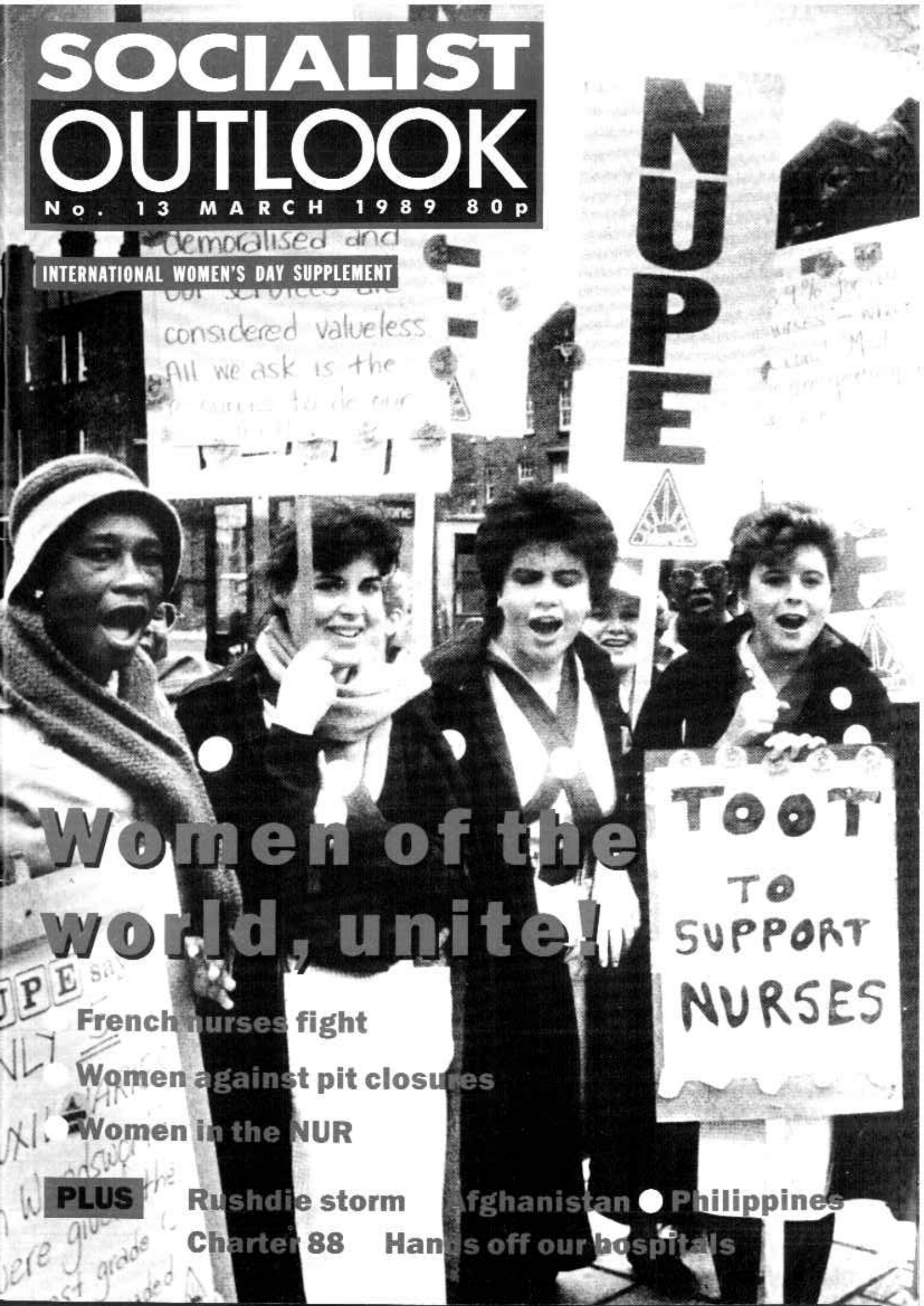


SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No. 13 MARCH 1989 80p

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SUPPLEMENT



Women of the world, unite!

French nurses fight

Women against pit closures

Women in the NUR

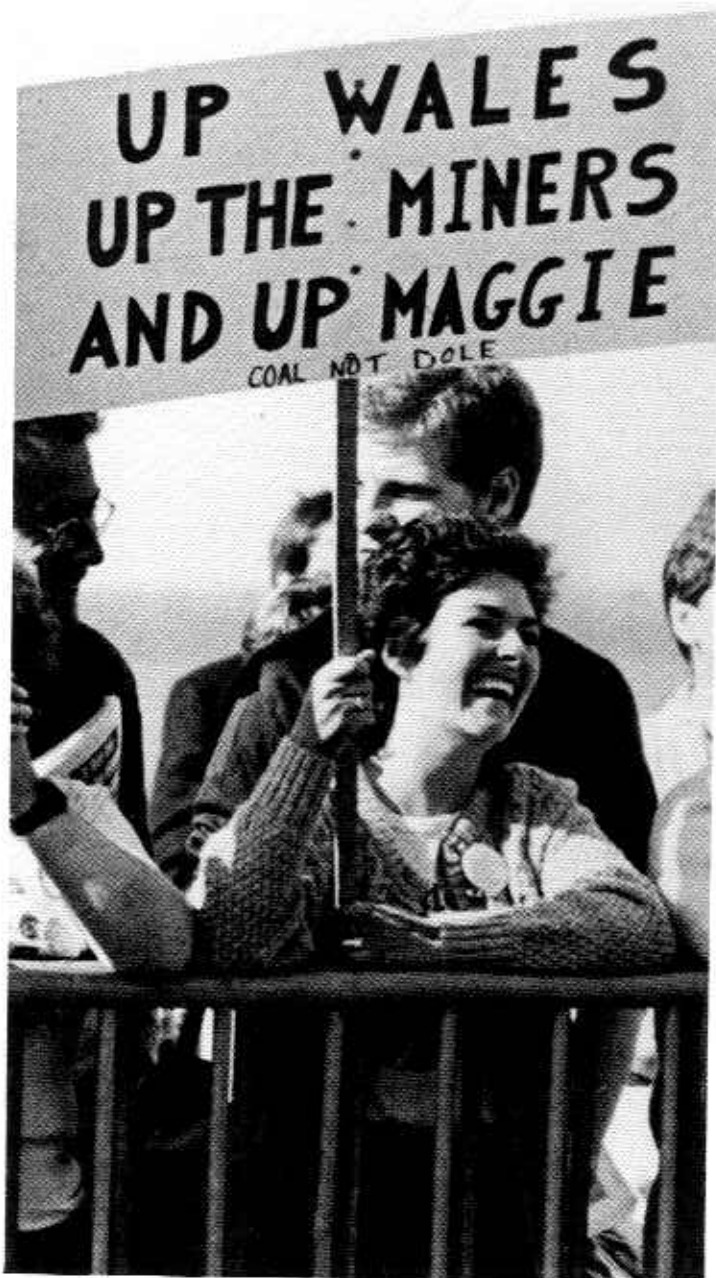
PLUS

Rushdie storm

Afghanistan ● Philippines

Charter 88

Hands off our hospitals



Women Against Pit Closures – see p13.

Socialist Outlook

Issue number 13

Final copy date 24 February 1989

Publication date 1 March 1989

Published by Socialist Outlook

PO Box 705

London SW19 1HA

Cover design by Spencers (TU) Ltd, London EC1

Printed by Blackrose Press (TU) Ltd, London EC1

Cover photo by Andy Lynne

Socialist Outlook

No. 13 March 1989

Contents

UPDATE

- 1•Editorial 2•Salman Rushdie 3•Low key Ard Fheis
4•Hands off our hospitals 4•Polytechnic plc
5•Berufsverbot comes to Britain
5•Pigsick in Scotland
6•In the interests of national security
7•Poland: Round Table? 7•New Premises – Appeal

8-9

Electoral reformism?

Richard James

10-12

Afghanistan

Gorbachev cuts his losses

John Lister

Ten years of crisis

No Soviet deals with imperialism

USFI Statement

13-20

WOMENS' LIBERATION SUPPLEMENT

Women of the world unite!

Cultural revolution in the coalfields

Valerie Coultas

Women in the NUR

Toni Matthews

'Neither maids, nor nuns, nor idiots'

Anne Marie Granger

21

El Salvador: FMLN calls electoral bluff

Will MacMahon

22-25

IN DEPTH

The Philippines: 3 Years after the 'February Revolution'

Finn Jensen

26-27

BACK TO BASICS

Not so popular front

Jane Wells

28

Stalinism Debate

Stalinists – or national communists?

Finn Jensen

29-31

REVIEWS

New feminist literature

Judith Arkwright

A green crop of slogans

John Mullings

Unity and diversity in Central America

Maria Astorga

Political urban cowboy

Barbara Green

Heavy on Stalinism, light on answers

Finn Jensen

Weapon of war

David Grant

32-33

LETTERS

Afghanistan

Defeat for Stalinism: victory for reaction

DESPITE the media hype, it was very different from the US retreat from Vietnam in 1975. There were no scenes of wild panic; no desperate soldiers escaping by clinging on to the skids of helicopters. The evacuation of the last Soviet battalions from Afghanistan was a confession of a *political* rather than military defeat, the fruits of Gorbachev's rethink of domestic and foreign policy rather than a rout on the battlefield.

The Soviet troops had never been sent as a full-scale army of occupation to annex or 'assimilate' Afghanistan to the USSR. The relatively small number of troops (only 120,000 to police 650,000 square kilometers, compared to 500,000 US troops to occupy 170,000 square kilometers of South Vietnam) showed that the operation was only ever seen as a limited move to support the Kabul regime.

Nevertheless their withdrawal represents a clear victory for the forces of reaction - the brutal mujahedin guerrillas, some of them fuelled by fundamentalist fervour, but many more by the grasping avarice of traditional bosses, landlords, mullahs and tribal rulers, and by billions of dollars in overt and covert aid and arms from the USA, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the cynical Chinese bureaucracy in Beijing.

This right wing victory has been grimly predictable for years. The seeds of the debacle were sown by the Kremlin bureaucracy itself when, under Brezhnev, it set out to solve by brute force the complex political problem of preserving a sympathetic regime in Kabul whose repressive and bureaucratic methods had made even its formally progressive policies of literacy campaigns, land reform and women's rights increasingly unpopular.

The troops were sent by Moscow bureaucrats to preserve Kabul bureaucrats. The December 1979 intervention was itself an infringement of the Afghan peoples' right to self-determination and a setback for the working class internationally.

Neither the bureaucracy's aims nor their means were those of the working class. The 'Red Army' would have been quite as vicious in crushing any left wing, independent revolutionary movement by Afghan workers or peasants as it was in its efforts to crush the mujahedin. There was not a shred of political principle involved: after it became clear that the bomb and the bullet were failing, Moscow master-minded a number of equally disastrous efforts by the various leaders in Kabul to appease the mujahedin - not through any appeal to their peasant base, but through deals with the most reactionary Islamic elements and landlords.

The original invasion split even the Stalinist movement and

was supported only by the most craven apologists for Moscow. But some socialists who had *opposed* the invasion still had serious doubts over the effects of a Soviet withdrawal - and were for various reasons profoundly reluctant to take up the demand for troops out.

It is now clear that the causes of internationalism, marxism and communism were *set back* massively by the Afghan intervention, which included use of landmines, napalm, cluster bombs and the most modern weapons, leaving up to a million dead and millions of refugees. It is partly because of this that

the Soviet forces not only failed to smash the mujahedin, but actually *expanded* the guerrillas' base of support by alienating still wider sections of the Afghan population. The invasion provided easy grist to the propaganda mill of the new Reagan administration and gave a boost to every anti-communist and cold-warrior in Asia, the USA and around the world.

Socialist Outlook favours the withdrawal

of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, because the alternatives would have been worse: but we do not regard the withdrawal as any kind of victory for the working class. On the contrary, a mujahedin regime would almost certainly embark upon a pogrom of progressives, riding to power on a programme of religious obscurantism, opposition to literacy campaigns, institutionalised oppression of women, and entrenched power to the old propertied classes.

It is the grim prospect of their bloody revenge that is holding firm the core troops and police cadres around the beleaguered Najibullah regime, who realise they have nothing left to lose in waging a last stand in the towns. Conversely, the likelihood of a mujahedin takeover appears more the result of the isolation and collapse of the Kabul regime than any measure of the strength of the divided and dubiously effective mujahedin, whose efforts would be insignificant if not for massive external aid.

For socialists there is nothing to celebrate in these events. The outcome, like the nine-year war that preceded it, is a defeat for the Stalinist bureaucracy which launched the invasion: but the consequences will be suffered for years to come by the Afghan masses, subjected to mujahedin rule.

The bitter lesson is that only the self-organisation of the oppressed, and not the imposition of 'progressive' measures by brute force from above can pave the way for socialism. This holds good not only for Afghanistan but also for anywhere impatient or bureaucratic forces seek to force the pace of change without reference to the masses.



David Stewart Smith/Inlight

Rushdie caught in tide of censorship

NO BOOK in recent times has caused such literary and political uproar as Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

It has been banned in most of the Islamic world as well as 'secular' India and South Africa. In France and Italy, publishers have 'delayed' its appearance; but in the countries where it is available, despite (or because of) the campaign for it to be banned or boycotted, its sales are soaring.

Now the European Community has withdrawn its diplomats from Iran because of the call from spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini and other Iranian leaders for Muslims to slay Salman Rushdie.

For the last couple of months, almost every weekend in one town or another in Britain there have been organised demonstrations against the supposedly 'blasphemous' *Satanic Verses*. In Bolton and Bradford the book was publicly burned, 'to attract public attention', according to one of the organisers. This served to horrify millions of people in Britain and non-Islamic countries, recalling the book-burning of Nazi Germany.

On February 12 five demonstrators were shot dead by police in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, when a huge demonstration led by mullahs tried to attack the American Centre in protest against the planned publication of *Satanic Verses* in the USA. Not one of the demonstrators had seen, never mind read, the book: indeed ordinary Muslims are not allowed to read any book that has been declared blasphemous - only religious scholars have this privilege.

However, the Islamic world is divided on its response. Hashem El Essawy, chair of the Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance, (the organisation which started and has led the campaign against *Satanic*

Verses in Britain) insists that he is not in favour of burning or banning the book, and considers such actions as un-Islamic. He is also reported to be totally against the death sentence being passed against Mr Rushdie.

Scholars from the Al Azhar mosque in Egypt, viewed as the world's leading centre of Islamic teaching for the majority Sunni Muslims, have disputed Khomeini's right to order a death sentence, saying the edict contravenes Islamic law.

The reason for the whole furore is that Muslims believe the book to be an insult to their very religion. Rushdie's novel is named after two verses which the prophet Mohammed removed from the Koran after the capture of Mecca by his followers, believing that the verses had been inspired by Satan masquerading as the Angel Gabriel.

The implication is that Mohammed may have done this to deceive the people of Mecca. Worse, it implies that Mohammed, not God may not be the author of the Koran. For the followers of other religions and non-believers all this may not make much sense: but for Muslims it is an intolerable insult, because for them the Koran, syllable for syllable, word for word, is the word of God.

The loudest objection against Rushdie's novel is to pages 363-4, which describes the prophet's revelations as 'sprouting rules about every damn thing from how deeply a believer should sleep to which sexual positions had received divine sanction, so that they learned that sodomy and the missionary position were approved, whereas the forbidden postures included all those in which the woman was on top'.

In another sequence, prostitutes in a brothel are given the names of the prophet's nine wives. There is in all a 12-point list of extracts



Bob Gannon/Insight

London demonstrators - helping the censors of the ultra-right.

from the novel which the mullahs find objectionable.

But there is no doubt that the campaign against the book is to some extent politically inspired. In India the elections are due within one year, and Rajiv Gandhi knows the importance of 100 million Muslim votes. In Pakistan, the demonstrations which brought deaths and hundreds of injuries were led by opponents of the new regime of Benazir Bhutto. 'Was it a genuine protest?' she asked, 'or was it rather a protest by those people who lost the election, or those people [who benefited from martial law], to try to destabilise the process of democracy? The dying order always likes to give a few kicks before it goes to rest'.

