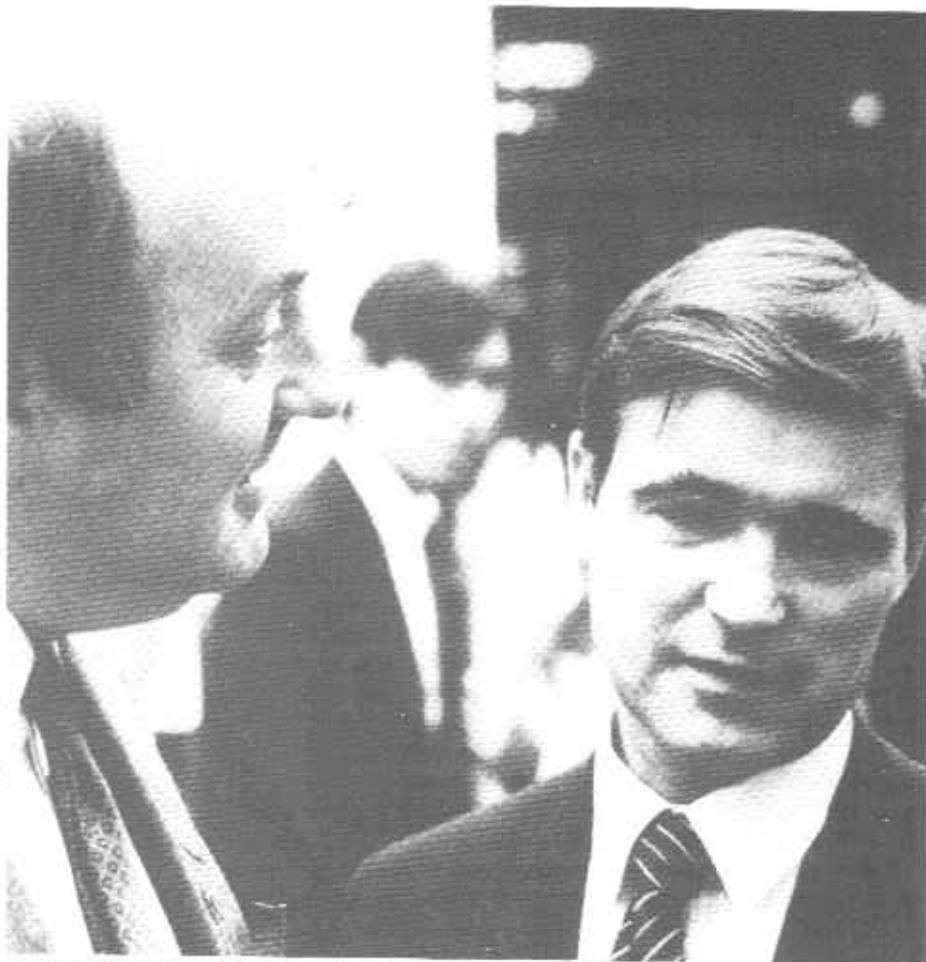


PHOTO: Wayne Edgington

Alan Tuffin (left) with right wing Engineers' leader Bill Jordan

working – traditionally the touchiest subject in the industry. It is not possible to predict when exactly the next eruption will be or how it will start: but it is likely to be only a matter of weeks or months.

The role of branch organisation proved crucial in the strike. The national leadership found itself reacting to initiatives from branches and districts, and failed to build or lead the strike itself. Credit must go to excellent local leaderships, particularly in Cardiff and Liverpool. Large branches such as Manchester which have their own office premises were able to lead practical support to smaller branches in outlying areas, despite the vacillation of local leaderships on the eventual deal.

There is a lesson in this: the existing district council structure of the UCW was in areas like South Wales supplemented by organisation which developed to mirror that of the Post Office's own letter territories.

However the role of the broad left in the strike was barely perceptible. The UCW broad left, as is so often the case, is almost completely dominated by supporters of *Militant*: so much so that they used their numbers to prevent the election of Socialist Workers Party supporters onto the broad left's national steering committee. Nevertheless the broad left is the only group in the union which is capable of organising members on a national level on a perspective of class struggle.

It goes without saying that all left wingers in the UCW should join the broad left. That is one

way of overcoming its present political problems, its lack of national profile and its low level of activity. It is certainly nowhere near representing a national alternative to the present one hundred per cent Kinnockite executive council; yet that is what, if more effective, a broad left should aim to be.

If the broad left is to break out of its isolation it will have to find a way of turning to the developments on the ground which we have already referred to. This would offer the possibility of providing a lead to tens of thousands, rather than pockets and handfuls of postal workers. However if past performance is anything to go by, the prospects are not encouraging.

The failings of the broad left so far should not leave us too pessimistic about the future. In an industry where many thousands of workers were still in primary school when Thatcher was elected, the rank and file is, though unevenly in places, aggressive and confident after its first experience of an undefeated national strike.

Recent elections in branches have seen left wingers elected or re-elected with their authority enhanced. The Tuffin leadership knows that after the debacle on the shorter working week and the shoddy DRAS settlement, they will have to give a good account of themselves in the next fight – unless they want to risk finding themselves out in the cold delivering letters again!

Billy Carron

An action charter for education

The 'Education Charter', produced by the Socialist Teachers Alliance, provides a detailed framework for an alternative policy on education. The STA wants to develop a discussion in particular with Black Sections, who have already produced their 'Black Agenda'. The charter outlines a comprehensive response to the current onslaught on schooling and deals with issues such as the aims and defence of education and the curriculum. Since every aspect of teachers' work is being changed systematically by the Tories, it is essential to have a plan that develops alternative policies while defending good existing provision.

'Standards and excellence' have been watchwords of right wing ideologues who have sought to make them solely their concern. In the mid-1970's, Rhodes Boyson, then headteacher of an ILEA school, wrote that a national curriculum and parental choice were the only ways of making schools more accountable. These were proposals aimed at breaking the hold of Labour controlled education authorities.

Ray Honeyford, ex-headteacher of a Bradford school, backed by right-wing theorists like Roger Scruton, have gone further. They started to elaborate the idea that anti-racists and multi-ethnic education has prevented schools from being able to transmit 'national values' and 'Englishness'.

The Tory attacks, abetted by the mass media, on Brent, Dewsbury, Bradford and Harringey have had the goal of re-writing the political agenda for education. Schools are to promote a 'national identity'. The needs and demands of black people are no longer to play a part. One of the newly inserted aims of history teaching is to develop a 'shared sense of British heritage'.

The most favourable context for developing support for socialist educational policies is action in defence of the real concerns of working class parents, school students and teachers. The charter has a clear position on the defence of positive action, a broad curriculum, unstreamed teaching, opting out and cuts in spending and services. We have already seen how the media has been used to attack anti-racist and anti-sexist practice in schools like Islington's Highbury Quadrant, where holding an assembly to celebrate Nelson Mandela's birthday has become an excuse for the Inner London Educa-

tion Authority (ILEA) and the Department of Education and Science (DES) to have full inspection of the school. The press has stirred up hatred for anti-racist teaching and the teacher who organised the assembly has suffered extreme abuse.

Belief in the importance of the curriculum is another fundamental part of the charter. It is based on good practice already in existence in many primary schools and some secondary schools that

concentrate on activity based enquiry. It views the whole community, not just white industrialists as a resource. The charter emphasises the importance of an internationalist curriculum, developing positive policies that challenge racism, sexism and heterosexism.

It is in the organisation of schools that we are going to see some of the major effects of the Tory plans for education. In Wandsworth, the council has already expressed their intention to dismantle the unified education system in the borough. They would like to see grammar schools for middle class areas and secondary modern set-ups for the working class areas. They are also in favour of an American type system where children advance a year or more when they pass their tests. Soon we could have eleven year olds, still in their first year of schooling because their reading was not good enough. The charter calls for support for a single unified system of fully comprehensive schools, under local democratic control. It also asks for a commitment to resourcing, in order to increase educational opportunities available to working-class students.

Education must not be seen as the sole concern of teachers, but of many other workers, including those in education. The charter should



PHOTO: Adam Hinton/Reflex

Tories want schools to promote a (white) 'national identity'

be adopted by trade union branches and trades councils.

It can be a real tool for campaigning to emphasise the new powers of governing bodies. They too should be urged to adopt the charter. Activists who are delegated to be governors by their ward should raise this. In order to set a real alternative agenda we shall need a sustained campaign to have these proposals adopted by as many labour movement bodies as possible. This would open up a debate on the issues and begin to offer an alternative education policy within the Labour Party, going beyond shadow minister Jack Straw's hollow words about standards.

The Tory attacks would have been blunted were it not for the failure of the national Labour Party to defend what has already been developed in education and to articulate an alternative programme. The most we have heard from Jack Straw is that he, like Baker, is in favour of national testing and 'excellence'. That is why it is vital that the left put forward an alternative: the charter can lay the basis for that task.

For further details and copies of the charter contact: Martin Allen, STA Convenor, 29 Greenhill Park, London NW10.

Eleanor Schooling and Ronnie Held.



PHOTO: Piers Cavendish/Reflex

Mexico City has a shortage of millions of homes

Mexico in turmoil

As the political and economic crisis unfolds in Latin America, eyes have been turned to the sharpened situation in Mexico, one of the most industrialised, and one of the 'big three' in terms of debts to western banks.

The crisis of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has been intensified following the recent general election, in which the PRI resorted to blatant ballot-rigging to defeat a breakaway bourgeois candidate.

The radicalisation has also opened the door for rapid growth of the Mexican Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), which is now one of the largest organisations of the trotskyst Fourth International. To find out the PRT's analysis of the situation, THERESA CONWAY from *Socialist Outlook* spoke to a leading PRT member, HEATHER DASHNER.

Can you say something about the economic situation in the country?

Over the last six years what used to be chronic unemployment and under-

employment, characteristic of an underdeveloped country, has increased enormously because of the policies the government has introduced to try

and deal with the economic crisis. Wages, which once accounted for 42 per cent of Gross National product have been cut back to only 27 per cent, and there has been an enormous concentration and centralisation of capital. People who were already living on what would be considered poverty level in a developed country are now at the level of serious malnutrition.

In Mexico, one of the most industrialised countries in the sub-continent, government investment in health and education has gone down to 17th and 25th place in Latin America. This is because of the government's 'modernisation policy, which aims to foster massive foreign private investment and to open Mexico to the world market.

PHOTO: Julio Etchard/Reflex



Cardenas, the renegade presidential candidate, echoed mass sentiments

Imperialism and the leading faction of the government party, the PRI, think we should be able to overcome the crisis and pay the debt, by producing goods for the world market rather than for consumption at home: this is the generalised policy of imperialism all over Latin America. Minimum wages have gone down enormously over last 10 years and the average family in the cities (which has 5.3 members) has to live on the equivalent of £12 per week. The minimum wage in Mexico City is 8000 pesos per day which is about £2. The real wage has dropped by 50 per cent – a brutal change over a period of 10 years.

In terms of housing, there is a shortage of several million homes in Mexico City, with a population of 18 million. There are enormous sections of the city which we call land invasions – places which have been taken over by the homeless, on which they build shanty towns. The first fight is to remain on such land – whether it is government or private. Then there is the fight for services – first water, then electricity and roads, then schools, markets, transport and so on.

All of this has been going on for many years since the agricultural crisis of 1965 which meant an enormous migration to the cities. It has accelerated after 1985, when the earthquake struck central downtown Mexico City. There were 400,000 people on the street from one day to the next. One third of hospital bed

capacity was destroyed, and 250 schools.

What was already an enormous housing shortage was increased by that crisis. The International Year of the Homeless decreed by the United Nations in 1986 provided some funding to replace some of the homes. The movement that arose in Mexico City had to fight hard for this funding and maintain its independence from the state. This movement changed the urban political spectrum, because it fostered the creation of organisations where none had existed before.

There has been a crisis in the countryside since 1965, but it has increased because of the modernisation programme and cuts in subsidies; guaranteed prices for agricultural products fell way below production costs. That has meant that peasants have turned to production crops and there is a deficit in corn and beans which we have to import, although the country is perfectly capable of producing them.

In the recent period there has been quite a conflict over raising the guarantee prices for basic grains. The products are priced by decree below even what the PRI-dominated peasant organisations consider they should be.

The only category where government spending has been increased is in population control, where they have been able to keep promises made to IMP in 1975, and lower the birth

rate from 3.5 to 2 per cent year. Between 1970 and 1982, 1.3 million women were sterilised, mainly in the urban areas. There has also been some evidence of sterilisation in the rural areas but news of this has been suppressed. The goal is to lower the birth rate to 1 per cent by the year 2000. This will require spending a lot of money persuading younger women not to have children or to get themselves sterilised.

Except for that, health spending is in crisis. If you go to hospital in Mexico City you had better take a relative with you, because the nurse will say 'I don't have any cotton wool, go to the corner and buy some; I don't have a syringe, I can't give this man an injection'. There is a basic list of medicines that the public health system has – and it's getting shorter and shorter.

Can you say something about the employment situation? What percentage of the urban population is underemployed, and what percentage unemployed?

We have a population of 80 million. According to government statistics, approximately 15 million of those are in what we call the informal sector. Over half the population is under 16, so there are less than 40 million people who are in the labour market. More than half the population lives in the cities. Twelve million people list themselves as housewives in the census and many of those would be a part of the 15 million. Ten mil-

"The minimum wage in Mexico City is 8000 pesos per day which is about £2."

lion of those in the informal sector are women. In the 1970s several studies estimated unemployment and under-employment as being from 40-60 per cent – it's a structural thing.

Can you say something about the political system that operates in Mexico?

The Mexican system is based on a semi-corporatist, semi-police control of the mass organisations. In the 1930s, after the revolution of 1910-1917, the state was consolidated through the populist nationalist policy of President Lazaro Cardenas who basically formed the state as it is today. He divided the working class organisations from the peasant organisations and incorporated both of them and the army into a mass party whose pillars were those three sectors.