A political motive is also a factor in the Iranian stance, not only in Khomeini's bid to take the leadership of the world's 1 billion Muslims, but also in the need for his regime to find a new external enemy on which to focus domestic discontent in the aftermath of the disastrous war with Iraq.

At the same time there should be no doubt that Muslim feelings are genuinely hurt. Islam has not undergone any reformation or experienced any 'Age of Enlightenment'. Doubts about the origin and teachings of the Koran are forbidden. The prophet Mohammed, however disguised with fictional names (as in *Satanic Verses*), his family, and his original companions are seen as beyond reproach.

The problem is not restricted to Rushdie's book. The works of one of Egypt's greatest, Nobel Prize-winning novelists, Nequib Mahfouz, are banned in his own country: and Egypt is relatively

liberal. Jordanian writer Fadia a Faqir, also banned in Egypt, complained recently in the *Times Literary Supplement* against the 'rising tide of censorship and intimidation in almost all of the Islamic world'. On the other side, a Saudi Arabian group has declared a *Jihad* (holy war) against 'modernism' itself.

Some moderate Muslims who have no time for mullahs or fundamentalists still feel that Rushdie's novel has produced the opposite of the effect the author desired, and has served instead to strengthen the hand of the fundamentalists among ordinary Muslims.

The whole affair has triggered a wider debate: who defines what is Islamic and what is un-Islamic?

The terms can quickly change. Not long ago, when Pakistan dictator Zia ul Haq carried out barbaric punishments against hundreds of his countrymen and women - for no greater crime than voicing political opinions or protesting against Zia's new Islamic Code - the mullahs applauded him or kept quiet. Where were the protests of the likes of Hashem El Essawy against Zia's barbarism or against the beatings and torture carried out by fundamentalist *Jumait-e-Islam* louts against their opponents?

Only after some artists and writers had the courage to make a film exposing the treatment of women in Zia's Islamic Republic were there belated screams by 'sophisticated, enlightened Muslims' in this country claiming that the (now safely dead) Zia had 'only exploited the name of Islam'. By then the climate had changed, and any association with Zia's

dreadful regime had become a liability. Yesterday's islam became 'un-islamic' overnight!

Under Zia's Islamic Code it was declared that the evidence of two women, even in a rape case, would be equal to that of one man. The religious leaders who formulated this code were quite indifferent to the insult and misery it must have caused millions of muslim women throughout the world.

Muslim leaders, including the Islamic Society for 'Religious Tolerance', who now shed tears for the hurt caused by Rushdie's book would do well to dwell on the feelings of the Bahais in Iran and the Ahmadis in Pakistan, who are constant targets of abuse and vilification from the mullahs.

The Ahmadis worship the same God as other muslims, regard the Koran as their holy book, say prayers like other muslims - but were, under pressure from religious leaders, declared *non-muslim* by the regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Advocates of 'religious tolerance' might be taken more seriously if they campaigned for better treatment of these victims of the mullahs, and for equal rights for women, and showed some concern for the plight of non-muslims (like Pakistani Sindhis, who were forced by fear and intimidation to leave Pakistan, and long to return home).

Unfortunately the anti-Rushdie muslims have now been joined in Britain by the 'I am against censorship, but...' brigade, and the lobby for extension of the blasphemy laws. This dangerous and ill-advised group of people are unwittingly playing into the hands of the reactionary elements, many of whom would happily step up such censorship but equally happily drive out Britain's muslims - along with any other black people, and any representatives of 'alien culture'.

An equally dangerous response comes from Labour MP Max Madden, who has joined Hashem El Essawy and others in demanding that a short statement from muslim critics of the *Satanic Verses*, explaining to those who choose to buy or borrow the book why some muslims find it offensive, be 'inserted in the book or displayed in bookshops or libraries'; this they term 'a modest right to reply'.

Why do they stop at *Satanic Verses*? What about Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (still banned from schools in parts of the USA)? What about the *Communist*

Manifesto, or the holy books of all the main religions - each of which contains passages which followers of other religions find offensive? If this ludicrous suggestion were taken to its conclusion, almost every book would include at least one 'short statement' and bookshops would need to erect new walls to carry objections to books on sale!

Socialists must defend Salman Rushdie: but by no means all his would-be defenders are socialists or progressive. Robert Maxwell, for example, in a signed editorial in the *Sunday Mirror* (February 19) urged the British government, among other things, to tell the Iranians that 'all Iranians, except proven enemies of Ayatollah Khomeini, will be sent home.'

With 'friends' like Robert Maxwell, Salman doesn't need enemies.

Ahmad Shuja



Kate Brincornte/Report

Muslim demonstrators fighting for democracy: London demonstration against Bangladesh dictator Ershad during his February visit to Britain. The banner translated into English reads 'Who is a bloodsucker? - Ershad'.

Low key Ard-Fheis

READING PRESS reports of the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis (annual conference) which was held in Dublin at the end of January, would have lead you to believe that delegates were assembled for the sole purpose of hearing Gerry Adams tear strips off the Provisional IRA. In fact it was a much more mundane and business-like affair altogether.

The main debate was around a resolution in the political policy section, which was put by the Ard Chomhairle (the executive committee). The resolution called on Sinn Fein to 'adopt in principle the need for an all-Ireland anti-imperialist mass movement,' and to '...accept that such a movement should be made up of the broadest range of political and social forces.'

Speaker after speaker supported the resolution and reiterated the need for Sinn Fein to continue to develop its political programme and to work in united fronts with other forces. The only note of dissent came from one or two speakers who expressed fears that this policy may lead the republican movement into popular front alliances with forces to their right such as Fianna Fail.

On the question of the tragic events of the past year or so and the decision of the leadership of the IRA to disband and disarm one

of its active service units, the message from the Ard-Fheis was clear. Both Adams and McGuinness reiterated the support of Sinn Fein for the military struggle and for the volunteers who carry out that struggle.

They spoke with regret of the deaths and casualties among non-combatants and congratulated the IRA for taking responsibility for such tragedies and for taking steps to try to prevent them happening again. They stressed that these measures were not taken in order to protect Sinn Fein's electoral support but on the basic moral grounds that killing civilians is wrong.

McGuinness made the point that the republican movement was there to fight oppression not to become the new oppressors. McGuinness also made the point that, to this day, neither the British army nor the British government have ever accepted responsibility for the deaths of fourteen civilians gunned down by the army in Derry on Bloody Sunday, 1972.

The other key issue of the Ard-Fheis was on the question of the declaration against violence which is now demanded from anyone standing in local elections. Placing all the responsibility for violence on the British government, delegates adopted a motion directing the Ard Chomhairle 'not to allow any British-inspired oath or pledge to prevent Sinn Fein representing its electorate in local

councils'.

Other motions debated at the Ard-Fheis included a motion opposing the privatisation programme of the British government, which was motivated with an explicit reference to Harland & Wolfe. Delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of the motion despite the fact, pointed out by some speakers, that the Belfast shipyard is a bastion of loyalism and that the jobs and skills held by Protestant workers there are held at the expense of Catholic workers. In the words of the proposer, delegates agreed to 'defend their rights as workers not their privileges as loyalists'.

All in all the conference was a non-contentious and low-key affair. This Ard Fheis and the previous one have simply been a consolidation and development of the historic decision in 1986 to drop the policy of abstentionism from the Dail.

In 1986 Sinn Fein agreed the need to develop a political programme to address the needs of the working class on both sides of the border. In 1989 they are some way along the road of developing that programme. Just as important, they have agreed, at least in principle, that the way to carry out that programme requires involvement in a united-front and broad-based anti-imperialist movement.

Jean Reilly

70 percent say

Hands Off Our Hospitals!

WITH OPINION POLLS already showing 70 percent opposed to the government's White Paper on the National Health Service, the first steps in building a massive fightback have now been taken.

Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke will be ruefully contemplating the failure of his lavish £1 million campaign to 'sell' the White Paper proposals to the public and to health workers. In many hospitals, staff have been taken compulsorily off their jobs, forced to watch a 20 minute party political video promoting the new scheme, and handed a glossy summary of the full document: the result in many cases has been to increase their anger and opposition.

Yet it is not only health workers who have emerged as predictably suspicious and hostile to the prospect of their hospitals 'opting out' of health authority control - and simultaneously shedding any commitment to maintain trade union rights, staffing levels, or the basic guaranteed pay scales, pension and other benefits and working conditions presently negotiated through Whitley Councils. Even some consultants are beginning to hit back at attempts to rope them onto the Tory

bandwagon for 'self-governing' hospitals.

In London's Guy's Hospital, Professor Ian McColl, who has very much set the pace as the leading advocate of the Tory plans, and publicly boasted that Guy's would be the first hospital to 'opt out', has come under fire from his own medical staff. Professor of psychiatry Jim Watson hit back at McColl, telling the *Health Service Journal* that:

'It is a matter of substantial embarrassment to us that the professor of surgery... is talking about Guy's opting out as though it was a *fait accompli*.

'He does not speak for the majority of medical staff here'.

There are similar problems facing the Tories from family doctors: the bigger GP practices and health centres (with over 11,000 patients) are being urged to become independent 'budget-holders', accepting rigid cash-limits, averaging only £60 per head per year. But a preliminary poll of 30 percent of the country's GPs found a massive *eighty* percent opposed to the White Paper proposals.

Indeed one of the few voices raised in any support of the Tory White Paper has been that of *Marxism Today*, which commissioned health academic Chris Ham from

the King's Fund to write a typically mealy-mouthed apology for Clarke:

'...the programme seeks to preserve the basic principles on which the NHS was founded and to tackle its weaknesses through a series of incremental and imaginative reforms...

'To those on the Left [!], a discriminating response is appropriate. Outright rejection of the White Paper would be both wrong and a missed opportunity...' (March 1989)

While the Eurocommunists in their armchairs debate how to give critical support to the White Paper, health workers and others are beginning to organise the fightback. So far the London teaching hospitals have been the focus of most of the early activity. An active trade union-based campaign is already leafletting Guy's and staging lobbies; in nearby St Thomas's, unions have called a mass meeting and are strongly campaigning against the Tory plans; and unions are also mobilising in Kings College, St Mary's, University College and Middlesex Hospitals, while at Charing Cross Hospital a meeting addressed by Tony Benn has set up a 'Hands Off Charing Cross Hospital' campaign.

A successful 150-strong meet-

ing on February 15 to launch a campaign London-wide decided to run under the linked slogans of Hands Off Our Hospitals and Hands Off Our Health Service.

The meeting agreed that under the common 'Hands Off' umbrella, local district-based campaigns are needed to 'target' the specific NHS facilities most under threat, and build the activity at grass roots level.

Early indications are that the Hands Off Our Hospitals campaign will find a strong echo of support throughout the workers' movement. Unfortunately the predictable absence from its launch of all but the smallest handful of the London Labour Party hard left suggests that once again they will miss the boat, and fail to take up a highly popular issue.

Fighting in defence of the NHS is not only a way for the left to relate to the broad layers of women and black workers in the NHS unions, but a real chance to participate in a campaign that could yet give Thatcher a bloody nose. It's not too late to join in!

Harry Sloan

Hands Off Our Hospitals can be contacted c/o London Health Emergency, 335, Grays Inn Rd, London WC1. 01-833-3020.

Polytechnic plc

ON APRIL FOOL'S DAY this year all Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education, 90 institutions in all, become public limited companies! Leading up to April, management are attempting to impose new private-sector style contracts to fit the new status.

The core of the new contract removes the lecturer's right to organise her time outside of teaching. All elements of the job, research and consultancy, curriculum development, administration etc, will have to be agreed between the lecturer and her 'manager'. The new contract will change the existing 38 weeks (36 teaching and 2 administration) to 44 or 46 weeks and the current 30 hours attendance to 'at least' 37 hours.

For those who balk at this new 'fractional' appointments are being introduced - term time teaching only - on 85% of salary and presumably no increments!

It has escaped no-one that this new 'year' could encompass a 'fourth' term. This could be used for short courses, to 'generate revenue' for the institutions. In a situation of government cut backs in higher education, polys and other establishments are increasingly being expected to fund themselves. But we could also see the development of 'short' degrees, eight terms over two years.

Management strategy varies from place to place. At Birmingham Polytechnic they have appointed a new Head of Nursing on the new contract and the NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education)

branch is balloting its members for action. At Leeds Polytechnic the new governing body voted only 6 to 4 in favour of implementing the new terms and conditions. The NATFHE branch there has a good chance of halting the process. At North East London Polytechnic a half-hearted attempt by management to do likewise has been seen off by the union. At Kingston Polytechnic, where Bob Smith, author of the original paper adopted by the Employers' Forum, is Director, management are likely to avoid a head on confrontation and introduce the new contracts by stealth and divide and rule tactics. At Portsmouth the management have put the whole thing off for a year in the face of a hostile union response.

The vast majority of lecturers are completely opposed to the

proposals which are widely seen as an attack both on conditions and on academic freedom. But at the local level militancy and the preparedness to strike varies a great deal. There is no doubt that a national campaign of opposition could be built with the right leadership. Whether NATFHE is capable of doing this is another matter.

NATFHE leaders are more likely to respond by supporting local struggles as they develop. These should obviously be built and spread to the region and beyond, and links built with other teachers' unions, in secondary, further education and university sectors. If the government get away with these plans they will certainly go for the universities next.

Jane Kelly

Berufsverbot comes to Britain

THE TORIES have introduced another major new local government bill into parliament. It is an omnibus bill designed to clear up 'loose ends' where the Tories' squeeze on local government has not yet been entirely successful.

The bill proposes the 'ringfencing' of the housing revenue accounts of local authorities. Councils will not be able to subsidise local council rents from their rates or poll tax income, or vice versa. This will have profound effects for tenants in many Labour authorities, which have in some cases used tens of millions of pounds of rate income to keep rents low in the inner cities.

If this subsidy was to be removed overnight it would mean rents for council tenants in such authorities would literally double. The Tories have promised a temporary new subsidy so such increases can be phased in over a few years; still council tenants will be clobbered. Strangely enough though, it means that local councils will suddenly have tens of millions of pounds sloshing round in their revenue accounts, which might mean fewer cuts or lower poll tax levels than would otherwise have been set.

There's a nasty sting in the tail for those, mainly Tory, local authorities which subsidise rates from their rent income. This too will be made illegal. Any subsidy will now have to go towards council housing benefit costs. This sets a very dangerous precedent. Local government has to date only administered the housing benefit system. This measure will mean some authorities will be financially subsidising it.

The second main component of the bill concerns the political activity of local government workers. After many media scare stories about alleged abuses ('Jobs for the boys/girls') where councillors in one authority were employed in another, this bill will put an end to this so-called 'twin-tracking'. It is ironic that Labour councils which introduced progressive equal opportunity employment policies to stop the 'Old boy' network of appointments have been accused of such

abuses.

This section of the bill represents a major attack on democratic rights. Not only will it stop councillors being employed by another authority, it also establishes a new category of 'politically restricted posts' in local government. Excluding teachers (although there are now rumours that secondary heads will be included) it encompasses tens of thousands of employees who are on a salary equivalent of £13,500 per year.

The extent of the political restrictions to be imposed is not clear. It is left to the discretion of the secretary of state. There have been heavy hints that these restrictions could include holding any office in a political party or even canvassing!

The Tories are establishing a new monitoring officer post in

each authority whose job will be to ensure this provision is not breached by the council's employees. This measure is reminiscent of the West German 'Berufsverbot' which bans tens of thousands of state employees from politics.

The response of the Labour leadership and their new realist allies in local government will be

more of the same: pious words of opposition combined with ruthless implementation of the Tories' dirty work. For the hard left in local government it means greater concentration on developing trade union resistance, including opposition from any base in the council chamber itself.

Davy Jones



Housing has been the most heavily attacked of all local government services. Here Gloucester council tenants protest against Council plans to sell off 6,000 homes as the new Housing Act begins to bite.

Pig-sick in Scotland

WITH AN APPROPRIATE sense of timing, the new political group - the Scottish Socialist Party, first met on November 5 to have informal discussions about the situation developing in Scottish politics. They have called a founding rally for February 25 in Glasgow City Hall.

Though some leading SSP members have recently left the Labour Party, the spark which ignited the pent-up frustration behind the formation of the SSP came from the bonfire which Silars lit at the Govan By-election.

Splits are, more often than not, messy affairs based on accumulated frustration at the politics of the leadership, rather than a serious move to challenge the leadership.

It would not be wholly accurate though to describe the SSP as a split from Labour. Certainly, the interim co-ordinators of the SSP -

Margaret Stewart and J D Young - had previously been in the Labour Party, but neither they nor anyone else had conducted a campaign within the Labour Party as an SSP caucus to win over forces to their position.

On the contrary, it was a case of individuals resigning as individuals without any coherent political programme on which to base their 'split' other than supporting the ideal of an independent socialist Scotland. Parties which first declare themselves in this manner and only afterwards set about the task of articulating a coherent programme, do not tend to last long.

With Kinnock's diabolical performance, there is no shortage of Labour Party members who are pig-sick. It is however, another matter entirely to mould those who may leave in frustration to join the SSP into a unified and credible organisation. The history of the Labour Party in Scotland is littered

with the corpses of breakaway groups, most of them far more significant - at least numerically - at their launch than the SSP.

This swing between the SNP and Labour indicates a conscious mass opposition to Thatcher in Scotland. It also indicates - ominously for the SSP - that the main struggle is unfolding within and between those two parties, leaving precious little ground for any new group to exist on, even one which attempts to address this central contradiction in Scottish politics.

It is possible for the SSP to exist on the margins for a certain length of time, but only as a propaganda group - and then only if they key into the main debates, such as those identified with Scottish Labour Action, that are beginning to take place inside the Labour Party.

Jim Niblock

'In the interests of national security...'

THE SECURITY SERVICES Bill (SSB) and Official Secrets Bill (OSB), currently going through parliament, represent further entrenchments of the powers of the state and erosions of civil liberties.

The failure of the 'broad anti-Thatcher alliance' to create any kind of political crisis out of the passing of the bills holds many lessons in itself. Widespread criticism of s.2(1) of the old Secrets Act, the government's defeats over *Spycatcher*, Ponting and other controversies led this alliance to develop illusions that the new bills may lead to a liberalisation, albeit against the tide, on the question of state security.

In fact the government never had any intention of addressing this criticism. The sole function of the new acts will be to make more efficient the implementation of policy dangerously riddled by debacles in recent years. Hence two of the main demands raised by this lobby in the *Spycatcher* and Ponting affairs – the need for 'public interest' and 'prior publication' defences against prosecution for disclosing information –

have been omitted from the OSB.

A jury was able to let off Clive Ponting even though he was technically guilty, because of the complete arbitrariness and lack of credibility of the old Secrets Act. Now there will be an indefinite and blanket ban on the disclosure of any information in specific areas: defence, MI5, international relations and national security. Under these terms it is likely that Ponting would not have got off; *Spycatcher* would have remained banned; and John Stalker would now be inside with the Guildford 4.

The OSB's real scope is only clear when taken with the SSB (setting out the ambit of MI5) and a definition of the type of information and activity subject to non-disclosure. This is to include protecting the state from actions 'intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by



The new laws will make raids on journalists and publications easier and more information illegal to obtain or publish.

political, industrial or violent means'. Implementation will ensure no further beans are spilled on Peter Wright and MI5's infamous 'bugging and burgling across London'. It also could be used to ensure silence on actions (including illegal ones) taken against left wing, black, trade union or Irish organisations.

As with the media ban on republican sympathisers – the aim is not simply to keep 'Britain's enemies' at bay. The bill's effect will be intimidatory: smothering broad public debate, particularly in the media and by public figures.

The weakness of Labour's opposition is that it has always defended the concept of 'national interest' and 'national security' that the bills are based on. Before 1889 there was no legislation against spying or information leaking. Its appearance and usage coincided exactly with the zenith and decline of British imperialist hegemony and (ironically) the developing need to protect itself against its imperialist rivals – not those opposed to bourgeois democracy. Thus the 1911 Act now being replaced was passed in response to apprehension

regarding German activities in the run up to the 1914-18 war.

Thus in defending this national interest Labour's hands were tied in attempting to argue that the denial of trade union rights at GCHQ should not be over-ridden on grounds of national security. Similarly with the new OSB; how can Labour convincingly argue for a 'public interest' defence in favour of disclosure that will somehow get around a 'national interest' argument against it? Either the 'public interest' and 'national interest' are the same or they are not. If there is such a gap between the 'people' and the 'nation' are not other policies based on national security, NATO membership for one, also likely to be questioned?

United action with all who oppose the existing and proposed restrictions on freedom of information and the lack of accountability of state bodies, must be sought. Unfortunately this is unlikely to bite, without greater clarity over what exactly such alliances are for and against. Socialists, at least, must be clear that such rights will never be attained so long as they are tied to the interests of the capitalist state. We have much to contribute to that discussion.

Piers Mostyn

Advert

International VIEWPOINT

A fortnightly review of news and analysis published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International

Subscribe now!

Payment: French francs preferred. Cheques to PEC, CCP No 2 322 42T Paris. Bank transfers to PEC, BNP Robespierre, Account 230179/90. Important: All bank or postal transfers must also be notified by letter.

Subscription and correspondence to:

International Viewpoint,
2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France

Subscription rates:

Surface Mail: 1 year 200FF/£18; 6 months 120FF/£9.50

Air Mail: 1 year 245FF/£21; 6 months 135FF/£13

Poland Round table or round and round the mulberry bush?

AFTER MONTHS of hesitation and prevarication, the 'round-table' talks between the Polish regime and the leadership of Solidarnosc have got underway.

Though by no means united on their objectives in these talks, the leadership of the ruling Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) have clearly decided that some form of compromise is the only viable way out of their long-standing political and economic crisis.

Solidarnosc, on the other hand, are if anything less united on their objectives than the PZPR. While Solidarnosc leader, Lech Walesa clearly believes that the only way forward lies in achieving some sort of consensus between a legalised independent trade union movement and the regime, many in the rank and file remain understandably dubious, as witnessed by the recent miners' strike in Belchatow.

The regime is clearly now prepared to legalise Solidarnosc, but with a number of important provisos - the general aim of which are clearly to restrict the capacity of the union to launch any



Walesa in the heyday of 1980: now he describes the 1981 martial law imposition as an 'unfortunate incident'.

kind of action in opposition to the regime. The condition of any dialogue was recognition of the Polish Constitution and the 'leading role' of the PZPR by the opposition.

The current talks would seem to be very much a confirmation that the regime is pursuing its strategy, outlined by General Kiszczak some months ago, of 'incorporating opposition leaders into official institutions'. The 'round-table' may represent the beginning of such a process. Walesa's downplaying of the history of confrontation between the state and the union, referring to the 1981 imposition of martial law as 'unfortunate incidents', is not a promising start.

Though it would be unwise to pre-judge the current process of negotiations too much in advance, the conduct of the Walesa leadership over the last year has been to seek consensus - to the detriment of independent workers' action - as we saw last summer. However, by no means all of the opposition in Poland are in agreement with Walesa. Young workers, who

played a leading role in last summer's action, have demonstrated their misgivings about dropping action in return for vague promises on a number of occasions.

In addition, the independent Polish Socialist Party (PPS), an organisation comprising a number of differing strands of anti-stalinist, socialist opinion, formed in 1987, has been stepping up its level of activity and organisation over recent months, taking part in demonstrations and publishing various journals. They argue that 'mass sackings, unemployment and increasing exploitation are the price paid for participation in government by that part of the opposition which is prepared to subscribe to the model of economic reform implied by support for the "anti-crisis pact".'

If used correctly, the current talks could play a useful role - to get Solidarnosc legalised and widen the scope for independent union activity. The problem is that Walesa and those that think like him might concede the latter to gain the former - which would be a case of one step forward, two steps back.

Patrick Baker

The PPS have recently opened an international office in London and have set up a support committee. They are desperately appealing for funds and cheques should be payable for the time being to 'Golborne Branch Labour Party'. Send to PPS(RD), 92 Ladbrooke Grove, W11.

New premises for Socialist Outlook and a new appeal!

AFTER MONTHS of searching, fundraising, problems and more problems, *Socialist Outlook* has at last acquired new office premises.

We have managed to buy three floors comprising seven offices in a self-contained building in London. This will allow us to produce our magazine, support and organise the many campaigns and activities that we are involved in, and offer space and facilities to some of the currents on the left with whom we work.

We can now do these things without the continual threat of leases running out, and have our own premises as a long-term investment, with our income going into a mortgage as opposed to a landlord's pocket.

But, as readers will know, even after the relative slowing down of the London property boom, it is still extremely expensive; we have had to scrape together every penny we could lay our hands on to pay the tens of thousands we needed for the deposit and lawyers' bills: unfortunately rich supporters of *Socialist Outlook* are few and far between!

We need financial support from our readers to help us get the building into a usable state: refurbished, repaired, with all the facilities necessary to make this a really useful resource for the far left; and to help us with our mortgage payments so that we can continue to improve our journal and direct our resources into organising political activity.

Dig deep!
Speed your contributions to: *Socialist Outlook* PO Box 705, London SW19 1HA (cheques made payable to 'Socialist Outlook')

**RED
STRIPE**

**Issue 2
Out now!**

Revolutionary Youth Magazine

**40p inc
postage**

from:
PO Box 705
London SW19 1HA



Charter 88 is silent on anti-democratic immigration and nationality laws.

Electoral reformism?

RICHARD JAMES explains his view of why socialists should critically support the Charter 88 campaign for democratic rights and electoral reform.

The organisers of Charter 88 expect their campaign to have 25,000 paid up members by Easter – fast work for a movement launched in December.

The Charter has already attracted a broad range of signatories from across the political spectrum including leading figures in the Socialist Conference; elements of Labour's soft left and hard right; and leading Social and Liberal Democrats. They join a host of academics, writers, actors and others in the public eye who have lent their support to the Charter's call for a new democratic constitutional settlement (see box).

But the Charter has also provoked opposition – from forces more politically diverse than those harnessed in its support. Its demands are of course opposed by Thatcher. Labour's deputy leader Roy Hattersley dubbed it the 'charter of despair' in the *Guardian*. And its alleged 'popular front, coalitionist basis' has been attacked by Graham Bosh and Bryn Griffiths in *Labour Briefing*, newspaper of Labour's hard left.

One thing is clear: this document and the movement it has generated have provoked a series of unexpected and interesting fractures and alignments among the non-Thatcherite forces in British politics. It is in the labour movement and within its left wing where these differences are sharpest and the alignments seem



Photos - Andrew Ward/Report

Hattersley: right-wing opponent of proportional representation.

strangest.

Championing proportional representation (PR) is perhaps the Charter's most controversial aspect, certainly within the labour movement. Eric Hammond, leader of the ultra-right-wing electricians' union, and National Union of Mineworkers leader Arthur Scargill, though not signatories to the Charter, are both enthusiastic proponents of PR. Tony Benn and Roy Hattersley are die-hard opponents. What other political issue sees such a line-up?

As with PR, so with Charter 88 as a whole: the division between those in favour and those against is not a simple left versus right split.

One reason for this is that while the hard left has been united around many questions of policy, there is by no means agreement on strategy for socialist transformation. The different strategic conceptions lead to different attitudes to democratic rights in general and to PR in particular.

For those whose strategy is essentially parliamentarist and reformist (of however left a variant) PR is anathema: it is seen as reducing

The Charter 88 demands

'We call...for a new constitutional settlement which would:

- Enshrine, by means of a bill of rights, such civil liberties as the right to peaceful assembly, to freedom of association, to freedom from discrimination, to freedom from detention without trial, to trial by jury, to privacy and to freedom of expression.
- Subject executive powers and prerogatives, by whomsoever exercised, to the rule of law.
- Establish freedom of information and open government.
- Create a fair electoral system of proportional representation. Reform the upper house to establish a democratic, non-hereditary second chamber.
- Place the executive under the power of a democratically renewed parliament and all agencies of the state under the rule of law.
- Ensure the independence of a reformed judiciary.
- Provide legal remedies for all abuses of power by the state and the officials of central and local government.
- Guarantee an equitable distribution of power between local, regional and national government.
- Draw up a written constitution, anchored in the idea of universal citizenship, that incorporates these reforms.'

the chances of electing a majority Labour government. For marxists, on the other hand, socialist strategy is not reducible to the election of a majority Labour government. This is without question a crucial task, but it is not a task to which all other considerations are subordinate.

The British electoral system is utterly and indefensibly undemocratic. The number of seats won by each party bears very little relation to the votes actually cast. For ten years we have endured Thatcher governments with large Commons majorities elected on the basis of a minority of the popular vote (less than forty-three per cent in 1987).

Charter 88's demands ring a bell in popular consciousness, where there is a longing for electoral reform. The anti-Thatcher majority of the electorate has the entirely democratic and reasonable desire to see its votes translated into an anti-Thatcher majority in the House of Commons.

Left wing opponents of PR justify risking ten more years of Tory rule on the grounds that the present electoral system may possibly, at some point, produce a Labour majority in the Commons. This is, to say the least, a high risk option – and the left will find itself in danger of being increasingly marginalised if it continues to pursue it.

Consider how different the last ten years would have been if there had been a system of proportional representation in operation in 1979. Who could argue that an unstable minority government or coalition would have had the political strength or coherence to inflict the damage done by Thatcherism with its formidable Commons majority?

Compare the situation in Britain with that in other west European countries with more democratic electoral systems. There is no doubt that one of the reasons why the austerity offensive has been most successful in Britain is that the political system here was ideally suited to it.

Another reason why Charter 88 has divided the left is the broader political context in which it was launched and the political project of some of its most prominent supporters.

The Charter was presented by its initial sponsors in the *New Statesman* as being 'above' party politics. But leader writers and columnists in the *Guardian* and elsewhere have been keen to link the Charter with a call for electoral pacts or coalitions between Labour and the centre parties. In an editorial on 12 December the *Guardian* called for a 'united front against still more years of Thatcher supremacy built on electoral pacts'.

Similarly, hard left opponents of Charter 88 and PR have argued that a coalitionist political



Will Charter 88 supporters take up the defence of trade union rights?

project is the automatic corollary of support for these demands.

Wrong. It is perfectly possible to unite with very disparate and broad political forces in a campaign for democratic rights, including electoral reform, without having agreement on the channels through which they will be carried out.

For marxists, a 'united front' against Thatcherism founded on electoral pacts is a castle built on sand. The Labour leadership's steady move to the right would speed up if the need for agreement with the centre parties was added to its armoury of weapons to deploy against the left. A Labour-centre coalition would be bound to pursue policies of austerity and make further attacks on the working class.

No way should socialists have any illusions that such a government would make dramatic improvements in democratic rights, or even that it would refrain from further attacking them. For a taste of what such a government might mean in practice, look at the socialist government in France, look at the antics of the socialists in Italy's coalition government. These are hardly attractive role-models.

The pressure towards electoral pacts and coalitions should be resisted by the left, not as a matter of dogma or ideological 'purity', but because it will not deliver the goods. We are not in the business of replacing Thatcherism with sub-Thatcherism. But that should not drive socialists away from a campaign for democratic rights that crosses party boundaries. It does mean, however, that when critically supporting such a campaign we make clear our understanding of its limitations and our own independent view of how to develop the struggle for democratic rights.

The limitations of the Charter were discussed

by Mike Marqusee in *Labour Briefing* no. 75. He explains that 'on Ireland, racism, lesbian and gay rights, trade union rights, self-government for Scotland and Wales, the police, immigration and asylum rights the Charter is in effect silent'. These are undoubtedly serious omissions. Nevertheless it would be wrong to condemn the Charter simply on the basis of what it does 'not' say. More appropriate would be an attitude of critical support, pointing out its weaknesses.

Another argument deployed on the left against the Charter is that with its demands for a bill of rights and a written constitution it sows 'illusions' in parliamentary democracy. This line of argument is ultra-left. To reject a campaign for extending democratic rights, on the basis that it sows illusions in the parliamentary system, is equivalent to rejecting a struggle for more pay on the grounds that it sows illusions in the wages system! We are for the total transformation of the political superstructure in the context of the transition to a socialist society – but we do not counterpose our vision of socialist democracy to the progressive reforms which are the subject of a campaign here and now.