The PRI has been in power for 60 years – since it was founded in 1928: it is all-pervasive in the state institutions and controls all areas of social and political life. However the PRI has been based not only on populist and police control but also on concessions. The population has been increasingly disaffected from it, both because of the PRI's octopus-like existence which has smothered all sorts of democratic openings, but also because over the last ten years it has been almost completely incapable of giving any economic concessions.

Although it considers the Mexican economy a mixed economy, based on the social role of the state and on private capital, it is very definitely a watchdog for private capital which it has fostered for over 50 years. The new policy means de-nationalising enormous numbers of very important productive industries. This is being demanded by the strengthened bourgeoisie, which had very little political role over the last 40 or 50 years but has increasingly acquired one.

The Mexican capitalist class now feels sufficiently strong and sufficiently related to American imperialist interests to start to make its own independent expressions as class. Until now, the weight of the PRI bureaucracy and of the state has always been stronger than of any section of the bourgeoisie.

Now the bosses are also clamouring for a re-vamping of the union structures. This is very difficult for the PRI because the unions, along with the peasant organisations, are the two major levers for their mass control over the population.

The bourgeoisie wants unions which are geared to 'modernisation', organised to increase production rather than defend workers. In order to make such changes the government need to attack one of their own sup-

porters. The PRI union bureaucracy is not going to sit back and allow them just to do this – they would sacrifice their financial privileges and their power. The oil workers' union leader is one of the few people in the country who can defy the president.

This conflict of interest creates an insoluble problem for both the government and the union leaders. They can't go back to the paternalist state because the economic crisis and the foreign debt preclude that; but neither can they go forward to the modernised state without a total and complete defeat and revamping of the PRI union bureaucracy – jeopardising the Party's domination of the masses.

So they are in gigantic crisis; and this has been best exemplified by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (son of the former President) leaving the PRI in September last year after making an unsuccessful bid for its presidency – and running as a breakaway candidate under the banner of a small satellite bourgeois party. Basically his project and outlook is to return to the old PRI tradition. He is not yet moving back towards the PRI but aims to revive the policies of the 'Mexican revolution', arguing for a return to the kind of state his father fashioned.

From the bourgeoisie's economic point of view that is extremely difficult. But Cardenas has also come out against the anti-democratic behaviour of the PRI. This echoes and gives voice to sentiments among the masses, who have identified with this man and came out in the elections, creating a snowball effect in favour of his candidacy.

This is a very complicated and contradictory process. Many millions of people who voted for Cardenas, voted for him breaking with the PRI, and that represents a step forward in their consciousness. They are supporting an alternative to the PRI which includes championing a higher minimum wage, a higher guaranteed price for agricultural products, some sort of change of policy on the foreign debt, and all sorts of questions of basic democratic rights.

However this bourgeois democratic populist policy and programme has also attracted socialists, as well as an important part of the university youth which would normally be an important breeding ground for socialists, and in that sense in that part of the movement from my point of view it is a step backwards in consciousness.

It has also attracted sectors that were previously independent from bourgeois politics, who now identify themselves with Cardenas' project, from differing points of view, and with differing emphasis. We are talk-

ing here about one of the major sectors which rose out of the 1986 year of the homeless, and other sectors in the provinces of urban and peasant movements, as well as trade union people who were originally socialists but now consider that unity of the mass movement has to begin with unity under Cardenas's programme and banner.

So as I say this is a very contradictory movement. However, we would say that in general it has been positive, in that it has meant the defeat of the PRI in the ballot boxes for the first time in 60 years. The PRI has always practised fraud, but it never had to practice fraud in order to win the presidential election. It practiced fraud before in order to secure a bigger majority, or in order to lower the number of absentions, or in order to legitimise itself – but not in order to say that it had won the presidency.

This is a major defeat – and it has accentuated the internal crisis in the PRI to an unprecedented extent. So deep is the crisis that we think the PRI could actually fall apart. There is another democratising current within the PRI of people who were originally with Cardenas but didn't leave the PRI.

There is enormous conflict between the oilworkers' union and the president. The union has accused the governor of the state of Mexico of fraud when he was the director of PEMEX, the state oil company. So we see members of the PRI attacking a PRI governor: this is unheard of in Mexico!

Can you say something about the perspectives and priorities of the PRT itself?

We recognised Cardenas' win at the polls and came out in immediate defence of it as soon as it became clear. Many of his supporters said 'we can't be sure, we don't know, we have to be responsible', but we said very clearly that the man has won at the polls and the PRI is not allowing him to take charge of the administration. Now the movement has more or less been unified round that question.

But the PRI has implemented the fraud, blatantly insisting that they won; they have fixed the votes by use of the computer, and invented votes in more than 25,000 polling stations mainly in the countryside where there were no opposition ballot watchers.

The movement against the fraud was quite strong for a couple of months but has now begun to decline. This is not only because of the natural tiredness of the movement, but mainly because the PRI has held firm and imposed its pyrrhic victory. Though Cardenas's supporters consider the

"The PRI has always practised fraud, but it never had to practice fraud in order to win the presidential election."

"The PRI has been in power for 60 years – since it was founded in 1928: it is all-pervasive in the state institutions and controls all areas of social and political life."



PHOTO: Julio Etchard/Reflex

15 million Mexicans depend upon the 'informal' sector

new PRI 'president' Salinas to be a usurper, and Cardenas has as much on several occasions, the fight to stop Salinas taking office on Dec 1st has not been as strong as it could have been.

When Cardenas made the call for a new party, the PDR (Party of the Democratic Revolution) he made no reference to the usurpation. In spite of that the mass movement has been enormously revitalised. There is huge potential for united action around democratic, economic and sectoral demands as well as the question of the usurpation.

Our policy is to continue the struggle against the usurpation because we consider that this is a basic question around which the Mexican masses have made major steps forward, and to leave it out is unacceptable. However we are also trying to unify

the mass movements that already exist, especially in the urban and peasant movement.

It is more difficult in the unions, but we try to do work there, as much as our forces will allow, working for unity around the question of salaries. At the end of each month the minimum wage is reviewed because of inflation, and we are trying to make the struggle for the minimum wage coincide with the struggle for the contract wage as the reviews on this are due toward the end of this year. This of course would be combined with the fight for democracy in the unions. We think it is quite possible to have a unified movement.

The same is true in the peasant movement, around guaranteed prices, and it seems possible to involve the forces who support Cardenas in such a project. The urban movement can

also be unified around all sorts of demands; for public services, for example.

If we unify these organisations that are independent from the PRI we can also attract the organisations that are breaking from the PRI: we can start a whole dynamic. We think that there is a change in the entire period; the PRI has never been in this sort of situation before.

Our perspective is to strengthen the mass movement to prevent Cardenas leading workers down a neo-corporatist path. We have also proposed the creation of a political front with Cardenas and his new party around democratic demands, including the fall of the usurper. If we can extend this to raising of salaries and the independent organisation of the unions we are in favour of doing this.

While we are in favour of working on a unified basis with these forces we consider it absolutely necessary to maintain an independent political focus. This is where the majority of socialist forces in Mexico today do not agree: they have been so attracted to the Cardenas project they are now discussing dissolving themselves into his new party. Therefore we have to swim against the current, proposing an orientation of unity orientation for the mass movement and united political action, but keeping a very clear socialist and revolutionary profile of our own.

Within the mass movement this has been well understood. Many other socialists said that we would be pushed to one side when we refused to withdraw our comrade Rosario Ibarra as candidate for President; they said we would be seen as divisive. When it came to defending the Cardenas victory which Rosario and we did, we found that this was wrong.

People were quite able to understand that we did not agree with Cardenas but that we were democratic fighters. I can give you an example where five days after the elections there was a demonstration where one of our comrades was a speaker. There were forces there who had never heard us before, and our speaker said 'we are not Cardenistas, we are socialists'. She explained what our programme was, and why we were fighting for democracy; she was the most applauded.

Normal people who are taking up political action for the first time are interested in what we have to say. It is the ex-socialists who are the most critical of us. We think there is not only a historical need to maintain an independent socialist profile, but a big opportunity to do this and build the PRT.

PHOTO: Julio Etchard/Reflex



Placards from the successful 'no' campaign against Pinochet

Chile

A difficult struggle ahead

After General Pinochet's brutal military coup ended the 'Popular Unity' government of Salvador Allende in September 1973, over 2000 refugees were welcomed into Britain and a serious solidarity campaign was created. Political discussion took place among a wide layer of activists.

Before and after the coup, debate about Chile brought up a lot of the key questions of revolutionary tactics and strategy – how to build political alliances; the nature of the state and the role of the army (especially after Allende brought military chiefs into his government); and how to prepare the masses for the bourgeoisie's violent reaction. It seemed to crystallise many of the debates going in Europe at the time between reformists and revolutionaries.

Today the situation after the

referendum requires the same sort of serious discussion, although the themes of the debate have shifted with the changed circumstances. The Chilean people are confronted with the problem of how to dismantle a dictatorship that has been in control of affairs since it crushed the mass movement in 1973.

The question of power is not posed in the immediate way it was in 1970-73. Pinochet's regime was shaken by its October defeat but is not on the verge of collapse. Though internal differences inside the military and bourgeoisie have got worse, we should not mistake the eventual removal of Pinochet for the end of the regime.

Looking at the actual figures – which are more or less free of fraud – the 43 per cent in favour of Pinochet represents a significant social base of the traditional middle classes, better-off farmers, backward rural layers, the

bourgeoisie and the military. Economic growth on Thatcherite lines has benefitted this base.

On the other side, the Convergence for a 'No' vote is made up of many parties. In the elections in 15 months time it will not be easy for them to agree on a common front or candidates. Pinochet's strength has always partly been the result of the weakness and division among his opponents. The referendum came after the regime had – through a mixture of repression and legal concessions to the more moderate parties – ridden out the optimum in the movement between 1983 and the failed July-September 1986 general strikes.

The Convergence is dominated politically by the Christian Democrats, who supported the 1973 coup and the fascist 1980 constitution. All major factions of the Socialist

Party (SP) are doing their best to develop a moderate coalition with the Christian Democrats (CD). The rising star of the SP, Ricardo Lagos is a sort of Felipe Gonzalez figure and is moderate enough to be acceptable to the CD. He says Allende was too 'extreme'.

The U.S. State Department is very actively involved with the CD and all moderate forces. The CD are more concerned with preventing the mobilisation against the regime turning into any sort of radical social mobilisation than in precipitating the downfall of the regime. CD president, Gabriel Valdes, does not mince words:

'The rational way out cannot be other than an agreement with the military so that they fulfil their responsibilities and show political will to open up the transitional process.' (ASPI, No. 186 Aug. 1986).

The Convergence have been engaged in exploratory discussions through third parties with 'moderate' sectors of the army.

What about the left of the movement? Both the Communist Party (CP) and the MIR (International Revolutionary Movement – Castroist) are outside the Convergence. The CD have in any case rejected political agreements with these forces.

The CP, MIR and the Almeya faction of the SP are in an alternative front, the Popular Democratic Movement (MDP). Over the past years these parties have been riven by internal debate. The CP and MIR only decided to support the campaign for the 'No' vote in the final run-up to the

What are the main political groupings and options currently on offer to Chilean workers after the recent referendum defeat for General Pinochet's 15 year-old dictatorship?
DAVE KELLAWAY has been talking to a Chilean comrade and offers a summary.

"Pinochet's regime was shaken by its October defeat, but is not on the verge of collapse..."

referendum in the face of the obvious enthusiasm of the masses for striking any sort of blow against the dictatorship.

During the Allende government the CP was politically to the right of the SP and other left forces. Following the trauma of the coup, the bloody repression against its militants, and then the Nicaraguan experience, it made a shift to more hard line positions, transforming its armed cadres into a sort of armed liberation front – the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front – in December 1983. The Front has been able to carry out limited armed actions against the repressive forces. Since the referendum, two of its militants have been reported killed while bombing electrical installations (*Guardian* 7.11.88). Its most spectacular action was the abortive assassination of Pinochet in 1986. This action provoked further debate inside the CP and an overwhelming majority of its cadres in the Front (particularly the youth) split from the party.

The debate was basically over how to participate in any of the limited openings for mass work, the correct policy for political alliances, and the role of armed struggle. The official Communist Party leadership around Corvalan has drawn back from its 'people's rebellion' line and is talking again of dialogue with the military.

Although the CP has regained a good part of its cadres in the Front, there is still a large grouping independent of it, and the Front acts autonomously from the party. A similar debate has developed inside the MIR, which also led to a split last year. Pascal Allende's current, which favoured a line of armed struggle and working with the Front, expelled a current around Nelson Guitierrez, which wanted an approach based more on using all the semi-legal openings and 'moderating' their political line.

There is another armed struggle grouping called MAPU-LAUTARO, which is much smaller but engages in Robin Hood-type appropriation and distribution. The immediate social base of all these more radical sectors of the movement is to a great extent among the youth, unemployed and the shantytown dwellers. The traditional CP base in the trade unions has been devastated by unemployment and repression.

One of the remarkable sights commented on by Chilean revolutionaries has been the way working people after the referendum were going up to members of the repressive forces and shaking hands. Memories seem so short. But a whole generation of militants were lost and many of the young people most involved in the

referendum mobilisations do not remember the Allende years.

A pacifist ideology is being encouraged by the Church, the CD, the SP and the media. 'Marxist' parties are still illegal, and it is difficult for new activists to find out about alternative ideas. The regime has tolerated the public activity of personalities identified with the banned CP so they are involved in discussions with Convergence parties; but the regime invokes the CP's illegality as soon as it tries to organise seriously.

Reports from Chile suggest that after all the referendum excitement there is a relatively passive atmosphere. Pinochet is firmly sticking to the schedule laid down in the constitution – under which he stays in charge until presidential and congress elections in 15 months time. Meanwhile he is reorganising the military to consolidate his power.

Pinochet will remain head of the armed forces, and the military will appoint 40 per cent of the congress. Rumours are rife that his wife might stand for president!

On the other hand the Convergence is paralysed in discussions about acceptable candidates, and for the moment is respecting the timetable. For the U.S. State Department the situation is promising – the transition can be calmly organised while Pinochet could be conveniently dumped if there were to be an upsurge of the masses.

For the left in Chile it is not easy. All the practical problems of organising under continuing repression remain. The left has to relate to the masses' desire for democracy while challenging the CD's right to lead such a movement. While not clearly challenging the CD and moderate sectors, the Communist Party, in a commune since the referendum, does differentiate itself from the Convergence:

"The enemy is the dictatorship and not other sectors of the opposition. We propose unity to all other sectors. Our call for a programme of meetings and marches to support the demand for Pinochet's resignation made by the United Command of Shantytown residents... such a [presidential candidate] would have to emerge from the popular majority and not from a group of parties."

(from *New Worker* Nov.88).

Despite such criticism, eventual CP support for a moderate CD candidate cannot be ruled out. Corvalan, CP general secretary, is on record as being in favour of dialogue and a 'consensus government' that they would support from the outside (see *International Viewpoint*, 105)

Another approach is to fight for a

front in the upcoming elections based on independent working class parties – which in practice would mean arguing against a CD presidential candidate in favour of an SP reformist.

Obviously within such a defensive united front the left could raise slogans (as the MIR currently does) for revoking the 1980 Constitution, for a freely elected Constituent Assembly, for freeing all political prisoners and the return of exiles, for dismantling the secret police and of course anti-austerity demands. Strengthening and broadening the forces around the MDP and rebuilding the CUT (Chilean TUC) is also important. If at the end of the day the only opposition candidate were a Christian Democrat, then the tactical problems for the left would be more complicated.

It is not clear how the revolutionary forces supporting the armed struggle fronts would intervene in such processes. An extreme position of refusing any participation in any 'reformist' alliance or 'fronts for democracy' could allow the CD and SP all the space they need in the mass movement to lead it into a dead end.

The dilemma for the Chilean left is how to maintain a clear revolutionary option (including an armed capability) opposed to a smooth transition and yet not isolate oneself from the masses. The experiences of both Spain after Franco, and the Philippines after Marcos show it is all too easy for revolutionary currents to underestimate imperialism's room for manoeuvre (declaring the so-called impossibility of 'peaceful transitions') and to fail to understand the masses' current consciousness.

In the Chilean struggle today, solidarity is still important. Repression has to be denounced – 3 people have already been killed in demonstrations since the referendum. Not all the political prisoners have been released. Eight thousand people have been sacked from government work-schemes as a punishment for a 'No' vote.

The Chile Solidarity Campaign recently sent an all-women delegation composed of J. Ruddock, M. Prosser and others to meet popular organisations in Chile. Such initiatives need our support, particularly when the mass media now tend to mention Pinochet as an avuncular type who has brought an economic boom and organises democratic votes!

We should be trying to develop, within a general solidarity effort, what support we can for groups in Chile who have a clear, socialist perspective against the dictatorship.

"One of the remarkable sights... has been the way working people, after the referendum, were going up to members of the repressive forces and shaking hands. Memories seem so short..."

PHOTO: Julio Etchard/Reflex



Castro speaking in Havana

Cuban Revolution – 30 years on

Castro's unique opportunity

The evolution of the Cuban revolution cannot be properly understood unless it is seen in a world context. Whatever our verdict on the personal qualities of Fidel Castro and his team, their scope for action was defined by many factors outside their own borders and out of their direct control.

Simply to look at the policies or political origins of the Castro leadership in isolation from the specific conditions which shaped their options and their actions is as futile as trying to analyse the defeat of the British 1984 miners' strike without examin-

ing the role of the Tory and TUC leaders, or discussing the problems of the Nicaraguan revolution without examining the role of US imperialism and the Kremlin leaders.

Nobody would dispute that in comparison with equivalent leaderships of post-war revolutionary struggles, the Castro team was quite extraordinary in its tenacity and its attempts to assert its independence not only from the USA, but also (in the early days) from Moscow. Where other leaders buckled under and abandoned revolutionary or even radical policies rather than break their alliances with sections of the capitalist class, Castro was from the start prepared to split from

former bourgeois allies who would not stay the pace.

However this is not to say Castro's policies were those of revolutionary marxism: his uncompromising line towards the largely impotent national bourgeoisie was not matched by any coherent development of working class organs of power. Capitalism was overturned *from above* in Cuba rather than by workers' mass action: the Cuban workers have still never held state power directly in their hands.

It was 18 months from the Rebel Army's seizure of power in January 1959 to the sweeping measures of nationalisation which finally broke Cuba's links with imperialism, expropriated most remaining Cuban capital, and established a deformed workers' state. During this time the thinking of the Fidelistas had developed from initially quite limited democratic reforms to embrace a wholesale overturn of the previous economic system as the only way to combat the pressure of US imperialism.

This development was also assisted by Castro's ability to retain and mobilise the enthusiasm of the Cuban masses, utilising the anti-imperialist sentiments of a nation breaking the yoke of dependence on US capital. Conversely, had Castro utilised his energies and talents to arguing for concessions to imperialism rather than defiance, he could certainly have divided if not totally derailed the revolutionary movement.

However the undoubted subjective strengths of the Castro leadership were not enough in themselves: they were able to develop in a uniquely favourable historic situation which meant that options were on offer to Castro that had not been open before and have not been open to liberation struggles since.

The first major advantage was the extent to which the old Cuban state machinery under Batista simply and abruptly collapsed in 1958-9. The armed forces and police, riddled with corruption, saw the mass desertion of the senior officers and conceded defeat to a Rebel Army of not more than 1,500 guerrillas (albeit with widespread popular support, as evidenced by the week-long general strike in Havana which brought Castro to power with hardly a shot fired in the capital).

The nearest comparison to the January 1959 situation was the collapse and mass exodus of the Yugoslavian bourgeoisie which had thrown in its lot with the occupying Nazi forces prior to the victory of Tito's communist-led partisans in 1944. In Cuba, too the collapse of the old state machine was followed by the deser-

January 1989 marks the 30th anniversary of the victory of Fidel Castro's Rebel Army over the Cuban dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Since then many guerrilla and left wing political movements and have attempted to follow the so-called 'Cuban Road'. Here JOHN LISTER, author of a controversial book 'Cuba: Radical Face of Stalinism', offers an analysis of Castro's strengths and weaknesses that helps explain the failure of subsequent revolutions which tried to follow the Cuban example.

"Gorbachev is if anything, less likely than Brezhnev to risk promoting conflict in Washington's 'backyard.'"

tion of the major capitalists.

By 1961 the abject failure of Kennedy's Bay of Pigs invasion attempt showed the extent to which the old reactionaries had simply upped and left Cuba to carry on their nefarious activities in Miami or elsewhere.

The second, quite decisive, factor was the changes taking place in Kremlin policy from 1960 onwards. The Khrushchev leadership, beset by an economic crisis at home, was also wrestling with the problem of how to counter a new US military build-up aggressively promoted by new sabre-rattling president Kennedy, and including new Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) capable of hitting Soviet targets from US soil.

Khrushchev was also facing a new political competitor to Moscow's influence within the once monolithic stalinist movement; Mao Zedong's Chinese bureaucracy had emerged in open opposition, splitting various national communist parties and seeking a new periphery of contacts for Beijing as levers of diplomatic pressure against imperialism.

For years, the Moscow line for communist parties in the 'third world' (and especially Latin America) had been to respect the 'spheres of influence' agreed with imperialism in the post-war settlement, and seek alliances with 'progressive', 'anti-imperialist' sections of capitalists. This line in Cuba had led the CP into a long-term accommodation with Batista, and vigorous opposition to Castro's guerrilla movement until the writing was clearly on the wall in the final months of the dictatorship. The Maoists, on the other hand, while still embracing popular frontist politics, leaned much more towards the type of guerrilla tactics favoured by Castro.

The Kremlin leaders therefore had to jockey between their instincts – of suspicion towards revolutionary movements not under their control – and their need to swing back their global relationship of forces with US imperialism: they wanted to head off the Chinese challenge to their authority in the emerging movement of liberation struggles – but without triggering a new surge of potentially embarrassing revolutionary action.

Castro and Guevara were able to take advantage of this unique opening – responding to the escalating US boycott of Cuban sugar and economic blockade by turning to Moscow and Beijing for support. When Moscow was slow to respond, Guevara would persuade Beijing to show support – and then return to negotiate more from Moscow.

Soviet economic aid was followed by what has ever since remained a free

supply of armaments to Cuba; and this in turn was followed by the most remarkable promise of all – Khrushchev's pledge to use Soviet armed force, even missiles, to guarantee the defence of the infant revolutionary regime 90 miles from Florida. This stands in sharp contrast to subsequent Soviet policy on the much more distant Nicaragua.

Khrushchev plainly hoped that a spin-off from this would be to site Soviet intermediate range missiles in Cuba – a low-budget response to Kennedy's ICBM threat. Though in the 1962 'Cuban missiles crisis' this option was abandoned, the commitment to Cuba has remained a major (and expensive) aspect of Kremlin strategy and foreign policy.

No similar situation has opened up since 1959. The closest comparison would be with the huge military support given by the Soviet bureaucracy (and Cuba) to the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia since 1977. However this support ran no risk of direct US retaliation, and simply served to protect Mengistu's reactionary regime against US-backed destabilisation and legitimate national liberation struggles of the Eritrean and other oppressed peoples.

In fact it has been not Cuba – with its break from both imperialist and national capital, its military and economic reliance upon Soviet support and its subsequent political assimilation into the Kremlin orbit – that has been the model for subsequent liberation movements, so much as Algeria.

The Ben Bella leadership of the Algerian anti-imperialist National Liberation Front (FLN) was of a different calibre from Cuba's Fidelistas; but different, too, was the attitude of the USSR, which was not seriously interested in Algeria or prepared to offer substantial support. Though the FLN as a mass movement was many times stronger than Castro's ramshackle July 26 Movement, the defeat of French imperialism was followed not by a break from imperialism but a renegotiation of terms and the reconstruction of the bourgeois state machinery, which we have just recently seen in action against militant workers and youth.

Very different, too, was the situation after the 1979 Sandinista victory over dictator Somoza in Nicaragua.

●Unlike Cuba, which had been a major base of US investment, the Nicaraguan economy was weak, and dominated by national capitalists, substantial sections of which had thrown in their lot with the anti-Somoza struggle – but then *stayed on* as a vocal and stubborn obstacle to progress;

●Cuba is an island; but Nicaragua's extensive borders with Honduras and Costa Rica have given Somoza's old National Guard and other CIA-backed mercenaries the chance to regroup and mount continual cross-border sabotage and terrorism;

●Soviet leaderships since 1979 have shown little or no economic or military commitment to defend Nicaragua, and used their leverage on Havana to limit Cuba's involvement. Gorbachev is if anything less likely than Brezhnev to risk promoting a conflict in Washington's 'back-yard'.

●The Sandinista leaders themselves, for all their courageous defiance of US pressure, have always insisted that their goal is not a workers' state or socialism, but a mixed economy. It is by no means certain that even if total external support were forthcoming the Sandinistas would opt for the 'Cuban Road'. Significantly Fidel Castro himself has been among those advising them not to.

Thirty years on, therefore, the Cuban Revolution stands as an inspiration to many millions of workers and peasants around the world, but not a finished 'model' for today's revolutionary struggles. With the partial exception of Nicaragua, every attempt to export the 'lessons' of the Cuban struggle have proved a total disaster, costing the lives of thousands of gallant guerrilla fighters.

In stressing the material gains for Cuban workers and the superiority of the Cuban system to the viciously exploitative capitalist regimes of Latin America and elsewhere, we must not forget the extent to which this is underwritten by multi-billion dollar subsidies from the USSR.

While welcoming the internationalism of the Cuban military effort that is helping to defend Angola from South African and reactionary terrorist attacks, we should remember that Soviet endorsement of this is also linked to Cuban military involvement in repressing the Eritrean struggle for self-determination.

Fidel Castro may provide a pleasant contrast to General Jaruzelski and his ilk, the grey-faced bureaucrats who have led only police-state regimes in eastern Europe. But for all his achievements and popularity, Castro's survival is partly because he now represents the 'acceptable', radical face of Stalinism.

The book *Cuba; Radical Face of Stalinism* by John Lister is still available at £4.50 including postage, from *Socialist Outlook*.

"...the Cuban revolution stands as an inspiration to many millions of workers and peasants around the world, but not as a finished 'model' for today's revolutionary struggles."



Who's next for the treatment? Thatcher has massively increased police powers

Thatcherism: the coming of the strong state

Has the left underestimated the extent to which state power in Britain is being transformed by Thatcher? PHIL HEARSE argues that it has, and that there is a drift towards a new form of authoritarianism, with some similarities to what Trotsky called 'bonapartism'.

WHILE Mrs Thatcher was in Poland praising free trade unions, drastic new restrictions on the right to strike in Britain were being outlined in a new 'code of practice'. While not being legally enforceable, they will be 'taken into account' by judges when deciding if particular strikes are lawful.

These guidelines are far beyond anything in the judicial armoury of any other advanced capitalist state. The guidelines call for a 70 per cent 'yes' vote in strike ballots before industrial action is undertaken, and conditions on ballots which put all the cards in the hands of scabs and management.

In itself this is a drastic and extremely authoritarian piece of legislation for a bourgeois democracy to introduce in peacetime. But it is just one of an array of violent attacks on democratic rights

which are transforming the mode of government and state power in Britain. In assessing this, it is necessary not just to look at formal, juridical forms – although these are very important – but the real social content of various instances of power.

In the 1970s, sections of the left – most notably the Workers Revolutionary Party – argued that Britain already had, or was about to have, a form of dictatorship. These absurd and catastrophist declarations have in my view almost numbed the left to what is, in the third term of Thatcherism, a real drift to the strong state.

Many comrades in the socialist movement are blind to the advent of the strong state because they think that provided we don't have either full military dictatorship or fascism, then we must have an unproblematic 'bourgeois democracy'. This was not Trotsky's approach.