More important than criticising the shortcomings of Charter 88 is providing a clear counter-strategy on how to pursue the campaign for democratic rights to that propounded by the advocates of pacts and coalitions. It is essential to explain that a coalition government will not deliver the goods. But we need to do more.

We have to explain that the strength, level of organisation and degree of political independence of the working class is the bedrock of all democratic rights. Basing ourselves on this understanding, we should aim to build a strong socialist pole within the broader campaign for democratic rights and electoral reform.

Andrew Whead/Report

The retreat from Kabul: Gorbachev cuts his losses

Why were Soviet troops sent into Afghanistan in the first place? Why was it correct to demand their withdrawal? Why is the USA sponsoring Islamic 'fundamentalist' guerrillas while denouncing Khomeini's regime in Iran? What are the implications for other Soviet-backed regimes? What will happen next? JOHN LISTER discusses some of the issues and offers some answers.

Leonid Brezhnev's decision in 1979 to send troops to prop up the weak pro-Moscow regime in Kabul was a gamble which brought serious setbacks to the Soviet bureaucracy.

Hostility to the intervention poisoned the ground for Soviet diplomatic initiatives in much of the 'Third World', especially the muslim states.

Though the troops were seeking to preserve an existing pro-Moscow regime in a country that had been for decades in the Soviet 'sphere of influence', their intervention gave the US warmongers a golden opportunity to step up their cold war propaganda, backed by an economic boycott. Reagan quoted the 'evil empire' as a pretext for his massive military build-up and the new Thatcher government was also able to cash in on the intervention as a reserve weapon in its arguments for siting Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe.

In both Washington and London a touching new concern was discovered for the 'self-determination of the Afghan people' - who had previously been completely ignored, and whose nationalities had been crudely carved up by the arbitrary imposition of borders by British imperialists.

Reagan, still smarting from the US humiliation at the hands of Khomeini's fundamentalism in Iran, lost no time in starting to funnel aid to the fundamentalist mujahedin, soon making them the best-financed guerrillas in history. The effectiveness of their guerrilla warfare is open to considerable doubt, and their impact for many years was much greater on naive western journalists than on the Soviet forces.

The intervention also brought the USSR the huge domestic cost of what proved to be not a limited and straightforward policing action but a prolonged and unwinnable guerrilla war, taxing the morale of Soviet troops, breaking the myth of their invincibility, and offering the Moscow leaders no plausible easy escape. While an escalation of Soviet involvement could have struck heavier blows at the mujahedin, in the absence of popular support for the regime in Kabul, this could only have been at the expense of virtual genocide. Estimates of Soviet losses are unreliable: however the figure of 15,000 Soviet dead is not apparently contested - with many more injuries.

However there was never any indication that the Soviet troops were sent in to 'sovietise', annex or 'assimilate' Afghanistan to the USSR. Arguments of Soviet 'expansionism', whether raised by pro-Stalinist supporters or by op-

ponents of the invasion, were always wide of the mark. Brezhnev went in to support a client regime in trouble, not as part of a global strategy for expansion to 'warm water ports'. The troops made no effort to impose collectivisation or other measures on the areas they controlled; on the contrary, the Kamal regime installed by Moscow made a continual series of overtures and concessions to the Islamic forces, culminating in the new constitution at the end of 1988.

Those like the British Socialist Workers Party who argued then and now that Moscow's line was 'imperialist', and who now argue that socialists should 'welcome' the Soviet 'defeat'

Trotskyist movement, some of whom grotesquely (and from the safety of long distance) 'hailed the Red Army', arguing with typical white petty bourgeois arrogance that the forces of 'progress', (the Soviet artillery and infantry, napalm and helicopter gunships), would help 'civilise' or even bring a form of socialism to the 'backward' Afghans.

But many socialists who had opposed the invasion still had serious doubts over the effects of a Soviet withdrawal - and were for various reasons profoundly reluctant to take up the demand for troops out.

The most credible argument for this point of view was that the Soviet invasion had substantially changed the status quo in 1979, and that in the aftermath of a Soviet withdrawal the progressive forces - largely grouped around the divided Communist Party (PDPA) - would be the victims of a bloodbath. Unfortunately for this point of view, the Soviet presence could only be maintained through the continuation of massive slaughter and destruction, forcing millions of Afghans from their homes.

A less helpful line of opposition to calling for 'troops out' rested upon the fact that Thatcher and Reagan were of course using the Afghanistan events for their own cynical propaganda. However if socialists follow this logic, they wind up gagged on any issue where a mass popular movement clashes with a Stalinist bureaucracy - as for instance in Poland (where the cold warriors tried to hi-jack the Solidarnosc struggle, and many socialists got cold feet). It was never the case that by calling for troops out of Afghanistan socialists gave any support to the reactionary mujahedin.

Others, perhaps entertaining illusions that the Afghan intervention might have presaged a more active line of Soviet military support for revolutionary struggles elsewhere, argued (drawing opposite conclusions from the British SWP) that a defeat for the Red Army could trigger the equivalent of the American 'Vietnam syndrome', and thus set back the cause of revolution. Such an analysis rests, in essence upon a crude view of the world as simply two counterposed 'camps' - with imperialism on the one hand, and the working class (including the Soviet bureaucracy) on the other.

Not only does this eliminate any independence of the working class from their bureaucratic misleaders, but it fails abysmally to grasp the reality of Stalinist foreign policy. Since Khrushchev's one-off adventure with Cuba in the 1960s, Soviet leaders, beginning



Courtesy of Uncle Sam: Mujahedin arms spree in Pakistan.

show how far they have strayed from a class analysis. In a major article, *Socialist Worker* declared that:

'Defeat in South East Asia was a blow which US imperialism took a decade even to begin to recover from. Despite its victory in the Gulf the Pentagon has not yet fully erased the memory.

'Gorbachev faces a similar nightmare. The repercussions of this defeat will echo way beyond the borders of Afghanistan.

'All socialists should welcome it.

'The United States decision to supply surface to air missiles to the mujahedin was an important factor in Russia's defeat...

'Inside Afghanistan the cycle of misery wrought by yet another attempt at imperialist subjection can only continue.' (February 4, 1989)

To see the US supply of Stinger missiles as an agency for the type of change welcomed by socialists is a feat of 'marxist' analysis reserved for those who share the SWP's bizarre view of the Soviet Union as a state capitalist regime, qualitatively indistinguishable from the USA. Few class conscious workers will share the SWP's glee at the mujahedin victory, which they claim 'will encourage the opponents of Russian rule everywhere'.

Surprisingly, however, the 1979 invasion was supported not only by those who routinely backed the Moscow bureaucracy, but also by some elements from the western ultra left and

David Stewart-Smith/Insight



Fighting for reactionary ideology and institutions – mujahedin guerrilla.

with Brezhnev, have made it patently clear that they would *not* challenge imperialism militarily in its traditional 'spheres of influence', and that while they may support friendly *governments* (as in Afghanistan itself), they would raise not a finger in military action to support insurgent revolutionaries in Central America, Southern Africa or Asia.

Gorbachev's decision to cut his losses and withdraw from Afghanistan, and his apparent willingness to do deals with imperialism on other 'regional conflicts' are not so much new developments in Soviet policy, but the global equivalent of 'new realism', attempting to strike compromises with hard-line capitalist leaders at the expense of the struggles of the oppressed.

Already the western media are speculating freely as to which other struggle will be the next to be sacrificed by Moscow on the altar of 'reconciliation'. Soviet pressure has been brought to bear on Angola's MPLA regime to negotiate a settlement involving the withdrawal of Cuban troops, who have been helping to repel imperialist-backed UNITA guerrillas. Mozambique already receives more western than Soviet aid in combatting South African-sponsored Renamo mercenaries. Moscow has even tried to force the exiled African National Congress into opening talks with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Under these conditions, continued Soviet support for Nicaragua is placed in doubt. Moscow has made plain it has no interest in supporting guerrilla movements in El Salvador, or radical movements elsewhere in Latin America which might interfere with its new commercial agreements with capitalist governments, including Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

Similarly in Asia, Moscow is more interested in links with the bourgeois governments than with the workers' struggles in the Philippines and Indonesia. All this cynical horse-trading with imperialism is as much a key component of Gorbachevism abroad as glasnost and perestroika are at home.

The other main argument raised by the opponents of a Soviet withdrawal is that the impending mujahedin victory will endanger the defence of the USSR itself, by establishing a

new, reactionary, pro-imperialist or Islamic regime on its southern flank, which may inflame the Soviet Muslim republics.

Socialists cannot argue for a defence of the USSR which depends upon the permanent military subjection of neighbouring peoples.

In fact the best defence of the USSR against such a threat rests on the vastly superior living standards, education and culture enjoyed by the peoples of the southern Soviet republics, together with prompt measures to reverse the traditional attitudes of Great Russian chauvinism, and thus defuse the national tensions which might otherwise be exploited by the Islamic reactionaries.

For Afghanistan, the future looks bleak. It seems that the Kabul regime may hang on longer than the western media had predicted: but since it has completely lost any serious control over the vast bulk of the countryside, its days must be numbered. Then the rival mujahedin factions will quickly fall out over division of the spoils: tied to reactionary ideology and archaic institutions (the mildest of which is restoring the monarchy), and corrupted by years of easy cash, arms sales and dope dealing, none of them has anything progressive to offer the peasantry or the tiny working class.

In the absence of a central state machinery or a predominant military power among the mujahedin factions, and with the predictable indifference of the imperialists (who don't care *who* rules Afghanistan, on *whatever* basis, as long as it represents a setback for Moscow), the most likely scenario appears to be a 'Lebanisation' of Afghanistan into zones of influence around the various guerrilla groupings.

Though there appears to be little or no scope in the foreseeable future for a healthy socialist current to emerge in Afghanistan to challenge the reactionary rule of the guerrillas, the working class movement in Britain, the USA and other imperialist countries should at least take up the demand for a halt to all further supplies of arms and cash to the mujahedin, and expose the complicity of self-styled 'democratic' imperialism in the restoration of 13th century-style feudal and Islamic repression on the women and men of Afghanistan.

Ten years of crisis

December 27, 1979 Massive Soviet invasion using forces from Soviet Muslim republics. Babrak Karmal and a new Parcham cabinet flown into Afghanistan in Soviet planes. State apparatus, purged to death by Amin, teeters on point of collapse.

February 1980 Troops from Muslim republics withdrawn, replaced by Russians. Karmal frees bazaar merchants from state control.

1980 Land reforms annulled.

April 1984 Radio Kabul claims major victories in military offensive against mujahedin involving over 500 Soviet tanks and armoured troop carriers.

1985 Gorbachev strategy to 'Afghanise' the war begins, with autumn assembly of tribal chiefs, mullahs and other 'personalities'.

November 1985 Karmal presents 'ten theses' including a new system of local elections designed to draw in non-members of PDPA, including mullahs.

1986 Regime boasts it has built 100 mosques in six years. Religious teaching reintroduced into schools. US aid to mujahedin reaches \$470m.

March 1986 US decision to supply mujahedin with portable anti-aircraft missiles.

May 1986 Najibullah, head of political police, takes helm from Karmal as party chief.

December 1986 Najibullah appeals from Moscow for government of national unity including mujahedin leaders.

1987 US aid for mujahedin hits \$600m.

January 1987 Culmination of Soviet-Afghan offensive. Revolutionary Council announces six-month renewable unilateral ceasefire and a general amnesty.

February 1987 Geneva talks under aegis of United Nations.

November 1987 New assembly of notables adopts a new constitution restoring Islamic rules of inheritance, and changing the official designation of the state, eliminating the term 'democratic'. A new agrarian law raises maximum permitted size of land-holding, and abolishes restrictions on big landlords.

February 8, 1988 Gorbachev announces swifter than expected schedule for withdrawal of troops.

April 14, 1988 Geneva accord signed by governments of Afghanistan, USSR, Pakistan and the USA.

October 1988 Leftist faction opposed to talks and deals with mujahedin expelled from PDPA.

December 1988 PDPA, in new bid for deal with mujahedin, announces change of name and abandonment of Marxist-Leninist ideology. New policy proposals include incentives for private, especially foreign, investment.

February 1989 The last convoys of Soviet troops pull out from Kabul and cross the border. Intensified feuding between mujahedin factions.

No Soviet deals with imperialism

Among the assessments of the Afghan events from the Trotskyist movement is this statement, issued on March 21, 1988, by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International

On February 8, Mikhail Gorbachev announced that Soviet troops would withdraw from Afghanistan in the ten months following May 15, 1988.

The fact that the withdrawal of these troops was decided on when 'the causes that led to their presence in the country' – to repeat the phrase used by Leonid Brezhnev in the wake of the Soviet intervention – have not disappeared but are more operative than ever, is in itself a striking recognition of failure. More than eight years after the start of the intervention, the balance sheet is terribly negative:

- The USSR is bogged down in an invasion, which has led to slaughter and enormous destruction.

- Its intervention has run up against deepgoing hostility from the great majority of the Afghan population.

- The Afghan reactionary forces have been able to increase their influence enormously in the name of a struggle against the invader.

- The 'progressive' regime in Kabul is even more unpopular and more fragile than it was on the eve of the Soviet intervention.

- The intervention in Afghanistan by US imperialism and its regional partners – including in particular Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, through their aid to the 'Mujahadin' – is greater than ever.

- US imperialism and its European allies have gained considerable political advantage from the vast revulsion of world public opinion, including in the workers' movement, against the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

- In the USSR itself, this 'dirty war' has engendered 'moral gangrene' in the ranks of the army and deepgoing discontent in the population. This is especially true in the 'Muslim' republics, where anti-communist Islamic propaganda has enjoyed a vigour unequalled for several decades.

Why we called for withdrawal

The Fourth International correctly judged that the massive intervention of Soviet troops, as it unfolded, was not only contrary to the right of self-determination of the people of Afghanistan but also to the real interests of the struggle of the exploited and oppressed throughout the region and to those of the Soviet workers' state. The prolongation of this intervention could only aggravate the harm that it did to these interests. This is why the Fourth International



Gorbachev: looking for new deals

called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

The withdrawal decision announced by Mikhail Gorbachev will be executed when the damage that it aims to limit has long since grown to enormous proportions.

In his February 8 statement, Gorbachev clearly refused to link the withdrawal of Soviet troops to an agreement with Washington and Islamabad on the formation of a new Afghan government, as is being demanded by the Pakistani dictatorship.

'This is a purely internal Afghan problem. Only the Afghans can settle it, even if they belong to different, or even opposing camps. When it is suggested that the Soviet Union must take part in negotiations over this and still more with third states, we answer clearly: Spare us this, it is not our problem, or yours.' That is what Mikhail Gorbachev has said.

This attitude is in total contradiction with the crude interference represented by the intervention of Soviet troops in Kabul in December 1979, just as it stands in contradiction to the very numerous occasions throughout the history of the Soviet bureaucracy when it has negotiated the fate of governments in other countries with imperialism and forced its allies to conform to the results of these negotiations.

The coming months and years will make it possible to verify whether the principle declared by Gorbachev is more than a purely circumstantial argument, especially since under Gorbachev Moscow today is advocating a worldwide course of 'reconciliation' for the Middle East, South Africa, Kampuchea and Central America! We will oppose any attempt by the Kremlin to pressure the peoples of these countries and regions into accepting so-called reconciliation with their worst enemies.

The USSR's duty is to provide aid, without strings, to the peoples struggling against imperialism and reaction. Only the leaderships of these struggles have the right to negotiate compromises with the imperialists and their partners. In this respect, since Moscow initially made ending US and Pakistani aid to the Mujahadin a condition for the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, it rapidly found itself

confronted with a new condition from Washington – the ending of Soviet aid to the Kabul government following the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

This sort of trading between Moscow and Washington, over the heads of their respective allies, in the last analysis can only harm the more advanced revolutionary struggles. To get what it wants in Afghanistan for example, Moscow might be led to make concessions at the expense of Nicaragua, which is less important for its own security. This is why, rejecting such deals in principle, we call for a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan without negotiations between Moscow and Washington. The USSR must withdraw its forces from Afghanistan without

delay, and continue to provide aid for the Afghan progressive forces struggling against the feudal-tribal and Islamic reactionaries, who are supported by imperialist and reactionary Muslim states. It should conform to the announcement by Moscow on March 17 that its troops will withdraw, even if no agreement is reached with Pakistan and the United States. Moscow is continuing, however, to express its desire for such an accord and to pursue that end.