He argued strongly that there can be many different combinations of the parliamentary form with dictatorial government, in which parliament is a 'fig leaf' for executive power. His writings on 'bonapartism' (a term derived by analogy with the French regime of Louis Bonaparte, who seized power in a coup d'état in December 1851) reveal this concern with the gradations between straightforward bourgeois democracy and the drift to dictatorship.

In order to make an assessment of whether Thatcherism is a new form of state authoritarianism, we have to assess just exactly what the Thatcherite project is about, for the economy, civil society and the state.

Thatcherism has gone well beyond the economic 'monetarism' of the early 1980s to become a huge project of reactionary social engineering. This counter-revolutionary strategy involves dismantling the central props of the post-1945 consensus – the mixed economy and the welfare state. It also involves downgrading the role of social democracy and the trade union bureaucracy as partners of the government.

This counter-revolutionary scheme has also necessitated a counter-revolution in democratic rights and the form of government. Let us first just list some of the areas in which democratic rights have been thrown back:

- Trade union legislation has banned many forms of effective strike action, and the code of conduct will further weaken the legitimate right to strike. The formal right to belong to a trade union has come under attack for the first time.
- Judicial censorship of the media, and informal censorship of the media through government intervention in the broadcasting authorities, has increased drastically.
- The right to demonstration and public assembly has been severely curtailed through new police powers and public order acts.
- A reactionary, almost feudal, poll tax is being introduced which will drive many poorer people off the electoral register altogether.
- The powers of the police and judiciary have been increased in many fields, including the abolition of unanimous jury verdicts, the right to silence, and the automatic right to legal representation during interrogation.
- Additional openly anti-lesbian and gay legislation, clause 28, has been introduced for the first time since 1957.
- New legislation aimed at restricting the rights of black people, the 1988 immigration act, has been introduced.

These attacks on democratic rights are however just part of the picture. What is unique about Thatcherism is the drive to concentrate power in the hands of central government, and within central government in a tiny clique of people around Thatcher, who is taking on more and more of an all-powerful, bonapartist, role.

The centralisation of power is of course illustrated by the attempt to destroy whole areas of potential counter-power – abolish-

ing the metropolitan councils, and attempting to crush all levels of local government as institutions dispensing any real power.

Wielding its huge parliamentary majority when necessary, the Thatcher government has swept aside with contempt many of the arenas of formal consultation with the trade union bureaucracy, and even the official Labour opposition.

Even more striking, however, is the style of government which Thatcher has organised. Tony Benn's recent diaries show that governments of the 1960s and 1970s continued to take votes in cabinet meetings. This is not the case with Thatcher, who increasingly even ignores cabinet meetings. She has developed a web of semi-official committees, including some senior ministers and civil servants, through which all power is uniquely concentrated in her.

Now it is quite true that all forms of capitalist rule combine coercion and consent, and that no 'perfect' bourgeois democracy, in which all the formal legal and political rights of the masses generally ascribed to this form of government has ever actually existed. But it must also be true that when the right to strike is restricted, when legal rights are whittled away, and when even the right to public assembly is severely circumscribed, you have something other than just a 'normal' bourgeois democracy.

The comrades of *Socialist Newsletter* have described it as 'semi-bonapartism' – something between bonapartist dictatorial rule and bourgeois democracy. I think their characterisation is as good as any. But whatever term we use, we have to accept that what is being put in place is a state apparatus, state powers, and governmental forms qualitatively 'stronger' from a bourgeois viewpoint than at any time this century, outside of war time.

Thatcher has always had strong links with ultra-right wing factions in the Tory party and on its edges. At the time of her election to the Tory leadership, Thatcher's election campaign was masterminded by an ultra-right ideologue called Robert Moss, well known for his association with the Freedom Association. These people always had a much more right wing agenda than the formal election programme of the Tories in 1979

or 1983.

Recent revelations² about the role in the Tory party of bodies like the Committee for Free Britain and the International Freedom Federation, and of semi-official Tory bodies like the privatisation pressure group PULSE in local government, make one thing absolutely clear. This government is not only to the right of Ted Heath in 1970-73. Today power is concentrated in a government which ideologically represents the ultra-right of British politics.

The ultra-right in government works together with a whole web of political organisations and associations which are much more serious, and more tapped into the centres of power, than fascist organisations like the National Front. Dictatorship in Britain will not come through these marginal groups, but through much

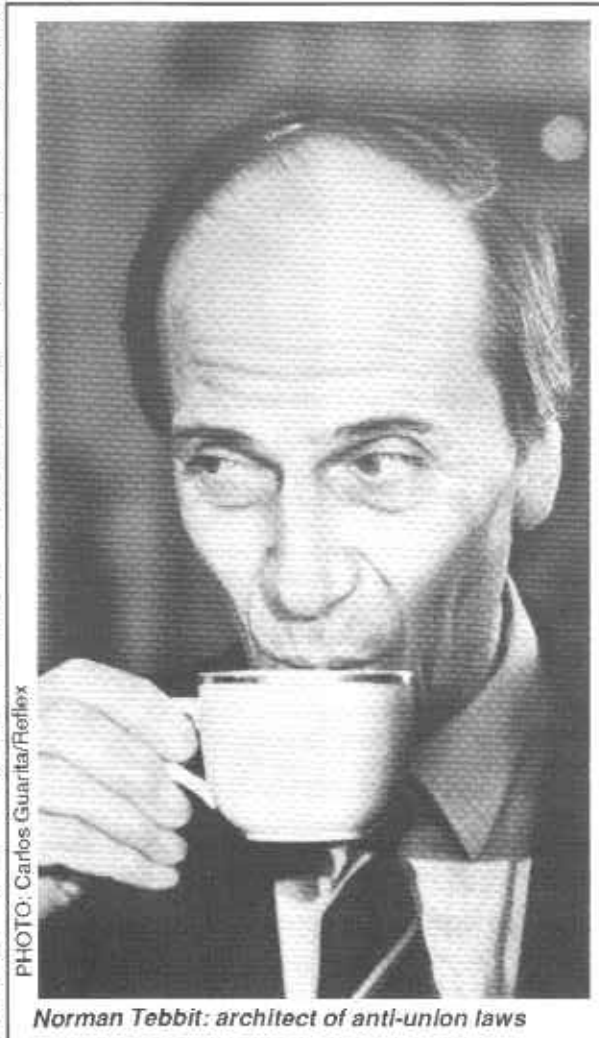


PHOTO: Carlos Guarita/Reflex

Norman Tebbit: architect of anti-union laws

PHOTO: Piers Cavendish/Reflex



Big Sister is watching you – and curbing what you watch!

more well-connected groups inside and on the fringes of official Toryism.

The Tory ultra-right has strong links with co-thinkers in the United States. An International Freedom Federation meeting at this year's Tory conference billed Lord Young, David Hart of the Committee for a Free Britain, and Richard Perle, US foreign affairs and arms control 'expert', dubbed 'the Prince of Darkness'. Perle, whose sinister visage can be regularly seen adorning BBC Two's *Newsnight* programme, is touring the world warning of the dangers of Gorbachev.³

Many socialist activists would argue that before we can talk of the imposition of a 'strong state' there have to be major defeats inflicted on the working class – like the coup d'état which brought De Gaulle to power in France in 1958. I would make two points about this argument.

First, we have seen major defeats of the British working class – the miners' strike, the local government rate-capping struggle, Wapping, and a host of others. These are not world historic defeats like 1933 in Germany, or even of the scale of 1926 in Britain. But they are major defeats which have transformed the relationship of class forces and laid the basis for the strong state.

The second point I would make is that we should not see the transformation of government forms in capitalist society as necessarily involving a putsch or a coup. Hitler became the German chancellor legally in 1933, although he utilised his position at the apex of the state apparatus to organise the Nazi coup against parliamentary democracy and the workers' organisations.

In summary, then, I would say that we have in Thatcherism the extraordinary concentration of government power which is, to a certain extent, 'above' the classes, although like every form of bourgeois rule serving the ultimate interests of capital.⁴

But what are the conclusions of this assessment? Do we not run the risk of demoralising people by telling them that we already have a strong state in place? The current situation of 'semi-bonapartism' is far from being a finished dictatorship, despite enormous government power. And democratic freedoms are far from having been finally crushed. But they will be, inexorably, unless the left is capable of mounting the boldest possible challenge to Tory authoritarianism.

This means – without sacrificing the political independence of the workers' movement – building the broadest possible alliances with democratic public opinion, including in the Liberal democrats, SDP and the Church, and even Tory 'wets' in defence of democratic rights. Many sections of the intelligentsia and middle class can be mobilised around specific questions, especially the right of free speech in the media.

Second, the left has to give thorough and relentless attention to raising issues involving breaches of democratic rights – including issues which are 'difficult' ones, like the fitting up and vicious sentences doled out to alleged Irish republican volunteers.

Third, the left has to constantly pay attention to and denounce the actions of the political police (MI5 and the Special branch), the state's paramilitary gangster forces (SAS and armed 'instant response' police units) and the ordinary police and judiciary. In particular it means defence of those sections of the oppressed, especially black people, for whom the state has *always* been a 'strong state'.

Every time a bank robber is shot dead without challenge, a republican volunteer sent to prison for 25 years, or a television play is banned – and these things go unchallenged – it brings the epoch of a real dictatorship closer.

Footnotes

1. See for example 'Bonapartism and Fascism' in *Writings 1934-5*, Pathfinder 1974 edition, page 51.
2. *Guardian* 4th November 1988
3. Peter Gowan has drawn my attention to the vogue for the writings of Carl Schmitt in ultra-right circles in the US and Britain. Schmitt was a leading Nazi jurist after 1933, but before that was a right wing critic of Hitler, regarding the Nazis as opportunistic. Schmitt argued that the Nazis tended towards the 'total state' which politicised every sphere of civil society around the Nazi project. He put forward the much more Thatcher-like notion of the 'absent state' – the de-politicisation of every instance of civil society and the concentration of the 'right to politics' in the state apparatus. While one involves political mobilisation and the other demobilisation, the effect can end up being the same. On Schmitt, see G. Lukacs *The Destruction of Reason* (Merlin).
4. As above, page 53.



Queuing for work in Dublin

Crisis in Dublin

The political and economic crisis facing the Dublin government has deepened considerably. Here, DAVID COEN, looks at the history of the twenty-six county statelet and its economy, and questions whether the British strategy of encouraging stable bourgeois rule, north and south, has any hope of succeeding.

The *Economist's* Ireland survey earlier this year was quite clear: 'No Cuts Charlie' has become 'Haughey the Hatchet'. This was a reference to the prime minister's about turn on economic policy in the twenty-six counties since coming back to power in March 1987.

In addition, Haughey's willingness to give in to British demands on security and extradition, raises again the question of whether or not the bourgeoisie in the south is capable of pursuing its own political interests independently of Britain. This is by no means just an academic problem because the development of the political situation in the 26 counties has serious implications for the ability of the British to defeat republicans and impose a stable bourgeois rule in the whole country. Recognising this and their relative weakness in the south, Sinn Fein have over the past few years begun to tackle that problem. But the discussion of the class character of the 26 county statelet and the method of assembling the forces on the island to bring about a 32 county socialist republic are at a very early stage.

Much of the debate so far has centred on economic questions, often in a very crude way as if the dominant capitalist interests in the south of Ireland could simply be read off from the different levels of investment. On the basis of changing trade and investment patterns the Workers' Party denies that the British are any longer the main problem in Ireland such is the level of US, Japanese and West German investment. The southern bourgeoisie are denounced as historic failures for the lack of industrial development and as backward reactionaries.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) point to the recent export of capital from the south as evidence of the independence of the capitalist class. For both, the struggle over the 'national question' is a blind alley away from the struggle for socialism, though the SWP at least takes the side of those fighting British imperialism.

The errors of both flow, however, from an economic approach: the dominant capitalist interests in Ireland are understood mainly by the levels of investment, whereas for the British the main problem in Ireland is a political one namely the dangerous instability of bourgeois rule north and south. Therefore the arguments about whether the level of British investment in Ireland is the reason for the continuing British presence are side issues. What is crucial, and something for which the British have been willing over the past twenty years to pay an ever-increasing price, is the level of political stability – whether a political solution is possible which will ensure a stable bourgeois rule in the long term and not threaten any of the political, military or economic interests of imperialism in that region.

Nobody can doubt that there is an economic crisis in the south of Ireland. Unemployment is approaching 20 per cent; emigration is rising towards the levels of the 1950s when the depth of the crisis began to put the very existence of the state into question, and the foreign debt per head of the population is higher than that of Brazil. Of all the indicators of the crisis, the debt is the most significant, not simply because of its size, but for what it represents for the ruling class, and especially for Fianna Fail, the largest political party and one which has considerable electoral support from Irish workers. Put crude-

ly, the historical basis of Fianna Fail's appeal to the working class in the 26 counties was economic development: the promise of state intervention to create employment.

In the 1950s following the failure of the de Valera policy of industrialisation behind high tariff walls and the resultant high emigration, the viability of the 'Free State' itself came into question, with some people questioning the value of the relative independence won from Britain after 1921. The response of Sean Lemass, de Valera's successor as leader of Fianna Fail was to open up the economy to external capital and go for a strategy of exported growth. The debt crisis marks the failure of that policy. No section of the bourgeoisie has an alternative, so the political crisis is particularly acute.

In 1986, the national debt, at IR£25 billion, was the highest as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Europe. The ratio of debt to GDP was estimated at 145 per cent compared with an EEC average of 60 per cent. Nearly half of the debt was foreign and interest payments were eating up around one third of tax revenue. The present situation is not much changed other than the fact that the debt is not growing quite as quickly as it did in the period after 1981. At this level of borrowing the foreign bankers become increasingly nervous and the usual procedure is that no further loans are sanctioned until an International Monetary Fund (IMF) package is implemented.