Washington raises the stakes

Even before being implemented, the Soviet decision has already sown deepgoing disarray in the enemy camp. This is true at an international level. The most reactionary currents in the imperialist countries are disgusted by the perspective of losing what has been one of their main anti-Soviet arguments in recent years. Some have gone as far as to denounce the decision for a Soviet withdrawal, calling it 'Machiavellian'! Far from making it easier for Moscow to withdraw its troops, the US is upping the ante.

The same thing is happening on the ground. After having concealed their differences and rivalries behind a facade of unity against the Soviet invader, the various components of the Islamic Alliance based in Peshawar, on Pakistani territory, are clashing more and more openly. Recently, the strongest of these forces, but also the most reactionary – Hekmatyar's Hezbi-Islamic – has taken the leadership of the Alliance. As the Soviet troops withdraw, the Mujahadin organisations will lose their aura of 'freedom fighters', as Reagan calls them, and appear as they are – profoundly corrupt reactionary organisations representing contending, irreconcilable ambitions for power.

If, however, the government proves incapable of surviving the Soviet withdrawal, its fall would anyway be a lesser evil than the Soviet Union getting bogged down indefinitely in Afghanistan. In any event, in the long run, the withdrawal will benefit the development of a mass revolutionary movement in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

Women of the world unite!

The first international women's day took place on March 19, 1911 as a celebration of the uprising of the Prussian workers.

At the Second International Conference of Working Women in 1910, Clara Zetkin, a leader of the German workers' and women's movement, declared that it should be an annual celebration. In 1913 the date was changed to March 8 – the date of an important strike by women textile workers in New York.

In the USSR in 1917, women determined to celebrate March 8 (February 23 on the old calendar) as usual and called strikes and demonstrations, providing the spark that led to the February Revolution and thence the first successful workers' revolution in October.

Three quarters of a century later, women around the world still struggle against exploitation as workers and peasants, and against their special oppression as women. This supplement for International Women's Day 1989 focusses on women's role in the working class movement and mass struggles in Europe.

History tells that socialist women have frequently played a key role in women's struggles, and that women have always been in the vanguard of revolutionary action. As we celebrate International Women's Day 1989, and contemplate the struggles to come, this is valuable food for thought.



Women Against Pit Closures Cultural revolution in the coalfields

Euro-communists like Bea Campbell have attacked the tactics of the 1984 miners' strike, and attempted to use the success of the Women Against Pit Closures movement as an argument against 'macho' class struggle politics. Five years after the great strike began, VALERIE COULTAS argues that on the contrary, the women's mobilisation built on the traditional class consciousness of the mining communities to produce a stronger socialist consciousness – from which all women can learn.

'The strike has been the quickest social and political education we could have gone through... Now we have become political animals' (Betty Heathfield, 1984).

This article looks at the political character of the Women Against Pit Closures movement. Five years after the beginning of the strike on March 6, 1984, this movement continues to exist and, although its active membership has diminished, still campaigns – on behalf of the miners sacked by the NCB during the strike, and in support of other causes including better education for working class women, for a non-nuclear energy

policy and nuclear disarmament.

In an article in *New Statesman* at the very end of the strike (March 8, 1985) Bea Campbell, in a virulent attack on the *Morning Star* wing of the Communist Party (CP) and the 'ultra left', claimed Women Against Pit Closures as a political reflection of her own Eurocommunist ideology. The movement, she argued, was the province of the realistic non-violent left as opposed to the 'macho militancy' which 'encrusts the myths of the hard left'. She counterposed the success of Greenham and Women Against Pit Closures, both assumed to be equal converts to 'non-violence', to the 'tendency of the left to equate "muscular militancy" and violence

with political strength'. In short, she claimed the violent tactics of the NUM leadership were responsible for the defeat of the miners, and that Women Against Pit Closures was not part of this but reflected of the more sophisticated politics of the women's movement.

This was one of a series of articles at the time aimed at discrediting the politics of class struggle in the labour movement and bending to the tide of New Realism, the idea that resisting Thatcherism is impossible and that strike action is 'economistic'. Five years on from that strike this general idea has become even more common at leadership and even rank and file levels of the labour movement. The

John Smith/ITL



Women did much more than make tea: their skills helped keep the strike alive.

real political character of the Women Against Pit Closures movement and the lessons of the 1984/85 miners' strike both provide a rich source for refuting these defeatist arguments.

Real reasons for the defeat

The 1984 miners' strike was the longest all-out strike by a national union in the history of the British labour movement. It involved a bitter clash between the mining communities and the conservative government over the future of coal, pits and miners' jobs. Despite the hardship, the battles with the police, the arrests and sackings, the vicious media campaign of vilification and the sequestration of funds, the miners continued to resist. The final blow came not from the Tories, but from within the labour movement, when the TUC refused to turn paper resolutions into active support. In a similar way to 1926, the leaders of the labour movement left the miners to fight alone: but this time round the TUC did not even begin to support them.

Political Character of WAPC

Four factors are important in understanding the political character of the Women Against Pit Closures movement as it emerged in 1984. First, the structural position of women in mining communities is one where a traditional domestic division of labour is forced upon them. Vic Allen in *The Militancy of British Mining* argues that miners families are crucial to the organisation of mining as an industry. The servicing role women play is integral to survival given the harsh nature of the job and the shift system which dictates the routine of family life. Mining has status within the community but servicing miners has little status because women's domestic labour, although vital, remains un-

paid. In many areas miners' wives form a reserve army of labour in cotton, textiles, catering and clerical work but their primary role is as miners' wives. The inferior status of women flows from this material reality.

But women who grow up in mining communities are also aware of the dangers of mining and of the interests of miners as part of the working class. This does not lead them to have a romantic notion of the job their husbands do. They take a very practical attitude. 'No one in their right minds would sentence them to a life in the dark, but what are the alternatives? For a working man being on the dole is no nearer a way to touch the Sun'. (J. Miller, *You Can't Kill the Spirit*, 1986).

Secondly, while class consciousness is part of a long historical tradition in mining this does not necessarily exclude women. In contrast to Campbell's Eurocommunist view that feminism exists outside the 'traditionally evolved class understanding', women have been active agents in the creation of working class history. In 1926, miners' wives were involved in public rallies, demonstrations as well as organising food parcels and fundraising activities. The Miners' Federation approached the Labour Party women's organisation to liaise with miners' families. The 1926 Labour Women's Conference supported the call for the nationalisation of coal. In 1972 and 1974 women again organised the distribution of food parcels. Even before the strike started in 1981 Betty Heathfield helped form a Chesterfield Women's Action Group that campaigned in the mining community for Tony Benn as deputy leader of the Labour Party. While it is true that working class organisations have rarely fully represented working class women, at high points in the class struggle women have made their presence felt. 'Working class' is not synonymous with 'male'.

Thirdly, miners' wives in 1984 were obviously influenced by the wider changes in a women's role in society since the second world war and, in particular, the increasing involvement of women in the labour movement. As Cynthia Cockburn (in the pamphlet *Women, trade unions and political parties*) explains that a third of all trade unionists today are women, and this has influenced women's voting behaviour. At the 1987 general election an equal number of men and women voted Labour, and in the 18-24 age group more women voted Labour than men. The miners' wives saw themselves as part of a much wider working class women's movement committed to achieving broad social change. Lorraine Bowler from

Bold recognised the wider impact of the women's movement on the consciousness of miners' wives. 'It's because of the women's movement that we've got organised. Women are much more militant and informed. Some of our women would call themselves feminists, some wouldn't. Many of our meetings are explicitly women only; after all the men have their meetings.'

Finally, it would be completely impossible to envisage the birth and growth of Women Against Pit Closures movement without the active support of the central leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) executive at a national and regional level. It was women who took the initiative in 1984, and they had to struggle to be taken seriously by rank and file miners and leaders alike, but the conversion of the left of the union was quick and clear. Evidence of women's support for Arthur Scargill's leadership role was also manifest during the strike. In speech after speech women refuted the media image of Scargill and the miners as violent thugs, and in all the written material Arthur Scargill is given praise as a leader who was faithful to his class.

On top of this women themselves were arrested and imprisoned, experiencing the class bias of the British legal system at first hand. Anne Scargill's arrest and Brenda Greenwood's prison experience, where she was strip searched while on remand and locked up for 22 out of 24 hours, make it hard to stick to the view that confrontations with the police were confined to men. In fact, women became centrally involved in the strike precisely because it was an active strike involving the rank and file, and giving working class men and women more control over how the strike was run than many previous strikes had done. Miners' wives, unlike Bea Campbell, understood both the cause of violence – the macho aggression of Maggie Thatcher's boys in blue – and the need for self-defence on the picket lines.

It can be seen therefore that far from Women Against Pit Closures being a movement that challenged the class struggle politics of the NUM, it developed as a movement independent but complementary to it. The public speaking and fundraising activities of Women Against Pit Closures were linked to women's active involvement in the strike. The women saw the left in the union and the arrested and imprisoned miners as their allies. They did not see their movement as the carrot to the NUM's stick. Rather than trying to fit the miners' wives experience into a nar-

"...at high points in the class struggle women have made their presence felt. 'Working class' is not synonymous with 'male'."

row 'Euro-feminist' ('bush the NUM') framework, there are a number of genuine lessons to be learnt.

Greenham

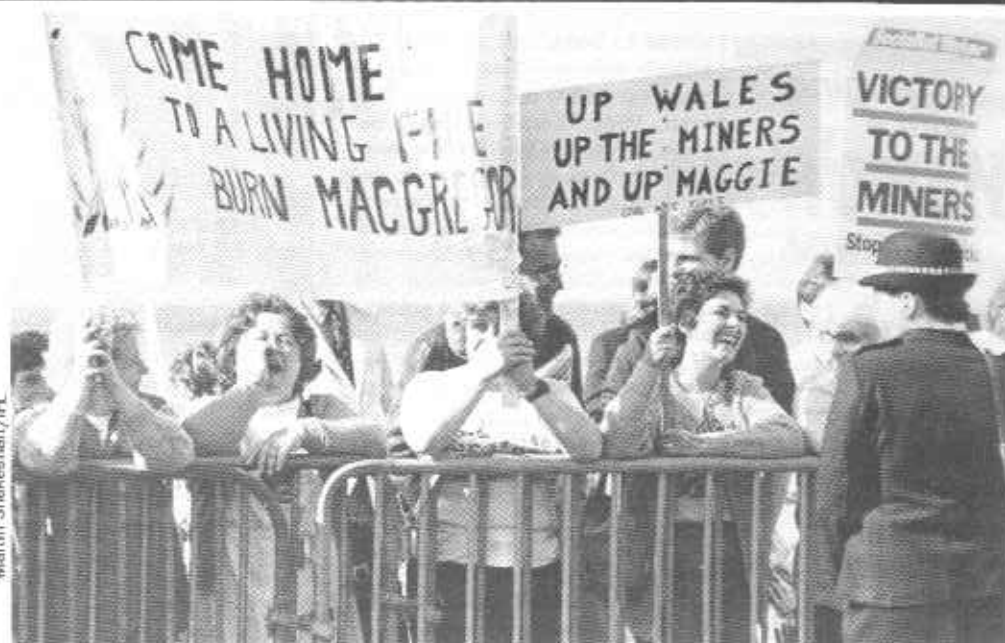
The attempt by Bea Campbell to conflate the Greenham Peace camp with the Women Against Pit Closures movement is dishonest in the extreme. They both involved women in a fight with the Tory government; but one was a traditional civil disobedience protest and the other was part of a strike. As Jean Stead outlines in *Never the Same Again*, it was really impossible to apply the non-violent tactics of the Greenham women to miners' picket lines. On the few occasions when miners and their wives did try this, as for example at Port Talbot, these demonstrations ended in disaster. The police were far less restrained in their handling of pickets than they were of Greenham women. Miners and their wives were in general opposed to deliberately getting arrested or turning the other cheek.

But this did not prevent miners and the Women Against Pit Closures movement giving political support to the aims of the Greenham women—the removal of nuclear weapons and bases, a non-nuclear energy policy, and unilateral disarmament. Neither did it mean that they refused to visit the camp and show solidarity with the Greenham struggle. Jean Stead recalls that it was rather some of the Greenham women who had difficulty with supporting the NUM at first because of their lack of commitment to Greenham type tactics. But eventually the active solidarity shown for the anti-nuclear fight and the case for coal rather than nuclear power as the main source of a progressive energy policy won the women over.

Democracy of WAPC

Women Against Pit Closures was not a highly structured movement and it was influenced by broad feminist principles of self-organisation. Betty Heathfield explained why this was the case. 'Some women find the Labour Party very off putting. It's organised from the top. Women from the mining communities didn't want hierarchy, they didn't want meeting procedures. Women are often terrified of the idea of delegates, protocol. They don't know why it's necessary. They were politicised during the dispute but they are not into political activism'.

Local groups could send representatives to the steering committee and the regular national conferences throughout the strike. Meetings were practical, geared to winning the strike and concerned with issues and areas that women felt confident about. The need to get involved in fund-raising,



Martin Shokes hart/ITL

providing food, public speaking and picketing produced a new political self-confidence among many women who had not previously enjoyed the opportunity to display these skills and talents. The collective support women gave each other in this situation mirrored the process of consciousness-raising that other women had experienced in the early 1970s, but it combined with a much deeper class consciousness and realisation of what this particular Tory government was about.

It was this growing self-confidence that made Women Against Pit Closures adamant that this movement would be controlled and led by working class women and not taken over by middle class 'do-gooders' as some women felt had happened with the soupkitchens in 1926. This implied no hostility to support from outside the mining communities but simply an understanding that miners' wives were best placed to lead the struggle.

Socialism and domestic roles

In many senses the 1984/85 miners' strike will be assessed, contrary to Campbell's Eurospeak, not as the struggle that wiped socialism off the agenda but the struggle that helped to preserve socialism as a living reality in Thatcher's Britain, showing the working class in struggle as progressive and sophisticated in its understanding of different forms of oppression. Bea Campbell again arrogantly stresses that the cultural revolution in a women's role came from outside the coalfields, from the solidarity activists. Again this underestimates the political consciousness of the whole working class and the active role of working class women within those communities.

What actually happened in the min-

ing communities during that year-long battle was a very sharp change in material reality. With the shift system out of operation, and with women actively involved in picketing, the domestic division of labour began to change, particularly in households where women were very active. Betty Heathfield, speaking at the 1984 Women's TUC explained that at first women had been taunted by miners to go back to the kitchen sink. 'But now it has created a fantastic understanding between men and women. ...The women's activity is a means of awakening and uniting the whole labour movement at the grassroots'.

In Blidworth Alan Radford and Pip Humber, husbands of Pauline and Doreen, really took their domestic labour seriously. They became houseproud, shared a Hoover and learned to know their children much better. As Pauline explained: 'I also found that Dad could look after the kids as well as mum could. If someone had suggested that to me before the strike I would have been quite hurt. ...In fact I realised it was good for them, good for Alan and good for me. ...Many men said they hadn't known their children before the strike, that they were always at work and then when they were home they were too tired to bother. Suddenly all these men had a lot to do with their kids. (L. Beaton, *Shifting Horizons*). She goes on to explain how the children in Blidworth also identified with the strike being called the 'strike centre kids' and becoming politically involved by defending at school what their fathers had done.

The new relationship between women and men was based on a material change in the social and economic role of women and men in the strike. The raising of funds, the strike centres and food halls were all

"Women Against Pit Closures were adamant that this movement would be controlled and led by working class women and not taken over by middle class 'do-gooders'..."

"The miner's wife's private skills as housewife, carer, budget keeper, manager became publicly valued..."

crucial to community survival. The miner's wife came into her own because her private skills as housewife, carer, budget-keeper, manager became publicly valued by the community at large. It was this that created the 'cultural revolution' in the coalfields during that year. Having established the social character of their contribution to the strike women moved quickly into a more general political role and gained a wider understanding of the relationship between the miners' case and that of other groups within the working class.