Though out of government since 1982, Haughey was blamed for the debt spiral. Before the 1987 election he assured the voters there was a 'better way' than the massive cuts proposed by the Fine Gael/Labour Coalition

government. No sooner had he become leader of a minority Fianna Fail government than Haughey was implementing cuts on a scale which made the opposition gasp. In money terms (before adjusting for inflation), spending in 1988 will be three per cent down on 1987. In what are being described as the biggest cuts for 30 years, nurses are being sacked, hospitals closed, teachers and civil servants pushed into early retirement and wages frozen. Further cuts are planned in social security and it appears now that there will be no need for an IMF delegation to visit Dublin.

Though Haughey is blamed for the 'extravagance' of the borrowing and spending of the early 1980s, it is clear that the main target of the monetarist right is not just the actions of Haughey but the whole policy of public spending and state intervention into the economy which had been accepted by all governing parties at least since the 1940s. That it was such a cornerstone of Fianna Fail policy, and the speed with which Haughey has about turned on the issue, is a recognition both of the complete failure of past policy and a massive political problem for Fianna Fail. In the sense that this policy was accepted in the main by all sections of the ruling class in the south, the debt crisis is an index of the depth of the political crisis.

But a history of the successive failures of efforts at economic development also reveals something more fundamental about the class structure of the 26 counties and its relationship to imperialism. Despite the current fashion for historical revisionism and the downplaying of the role of imperialism in the underdevelopment of the economy, it is clear that the hold of the pro-imperialist/anti-development elements in the 'Free State' was much too strong for the populist republicanism of any Fianna Fail government since 1933. Furthermore, it is precisely these elements in agriculture and finance, politically organised by the Fine Gael party, which constitute the main hope for British initiatives at the moment and which represent the greatest obstacle to a 32 county socialist republic. If the debt crisis represents the historical failure of state intervention to promote development in the 26 counties, it is also the failure of more progressive sections of capital to overcome the obstacles placed in the path of development by a well-entrenched sector which derived most of its strength from the relationship with Britain and whose free-market, non-interventionist stance was just as virulent when it ruled briefly after independence as it is today. In some ways it can claim to have been vindicated by events, since the failure of state intervention to promote development lends credence to the free marketeers of today.

In summary, the debt crisis represents the failure of efforts at economic development, but the reasons for this failure must be sought in the balance of forces within the capitalist class in the 'Free State' following the civil war of 1921-23. The dominant sector of that class, which had fed for decades on the relationship with Britain,

successfully resisted all efforts at development which threatened their interests.

It might be argued that whatever the relevance of this class formation up to accession to the EEC in 1973, the 'modernising' impulse from Europe would be too strong to resist and that a fundamentally changed scenario now existed. This is not correct. A recent article in the most progressively oriented bourgeois paper in the south, *The Sunday Tribune*, shows that GDP per head compared to the EEC average is about the same (63 per cent) as it was in 1972 or 1961.

One of the main advantages of EEC entry according to its advocates in Ireland before 1973 was that because of its natural advantages in grassland, Irish agriculture could compete successfully against others in the EEC and the resultant economic boom would lead to economic development in other sectors, particularly agriculture-related. There undoubted-

“...the EEC boom actually reinforced the dominance within the economy of those very forces which historically had been the major obstacles to development: the large landed interests and the banks...”

ly was an economic boom in the 26 counties following entry to the EEC in 1973, which masked the post-oil crisis depression in the world economy after 1974, and there was a significant effect on agriculture.

But the EEC boom actually reinforced the dominance within the economy of those very forces which historically had been the major obstacles to development: the large landed interests and the banks.

The landed interests because the long term effect of EEC subsidies is the very reverse of that which was used to win small farmers to vote for EEC entry, namely to protect small farmers and to redistribute income; the banks, because many small farmers, carried away by the hype during the boom years of the mid-1970s borrowed heavily from the banks and found themselves being driven off the land when the boom ran out of steam in the late 1970s. At the same time the government became reliant on borrowing as a way of staving off harsh decisions on taxation and spending, but now that too is no longer an option. The political crisis may well lag behind the economic, but its effects on the political map of the whole island are likely to be huge.

The problem for the southern bourgeoisie,

especially the wing of it which has dominated the 26 counties politically, is that its basis of support within the working class is eroding. When the previous efforts at industrialisation failed in the 1950s, the very existence of the state was called into question. If high tariff barriers could not 'grow' native industry then Fianna Fail under Lemass were pragmatic enough to make a U-turn and positively encourage foreign investment. The contract was renewed; Fianna Fail support in urban areas was consolidated on the basis of job creation and high state spending.

Now, however, the post 1958 strategy has run into the sands and neither foreign capital invested nor borrowed can provide the impetus for development. The crisis of the 1950s returns with renewed force. Though, at the moment, the bourgeoisie has a massive political majority for its austerity policy, a big shake-up in the political situation is likely. The beneficiaries of this crisis could be the left in Ireland.

But it is the split in the bourgeoisie itself which is the most striking. Historically this has been between the large landed and banking interests represented by Fine Gael and the small farmers and small town businesses represented by Fianna Fail. A combination of the failure of the Fianna Fail strategy for economic development with the EEC induced boom in agriculture, the benefits of which went mainly to the larger farmers, has strengthened the landed sector both within the economy and politically. An 'agribusiness' sector is emerging which looks to the free market economics of the British Conservative Party and to the intensive agriculture of the American mid west. It is virulently anti working class and, having nothing to offer along the lines of the Fianna Fail 'development' policy, is likely to rely more and more on outright repression.

The Fianna Fail wing of the southern bourgeoisie shares a common history with Sinn Fein at least until 1926 and a common social base: small farmers, rural workers and the small town petty bourgeoisie, who have relied on the economic intervention of De Valera, Lemass, and earlier, Humphrey Guts. It attracts more support than all than all the other parties put together.

British strategy requires this unstable coalition to hold together and to bring it into the mainstream of pro-imperialist politics. But the strains inside this multi-class party are such that it seems likely to fragment as Haughey's austerity programme begins to bite. This is both Sinn Fein's opportunity and its weakness: opportunity, because of the possibility of winning a significant section of the southern working class away from its allegiance to Fianna Fail; weakness, because it is only recently that Sinn Fein have taken seriously the question of organising in the south. A socialist leadership which grasps the opportunity offered by the crisis of bourgeois rule in the south, will not only frustrate British strategy on the island, but significantly advance the prospect of a 32 county socialist republic.

China:

Fake figures from fake socialism

New figures have revealed the surprising extent to which the Chinese stalinist leadership has allowed private capitalism to grow within the nationalised economy. The following article by ZHANG KAI is edited from the original published in *October Review*, journal of the Hong Kong section of the Fourth International.

Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), for over three decades China practised fake socialism. When this met with dismal failure, the blame was put on socialism and state ownership, while a eulogy was sung to the vitality of capitalism and the private economy.

The Chinese News Agency reported 'from a reliable source' that a leader of the CCP, when he interviewed the head of state of an African country, said: 'from China's experience, I would advise you not to practise socialism, or at least not to practise general socialism.'

Almost at the same time, another CCP leader, when interviewing this leader of a black state, also advised him not to develop a state-owned economy as China did in the past; instead more private economy should be developed. (*Wen Hui Bao*, Chinese CP publication in Hong Kong, June 6, 1988).

The CCP did not deny or clarify this report. The two leaders were Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang.

Since their advice to other countries is not to practise socialism, it means China's past practice was in their view basically wrong, and therefore China should develop a private economy.

In fact what China practised for 30 years had nothing in common with socialism as advanced by Marx and Engels. In China, after the overthrow of capitalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, whereby the majority of the people exercise democratic management of the state, and the producers directly manage production, was not introduced. On the contrary, there was bureaucratic dictatorship and severe social injustice.

For several years, however, the CCP has allowed the private economy to develop in China, in violation of the prevailing constitution. Last March, a resolution was adopted at the First Session of the Seventh National People's Congress to revise some articles of the constitution - in order officially to protect the legal development of the capitalist economy.

But to what extent had the private economy grown before it was made legal? Probing this question can help predict developments after legalisation.

Private enterprises in the whole country, employing 3.6 million workers (on average 16 workers per enterprise); their proportion of the

total industrial output value of the country was less than one percent.

In fact the above figures were false, aiming to cover up the real situation. Only enterprises employing more than eight workers were considered to be part of the private economy; those with less were deemed to be the individual economy. Yet in terms of exploitation or private ownership of the means of production, there is no qualitative difference between an enterprise employing over eight workers and one employing only six.

Worse, the official figures were based on reports from employers, who were worried about official reaction, tending to report figures far below the real situation.

For example, let us look at Wenzhou City, where the private economy is most developed. Less than ten private enterprises are registered with the Industrial and Commercial Bureau, whereas the deputy director of the local CCP Policy Research Bureau pointed out that individual and private economy in the city has a weight of 41 per cent in the industrial sector, 33 per cent in the commercial sector and about two thirds in communications and transport. (*People's Daily* June 19, 1988). How can such economic activities be those of just ten enterprises? Yet the figure is the basis for compiling official statistics.

In June, a national conference on the study of the private economy was convened in Fuzhou: about 200 officials, theoreticians and representative private entrepreneurs almost unanimously agreed that the official statistics seriously underestimate the actual dimension of the private economy.

In Hebei Province, where the private economy was not very developed, official figures show 17,294 private enterprises. But findings by scholars showed that in just Handan Region (one of the ten regions of the Province) there were already 27,000 enterprises (based on the same official criteria).

The official term of 'persons engaged in the enterprises' includes both employers and the exploited workers, thus covering up the relationship of wage employment. While the official figure was 3.6 million people engaged in the private economy, Professor Ge Lin of Nanjing University took into account all workers, whether they were licensed or unlicensed, employed in enterprises above or below eight persons, and gave the figure of 30 million by the end of 1987.

The official claim that private enterprise constituted less than one percent of industrial output value is also unbelievable. Of course there is unevenness in development among different regions; but examples included Wuchuan in Guangdong Province, where the output value of private enterprises constituted 48 per cent of that in the whole country; in Kaiping county it was 35 per cent; 38 per cent in southern regions of Jiangsu Province; in the Wenzhou region, the weight was about 60 per cent in industrial output, 58 per cent in passenger transport volume and 65 per cent in freight transport volume; in Shishi City in Fujian Province the overwhelming majority of rural enterprises are already in private hands. Shishi City belongs to Jinjiang County where the output value of private enterprises was 61.4 per cent of all output value; in Chuangzhou County it was 67.4 per cent.

Rural enterprises have also developed rapidly in the past few years. According to Lei Dong, director of China's Industrial Economy Association, up to the end of 1987 there were 15.15 million rural enterprises, employing 79 million workers.

As for the development of individual enterprises, according to an article by Yuan Zhang, member of Jiangsu Province Planning Committee, by the end of 1986 there were already 12.11 million individual enterprises employing 18.4 million people - about 14 per cent of the total of workers employed in state and collective enterprises. His article said that these figures did not include enterprises that operated on a part-time basis, or not formally or usually in operation. 'Therefore the figures are much lower than the actual situation.'

Up to now, the official argument that China is still practising socialism has been that the output value of state-owned enterprises constitutes the majority of the country's total output value.

However according to Lei Dong, the proportion of the total output value of state-owned enterprises in the national economy fell from 83 per cent in 1978 to 67 per cent in 1987. The present trend is that the private economy is developing to the detriment of the state-owned enterprises. China is going further away from socialism, and the factors for developing socialism are being more and more undermined.

October Review may be contacted at GPO Box 10144, Hong Kong.

PHOTOS: Martine Stead



London rally celebrates fifty years internationalism



Ernest Mandel

Among the audience were many veterans of the movement, some of whom spoke from the floor. Charlie van Gelderen, an active supporter of *Socialist Outlook*, was the first speaker from the platform. Van Gelderen was present at the founding conference of the Fourth International held in Paris in 1938, at the home of Alfred Rosner. He recalled the bravery of the earliest trotskyist militants who frequently had to fight off physical attack from both fascists and stalinists. What was happening in the Soviet Union today was a vindication of those comrades.

Catherine Samary spoke on the Gorbachov phenomenon, a theme which ran through practically all the contributions of the speakers. She underlined the importance of the call made by Czech dissidents for a 'popular Helsinki', and the need to discuss a Europe-wide charter of basic democratic rights. Such a charter, which should include

Reviewed by
STEVE ROBERTS

OVER FOUR hundred people met in London's Conway Hall on November 11 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International.

The meeting was the largest ever organised by *Socialist Outlook*.

as one of its first demands, the right to a job, could unite workers of East and West, against the efforts of those like Thatcher who sought to divide Polish workers from their British sisters and brothers.

As chairperson Alan Thornett explained the platform of speakers was selected to demonstrate the unity of all three sectors of the world revolution for which the Fourth International fights.

Accordingly, the next speaker, Heather Dashner, a central leader of the Mexican PRT, spoke on the struggle of Latin American women for basic rights, and the way in which this had enriched and been informed by the experience of other women in the Fourth International.

Two other supporters of *Socialist Outlook* who had been active in the movement for a half-century then took the floor. Eileen Gersh explained the conditions under which she had joined the movement in Britain in the thirties,



Charlie van Gelderen

and Alex Acheson, now seventy-nine, spoke of the lessons he had drawn from his time in the movement.

The last speaker was Ernest Mandel, a leading spokesperson of the International for most of the period of its existence. He recalled that many had accused the International of being established on the basis of a conjunctural assessment, but in fact the International had based itself on the basis of a long-term revolutionary strategy. As with the previous internationals, the Fourth International was based on a programme and activities which expresses the historical needs of the proletariat.

The rally marked a strengthening of the presence of the International in Britain. It also strengthened *Socialist Outlook*. A collection made at the meeting raised £3200, successfully concluding an appeal for £31,000 as a down payment on the journal's new editorial offices.

Tigers the Indian army cannot tame

Sri Lankan President JR Jayewardene has announced presidential elections this year, a general election (the first in 11 years) to take place early next year, regional elections for the northern and eastern provinces, and his own resignation as President. The 82 year old president (also known as 'JR' or 'the old fox') leaves his proposed successor, the Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, a more divided Sri Lanka.

Not only is the Tamil population (25 per cent of the total population) continuing its fight for independence, but the Sinhalese community is deeply split, with the JVP (People's Liberation Front) launching armed attacks on the ruling United National Party, claiming that the Sri Lanka government has sold the island's sovereignty to the 50,000 Indian troops now fighting the Tamils.

The presence of the Indian troops in Sri Lanka and the call for elections in the northern and eastern provinces are a result of the accord signed between the Indian and Sri Lankan governments on July 29, 1987. The accord was followed by the 13th Amendment and the Provincial Council Act, passed by the Sri Lankan parliament in August 1987. But neither give any real autonomy – let alone independence – for the Tamil people. The real power is given to a Provincial Governor, appointed by a Sinhala President.

For the last year a war between the 50,000 strong Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has prevented elections from taking place. The war has cost the Indians 500 dead and 1,500 wounded, while the LTTE has lost 300 soldiers and 3,000 civilians have died. The war continues with no end in sight, though on nine occasions the IPKF has declared that the back of the LTTE had been broken. Cities and towns – even hospitals – in the northern and eastern provinces have been bombed by Indian planes. Young Tamil men have been executed on suspicion of support to the LTTE and Tamil women have been raped by Indian soldiers.

The LTTE has proposed a cease-fire since the arrival of the Indian troops on 10th October, 1987, and on August 9 1988 proposed a referendum to determine 'whether the Tamils accept the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, whether the IPKF should be withdrawn and replaced by an International Peace Keeping Force and whether or not the LTTE are the representatives of the Tamil people'. The LTTE further state that they are prepared to accept the accord if they are defeated in the referendum. But the proposals have been rejected by the Indian government.

India agreed to a five-day cease-fire in September 1988. This was extended to 10 days (en-



Tamil guerrillas

ding September 26) after the LTTE proposed a permanent cease-fire. The LTTE has proposed high level talks with India on the provincial elections in the northern and eastern provinces, but these did not take place because India demanded that the LTTE should hand over all weapons before talks could start, and arrested LTTE leaders in Madras, who are still in jail. The day after the cease-fire ended, India resumed military operations, killing an LTTE militant, leaving the LTTE with no choice but to continue the war and boycott the elections.

The Indian troops had expected a quick surrender of the LTTE. After all India has the fourth biggest army in the world. A million rupees was promised to anyone who could get Velupilai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, dead or alive. Prabhakaran has not been caught yet, and the LTTE has still not surrendered. The reason for this was admitted by the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Peacekeeping Force when on 30 March 1988 he said that 90% of the Tamil population are pro-LTTE.

The war against the LTTE has also created growing opposition and brought 300 arrests in India itself. In the Tamil Nadu province in the south of India the united opposition will make the withdrawal of the IPKF a main plank in the next general election.

So why has the Indian government got itself into such a mess? To understand the situation in Sri Lanka one has to understand its history.

Two nations in one island.

When the Portuguese first landed on the island in the beginning of the 16th century, they found two ancient kingdoms, Tamils in the north and eastern provinces and the Sinhalese in the south. The Portuguese, and the Dutch who came after them, governed the Tamil nation as a separate kingdom without violating its territorial integrity. In 1833 the British imposed a unified state structure amalgamating the two nations irrespective of ethnic differences – laying the foundation for the national conflict.

As elsewhere in the world, the British changed the economic structure of the colonies to benefit the interests of the ruling class in Britain. A plantation economy was introduced in Sri Lanka, which forced hundreds of thousands of Tamil labourers to migrate to the Sinhalese south of Sri Lanka. In the 1840s and 1850s a million Tamils were imported from Tamil Nadu in the south of India. A Sinhalese nationalism emerged under the banner of Buddhist revival, which attacked both the European colonialists and the Tamils.

For more than a century this million imported Tamils lived without any human or political rights, in conditions similar to slavery. With the Citizen Act of 1948 and the Indian Pakistani Citizen Act of 1949 only about 130,000 out of more than a million Tamils were able to acquire citizenship. Sri Lankan independence from Britain did not improve the situation for them. The Sinhalese ruling class has over the years done everything possible to destroy the national identity of the Tamils.

Pogroms against the Tamils in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1983 and since, have taken thousands of lives. Sinhalese colonists moved into Tamil areas in the north and east, confiscated Tamil property and drove them away from their traditional homeland. The national oppression penetrated into the sphere of language, education and employment.

Tamil resistance

The racial attacks increased Tamil national sentiments. In 1961 the (Tamil) Federal Party launched a civil disobedience campaign demanding federal autonomy, but won only empty promises. The situation did not change when an alliance between the national bourgeois party of Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka

Freedom Party (SLFP) and the traditional old left LSSP and the Communist Party came to power in 1970.

Radicalised Sinhalese youth organised in the JVP (People's Liberation Front) organised a premature insurrection, which was drowned in blood by the government. More than 10,000 JVP supporters were killed and another 15,000 imprisoned.

The Tamil youth also radicalised in those years: but neither the Tamil United Front nor the left movement offered them any concrete political alternative. So in 1972 the Tamil Tiger Movement was born, under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran. In 1976 the organisation changed its name to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam - Eelam being the name for the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

Also in 1976 the renamed Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) called for the 'restoration and reconstitution of the free, sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam based on the right to self-determination inherent to every nation'. The 1977 general elections gave a majority in Parliament to the right-wing United National Party, with the TULF as the leading opposition party.

A new wave of repression was launched against the Tamils, particularly against the LTTE. Large contingents of troops sent in for the 'Tiger hunt' brought the Tamil nation under total military occupation. A new constitution gave President Jayewardene absolute power and gave the Sinhala language and Buddhist religion extraordinary status.

The LTTE

The LTTE sees itself as the political and military leadership of the Tamil people's fight for national independence. The leadership of the LTTE has a marxist political programme that is very close to the strategy of permanent revolution:

'The political objective of our movement is to advance the national struggle along with the class struggle, or rather, our fundamental objective is national emancipation and socialist transition of our social formation'. 'The liberated socialist Tamil Eelam would be a revolutionary ally of the oppressed Sinhalese masses to fight and destroy the bourgeois state apparatus.' (*Liberation Tigers and Tamil Eelam Freedom Struggle*, pp 41-42).

Far from being a terrorist organisation devoting all its time to military operations, the LTTE understands the need for political work among the Tamil masses. This has of course become extremely difficult with 50,000 Indian troops occupying Tamil Eelam.

In order to stop the Sri Lankan government from being able to exploit divisions between the Muslim people in the Eastern province and the rest of the (Hindu) Tamils, an April 1988 agreement between the LTTE and the Muslim United



Sri Lankan president Jayewardene with Gandhi in 1986

Liberation Front guarantees the Muslims' right to 'security, equality and freedom' and an agreed share of land and job opportunities.

'It was agreed that in all future land distribution, the Muslim people will be entitled to not less than 35% in the Eastern Province, not less than 30% in the Mannar district and not less than 5% in other areas. The Muslim people will be entitled to job opportunities in the public sector in proportion to their population in each district.'

India's role in Sri Lanka

After Jayewardene came to power in 1977, India watched with concern as Sri Lanka's foreign policy became more and more independent from India's interests in the region. To force Sri Lanka back in line, India made an open intervention, conducting negotiations for peace in Sri Lankan capital Colombo, while giving military training and arms to Tamil militants to step up the armed struggle. The ulterior motive was to pile military pressure on the Sri Lankan government and force the Jayewardene regime to bow to the regional ambitions of the Indian Government.

India got the Sri Lankan government to sign an agreement, which guaranteed the unity of the Sri Lankan state under Sinhalese rule, but gave some limited autonomy to the northern and eastern provinces. For a year the Indian Peacekeeping Force was left to fight the LTTE, with the result that the 30,000-strong Sri Lankan army has not had one soldier killed since the arrival of the Indian troops.

The Indo-Sri Lanka accord was rejected by the LTTE 'because it fails to meet the minimum aspirations of our people'. 'This accord fails to recognize the Tamils of Eelam as a nation and categorises us only as ethnic in a multiracial set up... This accord does not identify the traditional homeland of Tamils and the right of unification of all Eelam Tamils into one nation.'

International solidarity

The Tamil people's fight for self-determination and for an independent Tamil Eelam is a just and progressive fight, which also undermines the reactionary Sri Lankan and Indian governments. All forces in Sri Lanka fighting for the right of self-determination for Tamil Eelam should therefore be supported in that fight.

This should be done irrespective of what one thinks about their political programmes and tactics: this is especially the case since the news blackout on events in the occupied Tamil areas makes it impossible to assess the actual tactics of the Tamil (or Sinhalese) groups involved, or even ascertain basic facts. Defending liberation fighters against repression does not commit marxists to defend their tactics.

There is no doubt that the LTTE is the leading force - politically and military - in the fight for a liberated Tamil Eelam. Part of the international solidarity with the Tamil people should therefore be to give the LTTE a platform, so their voice can be heard.

Finn Jensen

Sectarianism:

The lonely road to nowhere

DESPITE the best efforts of generations of dedicated trotskyst activists to win forces to their banner, most working class militants still know little or nothing of the politics of trotskysm.

What they do know is likely to be most influenced by two factors: their reaction to occasional witch hunting against trotskysm in the tabloid press; and whether they are deterred by their first impression of a trotskyst movement chaotically and destructively divided into countless warring factions and currents.

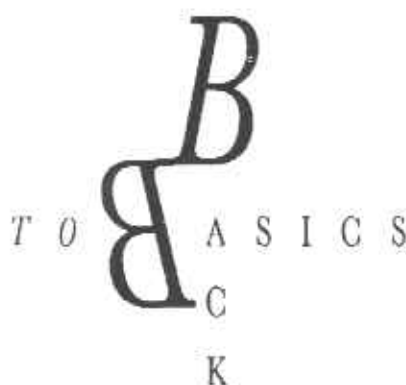
The taunts of '57 varieties' and the old Stalinist jibe that 'whenever there are 3 Trots in a room they are just waiting for the split' have more impact when so few people understand anything of the political background to the splits and organisational problems that have befallen the trotskyst Fourth International since it was founded 50 years ago.

The snide jokes also hit harder because despite the constant external pressures on the trotskyst movement, many of the most grievous wounds it has suffered have been inflicted by its own forces: a key factor in many cases has been the divisive role of sectarian politics.

Of course it is not necessary to be left wing or sectarian in the marxist sense of the term to suffer damaging splits: the abject confusion of the former SDP/Liberal Alliance, and the trench warfare between rival factions from the once monolithic British Communist Party show that. Indeed some splits are the result of healthy organisations expelling sectarian forces, or impatient sectarians finding an excuse to walk out and form something smaller and more 'pure'.

However many of the problems faced by trotskysm are traceable to the continuing tendency towards sectarianism — a term which when properly used is much more than a handy insult to throw at opponents. Sectarianism is a term to describe the relationship of a would-be 'marxist' organisation to the mass of the working class.

The first sects were of course the warring religious factions within, and then the many breakaway movements from the catholic church. 'Sectarianism' is still often used in this way in the media, especially when referring to



violent clashes between different communities which reporters classify simply in terms of religion — in the six counties of Ireland, for example.

The marxist use of the term focusses on the inward-looking, divisive aspect of the sects, which cut themselves off from rival schools of thought.

Leon Trotsky, fighting for the reconstruction of the Bolshevik revolutionary tradition, spelled out in 1935 what for marxists is the damaging essence of sectarianism: an indifference to the actual development and struggles of the workers' movement, a substitution of mere slogans and propaganda for active intervention:

'It is not enough to create a correct programme. It is necessary that the working class accept it. But the sectarian, in the nature of things, comes to a stop upon the first half of the task. Active intervention into the actual struggle of the workers' masses is supplanted for him [sic] by an abstract propaganda for a marxist programme...

The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a whole as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum: then the task would be solved.' (*Writings 1935-6* p152ff)

Trotsky goes on to examine some of the symptoms of sectarianism, one of the most common of which is to sink into conservative repetition of fixed, ready-made formulae rather than developing a living analysis of changing

reality. He shows that this weakness is in part the distorted outcome of the external pressures on the isolated, minority forces of the international Left Opposition as they battled for survival against the rising repressive tide of Stalinism and against social democratic and trade union bureaucracies:

'How could an element of sectarianism have failed to manifest itself in an ideological movement which stands irreconcilably opposed to all the dominant organisations in the working class, and which is subjected to monstrous, absolutely unprecedented persecutions all over the world?'

In part the emergence of dogmatic, wooden sectarian politics is the negative side of doggedly independent militants sticking to basic principles and refusing to bow the knee:

'Reformists and centrists readily seize upon every occasion to point a finger at our "sectarianism"; and most of the time they have in mind not our weak but our strong side: our serious attitude toward theory; our effort to plumb every political situation to the bottom, and to advance clear-cut slogans; our hostility to "easy" and "comfortable" decisions which deliver from cares today, but prepare a catastrophe on the morrow. Coming from opportunists, the accusation of sectarianism is most often a compliment.'

However sectarianism in its various forms has been a real and persistent problem in the Fourth International. Among its symptoms:

- A wooden 'orthodox' dogmatism, expressed by political currents which have sought to 'explain' everything in the post-war period by quotations and references to Trotsky's pre-war analysis. This has obstructed any serious or systematic development of the trotskyst programme to meet a host of new challenges. The most conspicuous weakness arising from this has been the lack of any coherent analysis or response to the complex role of post-war Stalinism in Eastern Europe and elsewhere; but this same problem has also brought confusion and divisions on how to respond to many of the petty bourgeois-led revolutionary nationalist movements that have emerged since World War II.