This new relationship was based on a struggle which the women led because they were conscious that a change of attitude was necessary if the men were to take on childcare and domestic labour, and thus enable women to participate in the strike. The miners did not automatically come to this understanding and many women still shouldered the burden of domestic tasks. But a shared political understanding of what they were up against and the belief that they had the power to change the world around them was central to the development of consciousness around these issues. To walk into a strike centre during the high points of the strike was to see a glimpse of socialism. Mining areas have always shown a strong sense of community, but the openness to new ideas was a product of a stronger socialist consciousness developing in direct opposition to the value system promoted by the Tory government, a value system constantly deferred to by the Labour leaders. The communities under seige produced their own ideology to sustain their resistance. Because women played such a central role in this resistance, rank and file miners inevitably adopted a more progressive attitude to women.

Attitude to NUM

Unfortunately the July 1985 NUM conference narrowly defeated the proposal to allow Women Against Pit Closures to affiliate to the NUM. As miners went back to work, old routines again became established and women were no longer able to play the same role. But it was the traditional male hard left around Arthur Scargill that fought hardest for Women Against Pit Closures to have associate membership status. By this time some of the Eurocommunist had drawn a negative balance sheet of the strike and were willing to compromise even on rewarding the women's movement for the contribution it had made to the struggle.

This exposes the hollowness of Bea Campbell's claim that it is the 'democratic left' which champions the cause of women and the hard left



Wayne Edginton

Scargill: backed by women's support groups.

which has 'failed to learn from the women's movement's successes'. It must have been obvious to all that the Scargill leadership of the NUM had moved a long way from the times when they defended a Page 3 pin-up in the pages of the *Yorkshire Miner*, and that the Women Against Pit Closures Movement had a real impact on this layer of the NUM executive. At the 1984 Labour Party conference, the NUM spoke in favour of the demands of the Labour Party Women's Action Committee and voted for the proposals coming from the Black Sections.

Without the strike, and above all the politics of class struggle which Bea Campbell abhors, there would never have been this change in consciousness in mining communities. The NUM would never have been moved even to debate associate membership status for miner's wives. And the strike would never have got off the ground if the NUM leaders had accepted the 'advice' of Bea Campbell to have a ballot in April 1984.

Lasting gains

To win this strike the Tories spent £106.5 million a week on oil imports, burning 600,000 tonnes of oil a week, to keep power stations running. In 1985 there were 172,363 miners; by 1987 there were only 114,974. Seven miners had been killed during the strike, four of them on picket lines. 200 miners had been imprisoned and 11,000 miners and their wives had been arrested. The defeat was a catastrophe for the mining communities, for the labour movement and for the socialist movement in Britain.

But even out of a defeat the working class movement can still make gains and learn lessons. The political breakthrough that working class women made will not be totally lost because the strike was lost. Future struggles of mining communities will draw on this example to strengthen their fight against the employers. Miners' wives have established Women's Centres at Castleford and Shiresbrook to encourage working

class women to gain access to education. Women Against Pit Closures continues to exist and requires continued support for its battle to win justice for the miners imprisoned and sacked by the NCB. This movement needs financial backing precisely because it failed to win associate membership from the NUM, and has no permanent source of funds. The left in the NUM should not give up the fight for the women's movement to have the status it deserves.

The arguments made in defence of coal during the strike still stand: that the NCB produces the lowest cost deep mined coal in Europe; that it receives the lowest subsidies in comparison to other European mines; that nuclear power, gas and oil are all more expensive forms of energy than coal. These arguments have been supplemented since the strike by others, not least that Combined Heat and Power Stations provide the most efficient heating systems because they convert heat that is normally wasted in power station cooling towers into hot water for central heating systems and that this would increase coal production by 20 million tonnes; and that, with new technology, coal can be used as a direct source of energy. The government made a political decision to cut funding to the coal industry to make it seem as if the NCB was not viable. Now it will try to farm it out to private industry to make it another Thatcher success story.

The gains of the strike are not confined to the mining communities however. Socialist feminists have gained a new inspiration from the example of miners' wives, who have proved once again that working class women will play a leading role in the struggle for socialism and feminism. The Women for Socialism movement developing out of Chesterfield is partially a product of that experience.

The 1984/85 miners' strike showed Thatcher that working class people are aware of their class interests and are capable of marshalling compelling arguments against the entire monetarist philosophy of her government, a philosophy which is now being seen to fail as inflation rates rise and working class living standards begin to decline across the board. Socialists have a responsibility to continue to point the finger of blame at the misnamed 'democratic left' and the labour leadership as centrally responsible for this defeat for failing to mobilise the rest of the class behind the miners and their wives who put up the most magnificent fight. Five years after the strike began, miners and miners' wives, we salute you!

"Socialist feminists have gained a new inspiration from the example of miners' wives..."

WOMEN IN THE NUR

The National Union of Railwaymen: the name itself speaks volumes. Women have very little place on the workforce of the union. Women do work on the railways but, not surprisingly, mainly in the 'traditional' jobs of cleaning and catering. Change is coming, but slowly, reports TONI MATTHEWS.

The NUR was born in 1913 from a merger of three of the main unions of railway workers. The oldest and largest of these unions was the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, formed in 1872. Women were not allowed to join the union until 1915. It was, of course women's recruitment into the railways during the First World War that forced this issue. Before the war under 5,000 women worked in the industry, mostly in clerical jobs. Unions and management collaborated to keep women out of the mainstream of railway employment on the grounds that it was 'unsuitable'.

It was the employers who broke this 'pact' at the start of the war and began to employ women as porters, ticket collectors, carriage and wagon cleaners and signalwomen. By the end of the war 55,000 women had been recruited.

Up to this time women in the industry were 'organised' in the Railway Women's Guild of the NUR where they raised funds for orphans and its other welfare services. It was the Guild which was instrumental in establishing Women's Sections in the Labour Party. The massive influx of women into the workforce caused a big divide in the union. The right wing was opposed to women becoming members, insisting that women's employment was of a temporary na-

ture. The left argued that it was necessary not only to recruit women but to demand equal pay for equal work in order to protect men's jobs at the end of the war.

Women, in fact, received only 3 shillings a week war bonus payments while the men received 5 shillings—since the employers argued that women's labour was only three-fifths as productive as men's. Presumably, women in signal boxes only pulled three-fifths of the levers!

But despite women's entrance into the 'mainstream' of the industry and into the union during the First World War, women are still a minority in every sense of the word in 1989. Although membership of the NUR is now at an all-time low, due to massive rationalisation and redundancies, fewer than 6,500, out of a membership of 125,000, are women.

There are two main reasons why there are so few women in the union. One is the prevalence of a traditional view that the majority of jobs in the industry should be done by men. In 1983 there were 56 female guards and six drivers. Signalwomen are few and far between and there are less than a handful of women on the Permanent Way and in Signal and Telecommunications. The vast majority of women are in cleaning and catering; and since the ending of the closed shop agreement these are the least organised and have a very heavy turnover of staff.

Yet the jobs women do involve long hours, shift and night work and very often heavy, dirty work. Today, a signaller in a power box has much



"A bevy of Lady Helpers" at a 1924 branch event, according to the NUR's history book.

"Votes for Women," July 4, 1915.

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper

The War Paper for Women

VOTES FOR WOMEN

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE UNITED SUFFRAGETTES

VOL. VIII (Third Series), No. 202

FRIDAY, JULY 3, 1915

Price 1d. Weekly (1/5)

BRAVO, N.U.R.!



Suffragette paper welcomes NUR decision to admit women.

less physical work to do than a carriage cleaner.

The NUR has started to look at the recruitment of women members. It has been forced to do this because the catering section (Travellers Fare) has been privatised and unless membership is maintained the union will lose negotiating rights. Yet the pay and conditions are probably the worst in the industry and the union refuses to tackle this very problem which lies at the heart of the high turnover of staff and hence the constant problem of non-members. The pay deal last year, just before the management buy-out, resulted in some employees being worse off. The complete lack of a fight against privatisation of Travellers Fare, which has also led to the worsening of conditions, reinforced the cynicism that staff have towards the union.

Change is coming slowly, however, because in the last decade women have started to organise. They have met informally at District Councils and grades conferences. Resolutions on all issues affecting women have started to appear on the agenda of the union's conferences and the union as a whole has been forced to debate maternity leave provisions, abortion, and the right for women to be organised as women in the union.

"In 1989, fewer than 6,500, out of a membership of 125,000, are women."

"There are no women on the National Executive Committee, no full time officers, and only a few women branch secretaries"

It is a long up-hill struggle. A National Women's Advisory Committee has finally been established, comprised of one delegate from each District Council. Thirteen out of the 26 District Councils have responded to date, and far fewer have established local Women's Advisory Committees. The union bureaucracy seemed to think that the establishment of the Women's Advisory Committee would dampen down the protests from women members. But although in its infancy, the committee members want to get out, meet and organise women. The leadership is doing its best to make the Committee nothing but a talking shop.

The National Union of Railwaymen must be the only major union that refused to oppose the Alton Bill. The National Executive Committee felt abortion was an issue that should be left to 'individual conscience' and the 1988 Annual General Meeting endorsed this position. British Rail at the beginning of the 1980's was forced to take equal opportunities policies on board after an investigation by the Equal Opportunities Commission. Yet the NUR has barely paid lip service to the pathetic attempts of BR to acknowledge that women should be recruited in all jobs in the industry.

Conditions at work, bad for most of the staff, are appalling if you're female and especially if you are pregnant or are responsible for child care. Toilet facilities are very often literally Victorian - dirty and unhygienic when they exist. Lack of toilets is one of the reasons why women are not recruited to do permanent way work. Sanitary towels, etc are only just appearing in some places; other places are lucky if they see soap, clean towels and hot water. Urinary infections among women are not uncommon. Sexual harassment is hardly acknowledged; women doing 'men's work' get what they deserve.

British Rail has recently introduced a 'return to work' scheme offering staff (men and women) the opportunity to take off a maximum of three years for child care purposes. The scheme will only apply to those employees 'with a skill...or occupational qualification...which will remain valuable to BR or in a job which requires a level of skill and expertise which BR considers it would be difficult to replace without a long period of training'.

"Women NUR members will continue to fight for rights that many other unions take for granted."



NUR leader Jimmy Knapp casts votes for women members - but none are on the TUC delegation.

Other than managers and engineers, this scheme would only apply to drivers, and then only if BR decided that there was a shortage in this area.

But most women cannot afford to take three years off without pay. The NUR played virtually no part in drawing up these proposals. Yet here was an opportunity for the union to fight for something concrete for women. There are a number of options that could and should be taken up: child care facilities both at work and at

the union. But the union has very little to offer them. It is stuck in its old traditionalist way of operating. There are no women on the National Executive Committee, no full time officers, and only a few women branch secretaries. Women can see that the union does very little to further the interests of women at work.

As attacks come fast and furious from the employers in the lead up to privatisation both in London Transport and British Rail, maternity leave, abortion rights and so on could well be seen as a luxury. Women members will continue to fight for rights that many other unions take for granted. There is a long way to go as can be shown by this little item which recently appeared in the 75th Anniversary edition of the NUR's *Transport Review*:

"Occasionally the NUR is accused of being behind the times, even sexist, because of the inclusion in its title of Railwaymen. There is a straightforward explanation for this:

"When the time came to decide on a title for the new Union, the leaders of the merging organisation decided they would avoid using any word in the new title which was included in the title of the existing rail unions. This was done to avoid any suspicion that one union was absorbing others.

"A suggestion was made that the new union should be called the 'National Union of Railway Workers'. This was rejected because one of the unions involved in the merger was the General Railway Workers Union.

"Finding a title acceptable to all parties and safeguarding the merger was seen as more important at the time, than incurring the wrath of the few hundred women then in membership."



home (the employer offsetting the cost of child-minding). Job sharing and part-time working should also be considered. Herein lies a problem: British Rail is anxious to replace some full-time jobs with part-time workers. The union is, quite rightly, opposed to this. But unless the union begins to take on board the needs of members who have responsibility for child care (or other dependants) then women will take these jobs. The NUR must start arguing for all kinds of flexible working arrangements (including working 'normal' hours - what is known as a domestic turn in the industry) to enable women to play a full role in the workforce.

Women in the NUR face the usual comments that they play little role in



French nurses, sick of seeming 'sweet and devoted', walked out in their thousands.

'NEITHER MAIDS, NOR NUNS, NOR IDIOTS'

In late 1988, France was shaken by a series of massive public sector strikes. To the fore were health workers, and among them nurses took the lead. ANNE MARIE GRANGER interviewed a number of nurses who had been active in the strike (which won many of its demands) including members of the strikers' national co-ordinating committee. The following extracts from her article (in the French marxist journal *Cahiers du Feminism*) show how they felt about their public 'image' – as women and nurses – and how they started to fight it.

'We want recognition' Nadia maintains. 'When they say 'nurses' people immediately think of putting on bandages or washing patients. They forget our three years study, and the knowledge we have to have... When (prime minister) Rocard talked on TV about 'under-qualified' jobs and put us on the same level as prison officers – well that really stuck in my throat! We're not just 'patient minders'; our qualifications should be recognised.'

In making that demand, the nurses are challenging the whole social image of their job. 'The whole image of the devoted nurse, always ready to sacrifice, that's an image inherited from the past when nurses were from religious orders, and practised their occupation as a 'calling' ' replied Valerie. 'At training school', she said 'they prepared us for this approach of 'sacrifice' – repeating endlessly that because we had an occupation we

loved, we would have to give all our time to it – not work to set hours.'

Workers like any others...

That is just what the nurses don't want any more. 'Stuff "vocation" and "dedication", we are nurses!' said the badge of the strike co-ordination.

'It's in the name of these abstractions like 'calling' and 'vocation' that nurses are always exploited and under-paid says Nadia. 'Because we help suffering people they insist on the title 'vocation'; they say to us 'your reward is to save lives'. Well, we agree, but saving lives doesn't give us anything to eat! Using the excuse that we do a 'social' job, pay is considered unimportant.

'It's true that we do the job with the aim of helping people, but it's necessary to be realistic. We are like other people, we also work for financial reasons – to live. We don't want the aura of being 'saints'. We want our job to be considered as important as other jobs which involve training. We want

to be on the same level as other people.'

Irene, for her part, talked about the malaise in the profession. 'There is the idea that we are not real workers. That's without doubt because we are women nurses. We inherit two problems: being women and being nurses.'

All the traditional banalities about 'typical women's jobs' reach their apex when it comes to nursing. A typical example was the ideas expressed by male nurses in a letter to *Le Monde* (25 October 1988). 'It's a woman's profession because qualities of sympathetic understanding are essential'; 'women have more dexterity'; or again 'a sick person is in a dependent situation, he expects a certain amount of mothering. Male nurses are there to enable them to get past that stage.'

In short, according to these gentlemen (who are in general technicians, the better to express their 'skills') the job of nursing is only an extension of the 'maternal function' of women!

"We are like other people, we also work for financial reasons – to live..."

John Harris/IFL



A lead to Europe: the Manchester nurses' strike which triggered the British protest.

'And when it's not the image of 'mother' it's the flip-side – the image of the 'randy nurse', says Valerie, 'naked under her white coat and who sleeps with all the doctors and interns. Whichever way it is, nun or whore, you're never recognised as someone qualified like technicians. People think 'feminine intuition' is enough for this job.' Old clichés die hard!

But the nurses' movement started to give this old ideological claptrap a good belting. Under the slogan of 'neither maids, nor nuns, nor fools' they demanded the right to dignity and equality. They wanted an end to being docile orderlies, there to simply bandage wounds; they demanded the right to think. It's just as much their place as women in a very hierarchical universe (85 per cent of doctors are men) that they are questioning.

In February 1988, on the other side of the Channel, British nurses, often called 'angels' took strike action on a massive scale, to gain recognition of their training and responsibilities. 'Why not do the same over here too?' said many French nurses... The result was the massive March 25 demonstration, and then the birth of a national co-ordination of nurses. That was the emergence of a movement which gradually overturned the rules of the political game.

A large part of the strength of the movement of the nurses and other medical personnel came from the feeling that the struggle really belonged to them; the method of organisation which they adopted (local, regional and then national co-ordinations, based on general assemblies in each hospital, with mandated delegates) showed the desire to guard and maintain their control of the struggle, and involve the maximum number of people. This was all light years away from the 'days of action' called by the union leaderships, without any consultation with the 'base'.