- Linked to the damaging impact of dogmatism has been the pernicious view that political differences could be 'resolved' by organisational splits. This approach helped set the scene for



Harry De Boer

Marxism means learning from the class struggle: here Trotsky in 1940 meets with American trotskyst Harry De Boer, picket captain in the massive trotskyst-led Minneapolis Teamster strikes in the mid 1930s.

the traumatic 1953 split which dealt a hammer blow to the Fourth International and stunted the political development and organisational growth of both the resulting rival factions. The same political method has spawned a host of similar, smaller-scale splits and ever-smaller groupings (accounting for several dozen of the '57 varieties') as sectarian forces chase the Holy Grail of political purity through organisational moves.

●The isolation and persecution of trotskyst forces has always tended to restrict the numbers involved, and therefore to foster conservative methods of small group politics in which tiny organisations would get an inflated idea of their importance, and prioritise their own narrow concerns above the requirements of the working class.

Under these conditions, personal links and non political factors tended to play an unhealthy role, and the significance of individual leading members tended to grow out of all proportion to their political strength, leading to bizarre 'cult' deformations revolving around particular 'guru' figures – and occasional splits between rival 'gurus'.

Though there is no comparison between the relatively tiny and financially squeezed trotskyst movement and the vast bureaucratic machineries created by the social democratic

and Stalinist parties, the relatively privileged position of some full-time leaders of sectarian groupings, together with the lack of a sufficiently independent-minded membership, have given rise to bureaucratic – even despotic and violent – internal regimes designed to repress any opposition. This can in turn open the door to a total abandonment of political principles.

The most grotesque example of this was perhaps the two decades of political and financial corruption, sexual violence and personal intimidation which was eventually exposed by the expulsion of Gerry Healy, former general secretary of the British Workers Revolutionary Party, whose politics exhibited all of the most classic symptoms of sectarianism.

However other sectarian currents, particularly those coming, like the WRP, from the post-1953 International Committee tradition, and based on charismatic 'guru'-style leaders backed by a dominant central bureaucratic clique, also display serious deviations from Bolshevik principles of internal democracy.

●The more bizarre the politics, odious the regime, dogmatic and clichéd the rhetoric and wild-eyed the followers of any given sect, the fewer workers it will attract, and the further it will fall into the grip of radicalised elements of the petty bourgeoisie, drifting away from any link to the actual struggles and concerns of the working class.

●Occasionally excited to new ultimatic slogans by a rise in the tide of class struggle, sectarians flourish most readily during periods of relative downturn of the workers' movement, devising slogans and propaganda which they believe to be panaceas, or seeking to substitute their own activity ("Building the Party") or tiny 'front' campaigns, for the mobilisation of the working class.

●However some quite large organisations appear to maintain much more of a connection with the working class, while retaining a strongly sectarian orientation. In Britain the *Militant* current has comparatively large working class support, but makes no effort to convert its programme into more than a few propaganda demands, and turns its back quite deliberately on almost any serious day-to-day work in all but one or two selected trade unions.

Similarly the British Socialist Workers Party is a relatively big sectarian organisation, which not only abstains from any fight to win leading positions in the unions, but also opposes any serious fight in the ranks of the Labour Party – thus reducing itself to the role of sideline critics on the main political issues facing the British working class.

Sectarianism is not cured by organisational means – either by growth or by splits and expulsions: it is not the product of smallness as such or evil individuals, but the outcome of constant material and ideological pressures on the forces of the marxist left.

The fight against sectarianism is as old as the fight for a marxist organisation. Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* insisted that 'The Communists (...) have no interests separate and apart from the working class as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.'

Lenin, recognising the need to combat ultra-left sectarianism, insisted upon distributing a copy of his key text *Left Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder* to every delegate to the second congress of the new Third (Communist) International.

Trotsky constantly warned against sectarian deviations as the new Fourth International took shape in the 1930s. The fight against sectarianism must continue as part of the fight to defend and extend the traditions and programme of marxism.

Supporters of *Socialist Outlook* believe that sectarianism can be combatted only by development of a serious, rounded programme for the class struggle, coupled with a constant fight to direct the attention and energies of militants and marxists towards the central political problems and class battles confronting the organised working class and the masses of the oppressed. This must run alongside a consistent fight to uphold marxist principles of democracy and accountability.

By our efforts to reverse the pattern of splits that has characterised post-war British marxism we hope to create a consciously anti-sectarian, internationalist current within the otherwise confused currents of the British hard left.

John Lister

PHOTO: Carlos Guarita/Roflox



Nicaraguan women mobilised by Sandinistas: what will happen to next year's planned elections?

The worst ever disaster for Nicaragua

IT IS ONLY now that the extent of the damages caused by Hurricane Joan on October 22 is being known. It is the worst ever disaster that hit this country already plagued by fifty years of military dictatorship, two years of revolutionary war, eight years of foreign aggression, and natural disasters such as the 1972 earthquake which flattened Managua, and the 1982 floods.

The front page of the Nicaraguan *Nuevo Diario* dated October 24 had a harrowing picture that looked like Hiroshima after the bombing. Headline: Here was Bluefields.

Of the main port of the Atlantic Coast, the centre of Creole culture, only five houses were left standing. It had a population of about 40,000 and survived on fishing and agriculture. But all the fishing boats, all the plantations, all the crops, the whole infrastructure of the Atlantic Coast have gone. The hurricane blew at 160 miles per hour. Less is known about Puerto Cabezas since there is no more inland access to it. The silting of many rivers and destruction of 15,000 square kilometers of new forest represent a major ecological disaster.

Heavy rains and strong winds hit the rest of the country. The per cent of the population has been made homeless, the main export crop, coffee, has been hardest hit, eighty per cent of it

lost. Three hundred schools, the fruit of many years of the literacy campaign, have been ruined.

Never in its history has Nicaragua suffered so much. But what is less well known is the way in which the country and its government reacted to the disaster. The Sandinista leaders organised an extremely efficient evacuation of some 240,000 people from the coastal or low-lying areas to safer places and shelters equipped with food and medical supplies. Thanks to this, the death toll was limited to seventy-nine people.

Press censorship was brought in to prevent the right-wing *La Prensa* from creating panic. The opposition newspaper's coverage of the hurricane was minimal and it attacked the government for 'militarising' the disaster. International aid was immediately requested by the Sandinistas, stating that Nicaragua will accept any type of aid, as long as there are no conditions attached.

The US government accused the Sandinistas of incompetence, claiming that they could not be trusted to administer relief assistance and that they wanted to use the storm as another platform for propaganda against the contras. But all Latin America countries have been called on to come to the aid of Nicaragua, Mexico setting the example. The first plane to land was Cuban. The European Community,

Spain, France, Belgium, Austria, the conservative West German government, all sent immediate relief, despite Washington's pressures to block it. The British government's response was pathetic, £10,000 was first announced, then £250,000. This however is for the whole region, and it is unlikely that Nicaragua will get much if anything. The solidarity campaign and the main charities launched an emergency appeal and some councils like Manchester, Lambeth and Edinburgh twinned with Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas on the Atlantic Coast set up their own appeals.

Recovery will be an extremely slow process, an extraordinary burden as the economy was in deep crisis already following eight years of foreign aggression. Attacks have since been carried out by the contras and several civilians killed.

Despite the lack of media coverage, it is essential that the extent of the disaster and its political implications should be widely known. What for example will happen to the municipal elections planned for the next year, Nicaragua needs massive aid so that the revolution can survive. Long-term solidarity at all levels is the only answer.

Hurricane Appeal: Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, 23 Beveden Street, London N1 6BH

Maria Astorga



Marzaroli: the changing face of Glasgow

Jean Reilly

Oscar Marzaroli, the photographer, died earlier this year at the age of 55. Marzaroli, an Italian brought up in Glasgow from the age of two, is famous for his pictures of Scotland, in particular his photographs of Glasgow.

His photographs, which chronicle the changing face of working class life in Glasgow from the 1950s onward, range from wee boys playing football, through men and women working, shopping and socialising, to trade union rallies

and Orange walks. One of the most striking features of his work is that it captures aspects of Glasgow and its people which are unchanging so much so that you often find yourself checking the dates on his pictures to confirm in which decade they were taken.

His last major work 'Shades of Grey: Glasgow 1956-1987', a collection of over 300 photographs with accompanying text by William McIlvanney, was an outstanding success. We reproduce here a selection of pictures from that book as a tribute to a great photographer who used his talent to record the life and culture of the Glasgow working class.





Giving the kids the facts about apartheid

Youth Against Apartheid: the video
 Revo Productions,
 Available from Debbie
 Epstein, Martineau
 Centre, 74 Balden
 Road, Birmingham
 B32 2EH,
 ☎021-449-4428. Hire
 £7, purchase £18.

Reviewed by KEVIN &
 JOHN LISTER

YOUTH Against Apartheid is the title of a new video aimed at getting the facts of the South African struggle across to young people.

The video has been made by Revo Productions, a collective of unemployed youth formed in Birmingham earlier this year. Their first work runs for some 44 minutes, and to judge its effectiveness in its declared aim of telling the facts in simple language for a teenage audience, I persuaded my 13-year old son Kevin to give it a 'test drive'. Kevin is concerned about South

Africa, having done sponsored a cycle ride for Mandela. He appeared to have picked up a lot of information from it, but saw both strengths and weaknesses in the video.

'I know what they are trying to do. I think it was quite good for kids who don't know that much about South Africa but want to find out more.

'I was most interested by the things I didn't know before. I hadn't realised that South Africa had invaded Namibia. And though I knew about Mandela in jail I didn't know Steve Biko had been murdered in prison.

'Another really interesting thing the video told me was how few whites there are. Out of twenty-five million people in South Africa, over twenty million are black. And I didn't know schools only teach black kids in Afrikaans.

'I thought the use of news film was good: it was all easy to understand. But the video goes on too long in just the same format, and this gets boring. I didn't watch it to the end. There was too much talking in the same tone of voice by the same woman.

'One other problem was that the video showed why we should

The Running Man
 Film, starring Arnold
 Schwarzenegger.

Reviewed by
 TRACY DOYLE

BASED on a story by Stephen King, *The Running Man* is a chilling vision of the future, of the decline of capitalism into barbarism.

Set in the America of 2019, it takes to the limit the logic of consumerist society. The cities team with the poor and dispossessed, held in place by state violence and the power of the media. Giant television screens on every street corner are used to manipulate the emotions and stamp out any rebellion.

Policeman Ben Richards (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is

Gotcha!

directed by his superiors to fire from his helicopter onto a crowd of food rioters, unarmed women and children. When he refuses he is overpowered. The subsequent massacre is pinned on him, a film of events in the cockpit is doctored to rewrite what happened, and he is sentenced to a prison camp.

Joining with a group of freedom fighters, he takes part in a break-out. He refuses to commit himself to their struggle, but his plans to return to his old haunts are thwarted. He finds himself captured and forced to 'star' in a cult television show 'The Running Man', together with his fellow escapees.

The studio audience and viewers bay for blood as criminals are released into a sealed-off and deserted part of the city, to be hunted down and killed by 'stalkers' equipped with a vast armoury of vicious weapons.

Taking on Richards and his cohorts proves too much for the stalkers, whose weapons are turned against them, and then television transmitters hidden deep in the game area are seized by the fugitives.

While this film is probably aimed mostly at science fiction fans (especially those who enjoyed *The Terminator* and *Robocop*), it has its share of thrilling moments.

If you have ever felt real anger and frustration at the 'Gotcha!' mentality of those who never question the 'loadsamoney' philosophy, and swallow the hypocrisy and violence of Thatcher's Britain, you'll love watching the smiles being wiped off their faces as their stalker heroes are mown down one by one.

Judging from the peals of laughter of the film audience, this point was not lost on them either!

call for sanctions against South Africa but didn't explain what sanctions were supposed to achieve.

'Perhaps I just knew too much about South Africa to start with. I think if the video was used in sections, with some chance to discuss and ask questions between them it would keep people's attention better.'

Youth Against Apartheid: the Video comes with an information booklet, and is designed for showing at youth clubs, schools and colleges.

Obituary Craig Robertson

IT IS WITH deepest sadness that we report the death of Islington Briefing supporter, Craig Robertson, who committed suicide on November 12th. Craig was a long time fighter in all the battles of the working class and the oppressed and a fierce defender of socialist principles. Those who knew him will miss him greatly, including those with whom he had many deep differences. If we failed to offer him the support he needed, we remain convinced that he would not wish us to falter in the fight against oppression and exploitation.

'Claiming spaces from the whirlwind'

Storms of the Heart; an Anthology of Black Arts and Culture

Edited Kwesi Owusu.
Published by Camden Press, £12.95.

Reviewed by
THERESA CONWAY

THIS fascinating book is the first major anthology of black artists in Britain. It demonstrates not only the variety and quality of black art produced in Britain today, but the issues and passions that motivate this art.

In 'claiming spaces from the whirlwind', it allows the artists

themselves to speak; about politics, about creativity, about community and about struggle. It is damning of the racism that pervades the British arts establishment both historical and contemporary.

The pieces are easily accessible, though many explore complex ideas about the relationship between society, artist and art. They cover a wide range of artistic forms; from an exploration of the Nottingham Carnival to a critique of Othello, from the visual work of Sonia Boyce to Gail Thompson's account of her musical career and her constant search for new languages.

A highly recommended book, either to devour in front of the fire or to dip into in those snatched spare ten minutes.



PHOTO: Jak Kilby

Gail Thompson

We present — in no particular order — the books which could help you and your comrades fill in the long cold winter breaks between meetings.

Reviewed by
MIKE RAWLS

The Labour Party: A Marxist History, T. Cliff and D. Gluckstein, Bookmarks, pbk, £7.95. Shamelessly described by *Socialist Worker* as 'the most significant analysis since Trotsky's' you know it must be good. *Socialist Outlook* promises a full review in the next issue.

Time Bomb, R. Franey and G. McKee, Bloomsbury, pbk, £4.99. The full story of the Guildford Four. Totally convincing case for the defence and an important contribution to fighting for their release.

Male Order, R. Chapman and J. Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, pbk, £7.95. A curate's egg, but one no male comrade should fail to read. Some provocative thoughts on masculinity.