A 'base' composed, let's not forget,

of 80 or 90 per cent women. This explains some of the specific features of the struggle. Entering into struggle is never the same thing for a woman as for a man, not because of any biological reasons, but because in the main for women it's never possible to completely separate their working lives from their 'private' lives. Even during strikes they continue to 'carry the weight of the home on their backs' as Claude put it. 'The nurses' strike was work at an emergency cover level; but it was also the kids in the house in the evening, the housework and the ironing – even if the 'husbands' did a bit more for a while, even if the housework was left to one side, even if frozen food and sandwiches constituted our daily fare'.

Irene emphasised: 'the women who mobilised had to assume multiple tasks: we speak of a double work-day for working women, but women on strike faced a triple work-day!

Everyone talked of the constant tension between their work at the hospitals, the general assemblies and demonstrations, and their family responsibilities: however interesting it all was, it was still a burden.

'Fortunately,' notes Claude 'most of the men at home lent a hand, otherwise it would not have been bearable'. But Sylvie has reservations – 'they understood, more or less.' She says they accepted it well at the beginning, but after a month of the strike began to find it a bit too much...

However, there are those who regret 'not being able to do all that they could to support the strike because of the children'. And there were those who disentangled themselves from family commitments to immerse themselves in the movement, but found that part of themselves felt guilty.

Like Marie-Francoise: 'I neglected my daughter during the strike; I didn't think any more about her homework; I pushed her aside when I could; she got

insomnia, a terrible sore throat, even boils ...' Or like Irene: 'I felt enormously guilty, not towards my husband, but towards my kids. Imagine what it's like for a four year-old who is close to his mother to have her suddenly removed and replaced... with the telly!'

The burdens of these problems explain the attention given from the start to the collective organisation of the struggle. In many places they tried to rotate and collectivise responsibilities so that no one had all the burden. They tried to hold meetings at 2pm to maximise the number of women who could come. They even tried to adopt forms of struggle which meant that they could bring their children – for example when they occupied the office of the director of the hospital at Agen!

A breath of fresh air

It is possible to give lots of different examples. All the women we interviewed said that during the weeks of the strike they did things which they didn't believe they were capable of. These are experiences they won't forget, long-term gains for the movement.

They talked as well about how the struggle had changed things for them at a personal level; that 'total disconnection' with their normal daily routine – like 'a breath of fresh air' – the discovery of solidarity among women, the pleasure of being together: 'during the struggle there was a different atmosphere, even between many of the girls who thought they didn't have much in common', I was told.

There were also the changes which the experience provoked between couples – there were a lot of collective discussions on that subject. Everybody had the same conclusion in one way or another: 'things can never be the same as they were before'. With a qualification from Marie-Francoise: 'At the hospital yes! But at home – well, I'm not so sure ...'

The struggle of the nurses was nothing less than the expression of a resurgence of women's struggles. Its importance goes way beyond the hospitals; it has relevance for all women, because it directly confronted the problems faced by all working women, especially those in the public sector. Other women's struggles are likely soon. Learning the lessons of the nurses' struggles is at the same time to prepare for future opportunities. The outcome will be decisive for the construction of a women's movement.

We leave the last word to Isabelle: 'Our struggle is historic for the profession. Perhaps also for all women...'

"...we speak of a double work-day for working women, but women on strike faced a triple work-day!"

El Salvador: FMLN calls electoral bluff



PHOTOS - Pietro Gagliardi

El Salvador: mothers in the capital pray for the return of 'disappeared' relatives.

In the last week of January the El Salvador liberation forces of the FMLN made an offer which has sparked debate across the whole country.

While refusing to participate in the March elections because of the inevitable fraud, the FMLN have suggested an alternative: to hold the election on September 15, El Salvador National Day, and for the FMLN to take part in these elections.

To make way for this to happen the FMLN has offered to accept the result and to campaign as a part of the Democratic Convergence. It has pledged to respect present mayors if they do not aid the plans of the army, and to decree a four day truce and withdrawal from towns and voting places so that the election can go ahead.

In return they are demanding an immediate cessation of all assassinations, abductions and the general repression against popular activity. They want the army and paramilitaries to be confined to barracks for the election day and play no role in the elections.

They are demanding the integration of the Democratic Convergence into the Central Electoral Council and the formation of a broad based Monitoring Council to maintain order on election day and coordination of the international observers. In addition they want the establishment of an electoral code which would represent a consensus among all the parties, and the exclusion of the US government from the electoral process.

The FMLN communique argued that this is 'A last effort to avoid the social explosion (which the FMLN claims will be a product of a fraudulent election) by providing the elections with a higher purpose so that they contribute to a lasting peace.'

This offer has been made at a time when US policy towards El Salvador seems to be changing. President Bush does not seem so personally obsessed with Central America as Reagan. More important is that the US budget deficit has to be reduced by the terms of the

Gram-Rudman Amendment without, for the moment, raising taxes. El Salvador is the US's most costly intervention after Vietnam and North Korea.

The Bush administration faces problems with regard to the whole of Latin America. In the last period the land mass to the south of the US has seen the development of a populist radical alternative to the ruling PRI government party in Mexico, the failure of the US to remove Noriega in Panama and the election of a self-proclaimed Marxist member of the Workers' Party to the mayorship of Latin America's biggest city, Sao Paulo, in Brazil.

The Bush administration, although having appointed a noted conservative to oversee the

region, appears to have been leaning on the hawks in the El Salvadoran army and in the far-right ARENA party to come to a more conciliatory position with the FMLN.

They hope to outmanoeuvre the guerillas and rebuild a centre right coalition which would be able to restrain the public excesses of the the death squad wing of ARENA while maintaining the legitimacy of the present political and economic structure.

The FMLN offer has allowed them to appear as the party of peace and democracy and it has undoubtedly won the majority to support this position. The response of the army, government and the US has been confused and divided. While in the first instance, under pressure from

the US, the army and the Christian Democrats had said there was something of value in the proposals, both have since come to the position that the March elections must go ahead. The generals have now openly stated that they are prepared to go it alone without the US if necessary and have threatened a coup if the elections are cancelled. For its part the FMLN has kept the offer open whilst claiming that its rejection will lead to an intensification of the civil war.

It is clear that the FMLN have made gains from this political offensive against the government and ARENA. Recent opinion polls suggest that 56% will not vote in the March elections, making it increasingly difficult for the US to hold up the electoral process as an indication of the legitimacy of the present political system. Thus the situation has become more polarised around the ARENA 'solution' to the problem (total war to eliminate the revolutionaries) and the FMLN solution - government by the popular majority. It is only a matter of time before a final test of strength takes place in El Salvador, the question is whether the fraudulent elections of March 19 prove to be the catalyst of what may be the final offensive against the oligarchy and the army.

Will MacMahon



'Come out and vote' - the National Guard help the regime with some canvassing.

The Philippines:



Piers Caverdish/Reflex

Hoping for democracy: Aquino supporters rally in January 1986.

3 years after the 'February Revolution'

3 YEARS AGO a combination of a popular uprising and a military coup overthrew the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. The event became known as the February revolution and brought Corazon Aquino to power. Since then five military coups from factions of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have failed.

The government has declared total war against the communist led New People's Army (NPA), but has not been able to win the war. The National Democratic Front (NDF), which includes the NPA and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), may be about to declare the formation of a Provisional Revolutionary Government. As in 1917, the 'February' revolution could lead to an 'October' revolution.

In February 1986 the Philippines became hot news in the international media when millions of people demonstrated, demanding the resignation of Marcos. He had called for presidential elections in February 1986 in the hope that a divided opposition would give him an easy victory. But with the support of the Catholic church, the opposition agreed to unite around Aquino (with the National Democratic Front and many legal left mass organisations calling for a boycott). Corazon Aquino declared her victory not only in the ballot box but also of the 'parliament of the street'. Millions of people demonstrated in support of her victory, to get rid of Marcos. Marcos claimed *he* had won the election.

Inside the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) the 'Reform the AFP Movement' (RAM) had been preparing for a coup for a long time; but it was the mass movement that triggered the coup. The US gave their support to Marcos until the last minute, and then shifted overnight to support Aquino. They wanted to make sure that the Marcos dictatorship was

replaced with an acceptable bourgeois government and not with 'anarchy'. Both Marcos and the AFP were of course the creatures of American imperialism. But since the Vietnam war and the Nicaraguan revolution the American government had learned that the best tactic is not always to support an American puppet to the bitter end.

That is how the 'February' revolution became a unique combination of a popular uprising and a military coup, a contradiction that shaped Philippines politics in the following months. A broad coalition government was established, partly to give concessions to the mass movement that had emerged against Marcos. From February to May 1986 new rights were de facto given to the workers without changes in the old Marcos laws, some of the institutions from the Marcos era were removed, and a lot of expectations were created among the masses. A land reform was promised by the government.

After May 1986 the right-wing brought these reforms to an end. The most progressive ministers were sacked, along with the neo-fascist former Defence Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, who represents the extreme right that wants to suppress the mass movement with old Marcos-style methods.

But the US and the majority of the AFP thought that the Aquino government could ensure bourgeois stability better than a military dictatorship. Aquino had popular support as the figure-head of the 'February revolution' and as the widow of the famous opposition leader, who was assassinated in 1983 when he returned from exile.

Mrs Aquino had no problem winning local and national elections, and with no elections coming up before 1992 she should be safe in power. But she only keeps power at the mercy of the army. Though she has defeated five coups from factions of the military, she has also made huge

concessions to the army chiefs. In doing so she has become more and more unpopular among the millions of workers, peasants and students who brought her to power. The military is essentially unchanged since the Marcos era. The AFP is still divided by factionalism, but 'a military takeover by any one of the military-civilian factions is a distinct possibility', according to *Ang Bayan* (CPP paper, April 1988).

Economic crisis and poverty

The Filipino economy is in a big crisis. 'From 1987 to 1992, the government expects new loans amounting to \$11.5 billion to be able to attain in 1992 the GNP level in 1982. This, on top of the \$28 billion foreign debt, on which the government paid \$2.9 billion in 1987. Debt payments were equivalent to 8.7 percent of the GNP and half of export earnings in 1987. In 1988 debt service payments were estimated to hit \$3.03 billion, including \$2.1 billion in interest payments - over three times the projected budget deficit. (*Ang Bayan* Vol XX, no. 2).

President Aquino presented her government's budget for 1989 to Congress on July 25, 1988. Out of the 228.9 billion pesos (\$11 billion) budget 42.2% was allocated to pay of the country's external and internal debt (up from 30% of the 1988 budget). The 1989 budget has a 22.9 billion pesos deficit of which 40% will have to come from further foreign borrowing. Expenditure on defence is to rise from 9.7 billion pesos in 1988 to 21.2 billion in 1989. (*Kasama*, no 31, p 4).

A confidential World Bank report has admitted: 'There are more poor people in the Philippines today that at any time in recent history. In both a relative and absolute sense, the situation has worsened during the past three decades.' According to the World Bank 'about 30 million Filipinos out of the country's 56 million population live in absolute poverty, in the sense of having an income that does not enable them to serve basic needs.' The Philippines has the highest level of poverty and the lowest calorie consumption per capita of all the ASEAN countries. The World Bank recommends the doubling of social services spending. (*Ibid.*, p 6).

With a foreign debt of \$30 billion and with gross domestic product and exports both declining 0.5% annually and investments declining 13.5% annually between 1980-87 the Aquino government opposed the workers' campaign to raise the minimum wage from 70 pesos (£2) per day to 80 pesos (£2.30). Thousands of children die from lack of nutrition. With only a very limited land reform being discussed in Congress, mass unemployment and starvation are to continue for millions of people.

Human rights violations

'Even when Mrs. Aquino dismantled the Constitution of Marcos, she did not repeal many of the repressive laws, including the Labour Code. These are Marcos laws, still with us now. And she has gone on to issue her own new pronouncements which amount to a virtual declaration of war against labour.

'Take, for example, her speech to businessmen on October 20, 1987 when she ordered the military outright to dismantle all existing pickets and barricades on company premises. No less than 30 strikes were dismantled within a few days... We say this is an undeclared state of martial law with a liberal facade. In this US-backed counter-insurgency strategy of 'low intensity conflict' the workers are in the first line of fire.' (Crispin Beltran, chairman of the KMU union federation, in *International Labour Report*, Summer 1988).

Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU, May 1st Movement) is now the leading trade union federation in the Philippines with some 700,000 members. In August and October 1987, the KMU was the driving force behind two strikes of unprecedented size over gasoline price rises and wage increases. Crispin Beltran or 'Ka Bel' became chairman of the KMU in December 1986 after the murder of his predecessor Rolando Olalia. Almost a million people went to Rolando's funeral. As with many other murders of leaders of trade unions and mass movements Rolando's murderers were never prosecuted.

Crispin Beltran is also the chairperson of the Philippine Labour Advisory Consultative Committee (LACC), which is a council of four of the five main groupings of Philippine unions representing 80 percent of organised workers. But when President Aquino last year spoke at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conference in Geneva she brought with her the representatives of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), which was set up by the Marcos dictatorship.

Most of the killings in the Philippines are done by the 'vigilantes' and the 'citizens' army' (formerly the ICHDF and currently the Citizens' Armed Force Geographical Unit or GAPGU). They are armed civilians co-operating with the army to fight communism, and specifically the New People's Army. The death squads, linked to the army and the police, suppress any popular opposition to the government. Even human rights activists and lawyers are murdered by the vigilantes and the death squads.

President Aquino initially gave the government's full support to the vigilantes, calling them 'concrete manifestations of People's Power'. Though official sanction has been withdrawn, and the military ordered to disband such groups, they continue to operate throughout the country.

According to human rights organisations in 1987 alone there were 29 massacres, in which 149 people were killed; 158 cases of forced evacuation, affecting nearly 14,000 families; and 54 cases of destruction of property, including the burning of

514 houses. 7,444 people were detained, most of them later released. There were 602 cases of torture and 263 persons killed either by 'salvaging' (murder by death squads) or during military operations or while in detention. (*Kasama* no 29).

Low Intensity Conflict and the US bases

A lot is at stake for the US in the Philippines. With a population about the same size as Britain, the Philippines is a resource for exploitation by American multinationals. The country's strategic position became more important for American imperialism after its defeat in Vietnam. The two main American bases in the Philippines, Clarke Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base, are the largest American military installations outside the mainland USA. All this is threatened should a government unsympathetic to the US come to power in the Philippines.

'Today, Washington is seeking to increase the fighting capability of the army by greatly increasing the number of American advisors and agents in the country, by improving the training of officers and soldiers, by strengthening heavy arms in particular (helicopters, tanks, artillery...) and by injecting new money into the counter-insurrectionary effort... Today the Philippines are a living example of the theory of 'Low Intensity Conflict'. We must not underestimate the seriousness of the counter-insurrectionary policies presently being implemented in the archipelago.' ('The Philippines: First lessons of the revolution' *International Marxist Review*, Vol. 2, No 4).



Whatever next? Aquino after the election contemplates her options.

Piero Cozzandini/Reflex

The two main American bases in the Philippines employ some 68,000 baseworkers. The Anti-Bases Coalition, campaigning to get rid of both bases, has growing support among the population. One of the Coalition's demands is that no nuclear weapons should be allowed in the country. In February a leaked document revealed that President Reagan had authorised the deployment of 467 nuclear weapons in eight countries without informing the countries concerned. Of these, 227 are to be deployed in the Philippines. (*Kasama* no 28).

The Philippine Senate introduced a bill on April 25, 1988 to ban nuclear-carrying warships and aircraft entering Philippines territory. For months the US governments and the Aquino government negotiated on a new base agreement. The second five-yearly review of the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) was completed on October 17, 1988, increasing the component of US compensation paid for the bases from \$180 million per annum to \$962 million to cover the final two years of the MBA. But nuclear-armed vessels are still allowed to visit the Philippines.