The Politics of Hope, T. Blackwell and J. Scabrook, Faber, pbk, £4.95. Elegiac personal farewell to working

class politics 1945-style by Britain's most famous utopian socialists. Their advocacy of a green alternative is elegant, but unconvincing.

Bearing the Cross — Martin Luther King and the SCLC, DJ Garrow, Johnathan Cape, pbk, £9.95. An important analysis of the important movement. A key book towards understanding contemporary north American politics with a breathtaking range of sources.

Fast Food Facts, T. Lobstein, Camden Press, pbk, £4.95. Sub-titled 'survival guide to the good, the bad, and the really ugly of fast food'. This handy book will really put you off your Christmas dinner. The putrid poisoned entrails of capitalism laid bare by extensive research. And if you don't think food's important, try going without it.

Arthur Miller, Time Bends: a Life, S. Morley, Methuen, pbk, £5.99. Excellent biography of leading American playwright.

Very Heaven, Looking Back at the 1960s, S. Maitland (ed.), Virago, pbk, £4.95. Enjoyable and serious accounts in their own words of what it was like for a number of feminist women in those long, lost, long-haired days.

Oscar Wilde, R. Ellman, Penguin, pbk, £6.99. The definitive biography of the great man who thought that we will never have socialism because it will involve too many meetings.

The Free Economy and the Strong State — The Politics of Thatcherism, A. Gamble, Macmillan, pbk, £7.95.

Carefully argued and challenging analysis of the current regime. Well worth reading if only to see where you disagree with it.

Lenin: the Novel, A. Brien, Paladin, pbk, £5.99. Favourably reviewed in our pages earlier this year. Full of penetrating psychological insights into the life of the great man, such as did he use a family

railcard to get to the Finland station? Did he know those beards went out of fashion in Russia after he went into exile? And so on...

The Satanic Verses, S. Rushdie, Viking, hbk, £12.95. Latest densely wrought novel from the author of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. Characteristically intense and majestic in scope — banned all over the place because of alleged insults to Mohammed.

A Scrape of Time, Ida Fink, Peter Owen, hbk, £9.95. A haunting collection of stories about life in Poland during the Holocaust by an eye-witness. Poignant, humane and beautiful — avoiding all the pitfalls of much Holocaust literature, this is an undiscovered masterpiece.

Twenty Years On, M. Farrell (ed.), Brandon, pbk, £4.95. Powerful collection from nine participants in the stormy birth of the civil rights movement in the north of Ireland. Easy reading, fascinating account of the different traditions that came to bear on these developments. An essential Christmas present for you and your friends. (See back cover for a *Socialist Outlook* special offer).

Bookends

A forthright call for withdrawal

Northern Ireland: the political economy of conflict.

Bob Rowthorn and Naomi Wayne, Polity Press, 1988.

Reviewed by
JEAN REILLY

NAOMI WAYNE, a London based trade union officer, and Bob Rowthorn, a Cambridge economist, have developed in this book a coherent and well argued case for British withdrawal from Ireland. For that reason alone it is a welcome contribution to the debate and a timely one, given that it coincides with the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the present phase of the struggle in the six counties.

The first section of the book sets the scene in a history of the island from the 'plantation' to the present day. It is a brief but thorough account of the historical and political development of Ireland and one which socialists and republicans would have no quarrel with. This is followed by an account of the sectarianism and discrimination, fostered by British rule, which developed in the six county statelet together with an account of the rise of the civil rights movement and the various British attempts, such as power-sharing, to deal with the ensuing crisis.

The core of the book, and what makes it significant, is the analysis of the six county economy and its economic prospects — and the clear and forthright way in which the authors develop this analysis to come to one precise conclusion: Britain must withdraw from Ireland.

The authors provide an abundance of statistical information on the effects of sectarianism on employment, wages, housing, emigration and standards of living in the north.

In the final section of the book

the authors take on, one by one, the arguments against withdrawal and present logical and concise counter-arguments in each case.

On a more cautious note, however, it must be said that part of the argument which Rowthorn and Wayne develop on the future prospects for a 32 county Irish economy, depend on the maintenance on both sides of the present border of a low wage, highly skilled workforce.

In addition, the brief description they give of the 26 county economy, for the purposes of comparison with that of the six counties, seems a bit too generous and uncritical. They note favourably that successive Dublin governments have been able to attract substantial investment by foreign based multinational companies. They fail to point out, however, that this has meant that the southern economy is now essentially a branch-plant economy and that, overwhelmingly, the profits made by multinationals are exported and not used to build a strong manufacturing or industrial base in Ireland.

More seriously, they make the point very strongly that Britain should continue to give aid for a substantial period after the removal of the troops and the unification of Ireland. They argue that not only would this be Britain's moral duty, but that it would be necessary, together with guarantees of religious and civil liberties, to induce loyalists to acquiesce in the removal of the border.

To argue this without spelling out how unlikely it is that Britain would give aid without any strings attached is a problem. The authors explicitly argue that Britain, and possibly other imperialist powers, would be willing to give aid in order to guarantee for themselves a stable friendly neighbour in what is a strategic region. This may be true; but it is not the aim of the anti imperialist movement.

This book is an important one and provides anti imperialist with much useful factual information and cogent analysis. It is also extremely readable and therefore accessible to comrades unfamiliar with the subject.

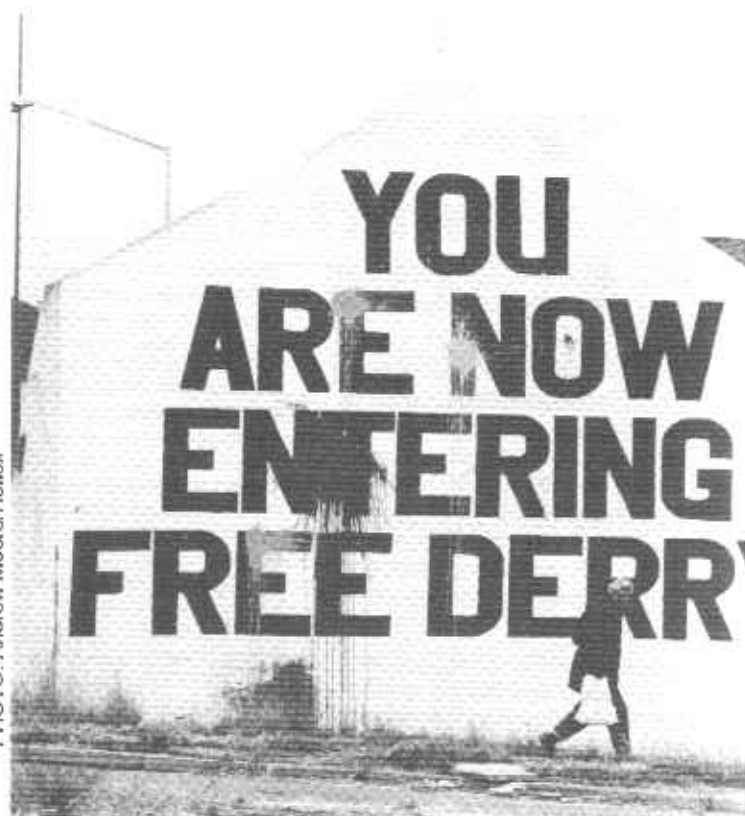


PHOTO: Andrew Moore/Reflex

The book's strength is its call for British withdrawal

Poll tax as social engineering

The Poll Tax and the Enterprise Culture
Susanne MacGregor,
Centre for Local
Economic Strategies,
1988, 66 pages, £3.95.

Reviewed by
FINN JENSEN

'I think, in terms of local authority services, people should be paying for what they get. It has nothing to do with how rich you are. In this country, we are too sold on the idea that the rich should be made to pay for other people's services.'

THIS STATEMENT from Nicholas Ridley, the minister in charge of the poll tax, sums up the ideas behind the enterprise culture. The consensus around the welfare

state is to be replaced by idea of setting a market price for services like education, street lighting, housing etc. As Norman Tebbit, the former chair of the Tory party, argues: why should the rich pay more for, for example, a council's street cleaning services, when the rich do not pay more for washing powder or bread in the local supermarket?

Susanne MacGregor argues in her well written and informative little book that 'to build an enterprise society you have first to demolish the welfare state'. She correctly explains the poll tax as part of an overall strategy, not just to undermine Labour's strongholds in the inner-cities, but a radical change in the social fabric.

The book not only looks at the rating system but also at privatisation, education, housing, inner city development and social services, as part of that Tory strategy. In order to carry out such social engineering



EEC: Maggie right for wrong reasons?

The Common Market is back on the political agenda — but once again this is no thanks to the Labour Party.

The reason is rather Mrs Thatcher's speech at the College of Europe in Bruges, where she set out her 'vision' for future European cooperation. For her, the EEC is a common market, and that is how it should stay. The Brussels bureaucrats should keep their noses out of domestic affairs and let each member state retain its sovereignty.

The problem for many of us in the Labour Party is that Mrs T. has undoubtedly focussed attention on an issue which can pose problems for the left as well as for the right.

When the Labour conference repeatedly confirmed its policy of non-participation in the common market, the main reason advanced was that the Treaty of Rome and the legislation issued under it would prevent a Labour government from implementing the industrial policies which it deemed necessary for the regeneration of the British economy.

Thus the issue also revolved around the question of national sovereignty, but from a totally different perspective from the Prime Minister's free market ideology.

Some would have us believe otherwise. We are told that Mrs Thatcher is trying to prevent European socialism from gaining a foothold in this country. Statements made recently by Jacques Delors, the EEC President, to the TUC Congress held out the prospect of building a 'social Europe' within the next decade.

However M. Delors made it clear that he was speaking in a personal capacity — and for a very good reason. The EEC

Commission is a collegiate body with a centre-right majority among its 17 members; they would never allow their president to issue such statements on their behalf.

The Treaty of Rome has undoubtedly been changed in recent years, but not to make it any more conducive to socialism: on the contrary, its ultimate aim of removing all barriers to trade by 1992 makes it a perfect charter for big business to shift goods and capital to suit their interests, not those of the peoples of Europe.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has emerged virtually unscathed from all the changes provoked by the Single European Act, and CAP payments still command an excessive percentage of the total EEC budget. The CAP also represents a threat to the environment, by encouraging the denaturing of the soil through excessive use of nitrate fertilisers: the paltry EEC directives on petrol lead or acid rain can hardly compensate for the environmental damage caused by common market food policies.

It is wishful thinking to believe that all these disadvantages can be eliminated even within the lifetime of a Labour government. To do so would require a convergence of socialist governments in every EEC member state, since the Treaty can only be amended with the unanimous consent of all its signatories.

This is not to deny the desirability of European cooperation in certain areas, such as environmental matters, education, and consumer protection. Such cooperation must secure the full-hearted consent of the participating nations if it is to be effective.

National sovereignty is therefore the best mechanism for achieving

a real and enduring consensus among the peoples of Europe.

The next Labour government must therefore reclaim its sovereignty by repealing or amending Section 2 of the European Communities Act, which gives effect to the Treaty of Rome and EEC legislation in this country. This will enable it to select those areas of EEC law which are in the interests of this country. Such a step would be perfectly legal, since EEC law only operates in this country by the consent of our parliament, which may be withdrawn at any time the latter chooses to do so.

Walter Cairns
Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee

Any answers?

Dear *Socialist Outlook*
Phil Hearse's article (*SO* October 88) on the latest redrafting of the Communist Party's programme ('Facing up to the Future') is far too complacent. At the descriptive level, Hearse writes 'we can agree with *MT* that 'Capitalism is changing, the working class is being recomposed, the economy is being restructured — therefore... the old post-war consensus is useless — we need a new way forward.' Fine. But while *MT* attempts, from its own viewpoint, to develop its neo-reformist programme, we are offered up only negative criticisms which fail to indicate any fresh thinking on the changes which we are confronted with.

Unfortunately, Hearse's article is far too brief to offer much of an alternative, but equally the conclusion could be drawn that there isn't one on offer!

Of course, there isn't a completed alternative (anymore than the *MT* thesis is adequate or complete) but this does

not absolve Hearse from indicating in more positive terms the direction in which he thinks the answer might lie.

To its credit *MT* is (on its own terms) trying to develop its programme even if one may disagree with parts (or all) of it. Comrade Hearse's article fails to spell out *SO*'s counter-hegemonic strategy to effectively challenge *MT*'s theses concerning the conclusions which may be drawn from new developments in late capitalism.

Yours comradely
Chris Madoc

Gorbachev

Dear Editor
Thank you for Phil Hearse's interesting and informative article on the USSR (Gorbachev's Gamble, *Socialist Outlook*, no. 9). However, there was one issue he neglected to discuss: how will the reform process affect the relationship between 'communism' and the Social Democratic parties in the western world. It may be too early to make a judgement, but there are already signs that Moscow may apply some glasnost to the historic breach of the Second and Third Internationals. A more conciliatory attitude towards right wing social democrats — in east European publications like *World Marxist Review* — is becoming increasingly evident, much to the consternation of a number of 'pro-Moscow' parties.

If Gorbachev should attempt to end the historic division between Social Democracy and 'Communism' then revolutionary marxists may well benefit from the political differentiation that such a move would create. We should watch, and where possible, be involved in facilitating this process.

Jeff Richards
South Australia

'effectively in rapid time a strong, centralised, authoritarian state which brooks no opposition and makes no concessions' is required. Hence the need to attack the work force in the public sector in order to open up for the privatisation of public services and to undermine the standard of living for the working class by weakening the trade union movement.

The book gives the history of the poll tax but does not deal with the strategy to defeat it. It notes that neither the Labour Party, or anyone else, has come up with alternatives to the old rating system, which is also unjust and unpopular.

'Proposals for local income taxation are now receiving more sympathetic consideration by those looking for an alternative to the "poll tax".' But a local income tax will only be another way of redistributing the poverty within the inner-cities.

Only a national progressive tax can take the money from the really rich (individuals and companies). This should be combined with a sharp increase in government grants to the regions without any strings on how local authorities can use the money. Such a radical tax reform still has to be developed and campaigned for by the labour movement.



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