The Communist Party of the Philippines

The leading force in the National Democratic Front (NDF) is the Communist Party (CPP). The CPP have around 35,000 members and 20-25,000 soldiers in the New People's Army (NPA). It is leading mass organisations with around 2 million people and the NDF has set up local and regional alternative government bodies in areas where 11 million people are living. According to documents seized by the Philippines army during raids in Manila the Communist Party has organisations in 823 towns and the population of villages where government troops seldom venture is said to have risen to 771,094 (*South*, November 1988). The political situation in the country cannot be understood without an understanding of the CPP.

The CPP emerged in 1968 as a split from the old Philippines Communist Party PKP. It based itself on the new radical youth from 1968-72, particularly the student mobilisations. The Cultural Revolution in China and helped provide political guidelines for the new CPP. In 1972 President Marcos enforced martial law and the CPP launched the armed struggle. The martial law nearly destroyed the party in 1975-77. But the CPP recovered in 1977-80 as the leading opposition force to the Marcos dictatorship.

In a way it was Marcos' martial law that unified the country and the opposition. The Philippines, a country of over 7,100 islands, has struggled for a national identity during its nearly 400 years as a colony, first of Spain, then of the US. Under Spain it became a predominantly Catholic country (though the muslim Bangsa Moro people form a large minority in the southern islands).

In 1889 the Philippines was the first Asian country to liberate itself from colonialism. Though the Filipino elite capitulated to the US immediately afterwards, armed resistance against the new colonisers continued for nearly 11 years. The CPP began to develop a national (as opposed to purely regional) policy for the first time. But it also began to break its political links to China, when Beijing came out in support of US troops in the Philippines (to oppose 'Russian influence').

Marcos claimed that martial law was to suppress the growing nationalist movement calling for constitutional reform and as an instrument to modernise the country: to build a nation state founded on modern capitalism. In reality it led to concentration of political and economic power in the hands of Marcos and his cronies. The worsening economic crisis and harsh repression led to an increase in the popular resistance

both legal and illegal.

The CPP's links with the Chinese Communist Party were further weakened when the Beijing and Manila governments normalised their relations in 1975. Chinese aid to the CPP/NPA ceased, although the CPP was a Maoist party. (The CPP still today claims adherence to Marxism-Leninism-MaoZedong Thought). In 1975-76 the CPP abandoned the notion of fighting from small-scale guerrilla strongholds (almost a 'foco' conception) in favour of policy of mobilising the peasants in arms.



Battling on regardless: guerrillas of the New People's Army.

However in 1978 the regional leadership of the CPP in Manila broke the party's discipline and participated in elections. The national leadership was in favour of a boycott. The election in Manila was a failure for the CPP, and the regional leadership was replaced.

The 1986 February Revolution came as a total surprise for the CPP. It had never seen such a mass mobilisation. The CPP (especially in Manila) was running behind the mass mobilisation all the time, not least in the call for a general strike.

The CPP called for a boycott of the elections between Marcos and Aquino, but this left them partly isolated from the mass movement that developed around Aquino's election campaign. In May 1986 the CPP made a self-criticism of the boycott line. Whether the boycott line was wrong and what revolutionaries should have done in such a situation have been widely debated inside the CPP (and the Fourth International; see *International Marxist Review* Winter 1987).

It seems that the CPP has decided that it has to fight in all arenas, including the electoral arena. As a leading force in the NDF and leading the NPA it is not possible for the CPP to be a legal party taking part in elections. A legal left progressive party does exist. This is the People's Party (PnB) which was officially founded in August 1986 by, among others, Jose Maria 'Joma' Sison, who some claim is the former leader of the CPP. 'Joma' describes (in *International Viewpoint*, Dec. 1986) the People's Party as neither a rival nor a replacement of the CPP, but a party with its own political and organisational integrity. (Rolando Olalia - the former chair of the KMU trade union federation - was, until his assassination, also the chair of the People's Party. The present chair of the

KMU, Crispin Beltran, is the vice-president of the Partido ng Bayan (the People's Party) and the president of the progressive front BAYAN). The People's Party did not get many votes in the national elections, although it did win some seats in local elections.

The New People's Army and the National Democratic Front

The New People's Army will celebrate its 20th anniversary on March 29 this year. From its original 60 fighters with 9 automatic rifles it has grown to 25,000 full-time and part-time guerrillas, with 10,500 automatic rifles. 'By the end of August 1987, the NPA had equalled the frequency and intensity of military actions launched during the final year of Marcos rule. In the months of July and August 1987, more than 600 NPA-initiated tactical offensives were carried out all over the archipelago - an average of 10 offensives a day.' (*Batita ng Malayaang Filipinas*, Free Philippines News Service, published by the NDF, Vol I, number 5).

The NPA is not only operating in the countryside but right in the capital Manila. The Alex Boncayao Brigade (also known as the sparrows) is permanently placed in the Manila-Rizal area, attacking both the army and American military personnel.

The National Democratic Front (NDF) was formally established on April 24, 1973 on a 10-point programme. This has developed expanded to the present 15 point programme which seeks to establish a sovereign, democratic, self-reliant and non-aligned Philippines. The NDF was formed by 4 organisations: the CPP, the NDA, Christians for National Liberation (CNL) and Patriotic Youth (KM). At present the NDF consists of 14 underground revolutionary mass organisations.

'Now we stand at the threshold of establishing the Provisional Revolutionary Government. NDF structures or people's councils have been set up in about 25% of the 45,000 villages and urban sub-districts; in around 800 of the 1540 municipalities; in all of our 60 cities; in 63 out of 73 provinces.' (Free Philippines News Service, vol I, no 5). In the areas where it is possible, the land has been redistributed, cooperatives have been established and an alternative education and health system promoted.

One of the 14 organisations in the NDF is the Cordillera People's Democratic Front (CPDF), which is an alliance of various ethnic groups in the Cordillera region of Northern Luzon. The Cordillera consists of five provinces with approximately one million tribal people (collectively known as Igorots). More than 50% of the people suffer from malnutrition. In 1981 the New People's Army began organising the CPDF, which now claims mass support in about half of the one thousand villages in the Cordillera. The Cordillera People's Alliance was established in 1984 and now has over 120 members organisations and an individual membership of 25,000. In early 1988 the CPDF established a de facto functioning revolutionary government at a regional level.

The NDF also supports the legitimate pursuit by organisations of the Bangsa Moro people of their independence. It cooperates with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Mindanao region. In early 1988 the MNLF gave the Aquino government a deadline to grant full autonomy to the 13 Muslim-dominated provinces in Mindanao before resuming its war for a separate Moro state. MNLF said it would ask the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to support recognition of independence by the United Nations.

The NDF also has relations with organisations in at least 25 countries. For example on April 12, 1988 the NDF and the FMLN of El Salvador signed a joint accord in which it was agreed to 'conduct joint activities to generate solidarity for the struggle that our people are carrying out. Likewise, we call on other liberation movements to unite and fight US interventionism'. In 1984 the NDF formally established an international office in the Netherlands.

The CPP has various degrees of contact with Communist Parties and other worker's parties in East and West, including Albania, North Korea, the French Communist Party, the Belgian Labour Party and the Australian Communist Party (*South*, November 1988). The CPP does not make any



Never too young to fight: a woman NPA guerrilla visited by her baby daughter in a jungle training camp.

public criticism of the 'socialist countries', and supports 'peaceful co-existence' even at the same time as it fights arms in hand against American imperialism and the 'US-Aquino government'.

Solidarity with the Philippine revolution

President Aquino with the active support of the Armed Forces and the US has declared total war against 'communism'. The repression against the mass movements is as hard as in El Salvador and South Africa. International solidarity is therefore an urgent task.

Finn Jensen

The CPP, the NPA and the NDF are the dominant force in the opposition in the Philippines and that should be recognised in the solidarity work. But solidarity should include all the left organisations and mass organisations in the Philippines. There are also a lot of significant organisations outside the NDF (such as the New People's Alliance, which is the largest multi-sectoral federation of progressive organisations in the Philippines; also large united coalitions that are set up around specific demands; and the BISIG, which is a legal socialist organisation).

Trade unions should develop direct links with the KMU in the Philippines. The KMU mineworkers' union has been exploring relations with the British NUM. NUPE and NALGO sent delegations to the Philippines in 1988, and the TGWU will send one this year. KMU representatives also visit Britain. COHSE, FTAT, NALGO, NUPE, SOGAT '82 and TGWU have signed letters to President Aquino about the continuing human rights abuses against trade unionists in the Philippines. All six unions are affiliated to the Philippine Support Group.

Links to the mass organisations can be made through the Philippines Support Group's national office, 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 3HQ. tel. 01-272 5317. The PSG also produces a newsletter called 'Kasama', which gives a lot of relevant information about the development in the Philippines and on solidarity work in Britain.

The National Democratic Front and the Free Philippines News Service can be contacted on: P.O. Box 19195, 3501 DD Utrecht, The Netherlands, Tel. 030-310431.

KMU (the trade union federation) can be contacted at: International Department, 3rd Floor, Jopson Bldg, 510, M. Eamshaw Street, Sampaloc, Manila, The Philippines.



Hitler (left) rode to power over a workers movement divided by the sectarian line of the Communist Party; Franco (right) took advantage of the weakness of the popular front and Stalinist murder of revolutionaries.

Not so popular front

The Democrats' new strategy document, 'Our Different Vision' (a sort of SLD 'Aims and Values'), got at least one rave review recently.

'Far more impressive in its intellectual reach and sense of the future than anything that the old Alliance or the Labour Party managed to produce, '...it has a purchase on the real world, '...a real feel for that new world, a sense of what it might be'.

No, not an excerpt from an SLD press release. Not a sympathetic *Guardian* review, either. This was Communist Party (CPGB) member and editor of *Marxism Today*, Martin Jacques, writing in the *Sunday Times*.

His article went on, under the heading 'Democrats' vision puts left in touch with the real world', to promote the SLD 'vision' and to recommend to readers an extension of the 'cross party' debate promoted by *Samizdat* and Charter 88 in response to the challenge of Thatcherism. Jacques' 'conclusion' is that the result of all this could be a re-run of the 1945 Labour revival – or not; anyway, 'something very different could emerge...The left is in a state of depression, but these could yet turn out to be exciting times'.

Typically inconclusive. But, of course, there's a lot more to this than meets the eye. Behind all the talk about talks, lies the more developed political project frequently put forward in the pages of *Marxism Today*: an electoral pact, or governmental coalition of the centre-left, anti-Thatcherite parties.

So all this talk turns out to be not so visionary, or even very new, after all. The labour movement has seen this before, sometimes in different guises and in different forms in particular historical and political situations. What it boils down to is what the Communist Party used to call the *popular front*.

T O B A S I C S
K

Dirty deals and capitalist coalitions

From 1935, under the direction of the Communist International, dominated by Stalin, communist parties across Europe abandoned their ultra-sectarian policies of the 'Third Period' (which had divided the powerful German workers' movement and thus opened the door for Hitler) and switched to an equally disastrous policy of popular fronts. Faced with the rise of fascism, the Stalinist parties openly advocated, and actually joined in parliamentary coalitions not only with reformist (social democratic) parties but also with 'democratic' bourgeois parties.

The results were devastating. So wide were the CP nets thrown, and so right wing the resulting attempts at political alliances, that they were frequently denounced from the *left* by reformist leaders, including the British Labour Party. Worse, the policy of the popular front when applied in practice led the Spanish Stalinists to support not the workers but the bourgeois republic in 1936-39 as it suppressed the strug-

gles of workers and peasants – and the CP itself helped carry out and organise the systematic slaughter of Spanish revolutionaries. This unholy alliance against the key forces in resisting Franco's fascist offensive was based on 'unity' in defence of bourgeois private property: it served only to politically (and physically) disarm the workers' movement and reinforce Franco's grip on his predominantly peasant base, and paved the way for final defeat in 1939.

In France, the politics of the Popular Front helped defuse a pre-revolutionary situation in 1936, and also led to the defeat of the working class after two years of intense struggle as well as the demise of the popular front government itself. The popular front policy began not from any mistaken assessment of the specific situation in western Europe, but from a cynical appraisal of the diplomatic interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, seeking alliances with the so-called 'democratic' imperialist governments, and riding roughshod over the interests of the working class.

It also fed off the self-seeking interests of a developing bureaucratic layer leading the reformist and Stalinist parties and trade unions; they controlled the apparatus from the top and had no desire to see the full force of independent working class unleashed. They knew that if the working class were allowed to feel their own strength they might just boot out their own (mis)leaders as well as the capitalists.

The same politics of Moscow-sponsored class collaboration dominated the wartime line of the communist parties in the allied powers, who became foremost champions of the capitalist war-effort, breaking strikes and supporting anti-union laws. The immediate post-war period saw an equally pernicious revival of popular frontism, with CP ministers conniving at the imperialist measures of coalition governments in Italy and France, until capitalist rule

had been re-stabilised and the cold war saw them kicked out. The same bankrupt politics were central to the parliamentarist *British Road to Socialism* in 1951 and its various revised editions ever since, and other CPs have followed the pattern of gradually throwing overboard their historic links to class struggle politics, leninism, marxism and even the pretence of a revolutionary programme.

The preferred path of many communist and reformist parties over the years has been to hope for a short cut to power and respectability, to turn directly to deals with sections of the bourgeoisie in the popular front. This means you lie down, roll over and hope the bosses tickle your tummy. They might of course, stamp on you instead. More often than not, they do. The most brutal reminders of this in the post-war period brought the mass slaughter of communist party members in Indonesia in 1964, and the murder or torture of thousands of socialists and communists after General Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973.

All this is not to argue that revolutionaries can afford to ignore the fight for fighting alliances with non-revolutionary forces, and posture, pure, from the sidelines, simply denouncing the reformist or Stalinist leaderships. Many would-be marxists undoubtedly make that mistake, suffering the inevitable fate of all sectarians - as workers' struggles and self confidence grow, they become increasingly irritating and irrelevant.

The problem of how minority (and often very small) groups of revolutionary marxists should relate to and influence the majority in the worker's movement (often led by reformists or stalinists), remains. In advancing workers' struggles and building alternative left currents, what should the relationship of marxists be to an often open rank and file but usually hostile leaderships in the fight to overthrow capitalism?

The answer: a revolutionary approach

There is an alternative course, outlined by the early Congresses of the Communist International and in Leon Trotsky's writings - and fought for by more progressive sections of the marxist left: the *united front*.

The theory is laid out step by step simply and effectively by Trotsky in his capacity as a central leader of the Comintern when he assessed the political situation of France in 1922, in the article *On the United Front*. He argues for the establishment of a clear, class-based party (in opposition to the reformists and centrists) and for joint struggles to draw in those workers still organised by the reformist parties.

He says:

'The task of the Communist Party is to lead the proletarian revolution. In order to summon the proletariat for the direct conquest of power and to achieve it the Communist Party must base itself on the overwhelming majority of the working class. So long as it does not hold this majority, the party must fight to win it.

'The party can achieve this only by remaining an absolutely independent organisation with a clear programme and strict internal dis-

cipline...'

Where revolutionary currents are not really parties but relatively small currents without real mass influence, the problem of united front work is not posed in the same way. Where the marxists are a big enough force to command significant attention, or even make a difference,



Trotsky speaks to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International.

the united front tactic becomes absolutely crucial, argues Trotsky.

'If the party embraces one third or one half of the proletarian vanguard, then the remaining half or two thirds are organised by the reformists or centrists. It is perfectly obvious, however, that even those workers who still support the reformists and the centrists are vitally interested in maintaining the highest material standards of living and the greatest possible freedom for struggle. We must consequently so devise our tactic as to prevent the Communist Party, which will on the morrow embrace the entire three-thirds of the working class, from turning into - and all the more so, from actually being - an organisational obstacle in the way of the current struggle of the proletariat.

'Still more, the party must assume the initiative in securing unity in these current struggles. Only in this way will the party draw closer to those two thirds who do not as yet follow its leadership, who do not as yet trust the party because they do not understand it'.

Trotsky's conception is not one where communists move politically rightwards to merge with reformists and the 'democratic bourgeoisie', but of tactics which mobilise the reformist-led workers, and thus lead them through their experiences of struggle towards the marxist programme.

What does this mean in practice? Getting down to the specifics, Trotsky continues in a passage which, though long, spells out the approach clearly:

'The circumstances make wholly possible joint action on a whole number of vital issues between the workers united in these three respective organisations (Communist, refor-

mist and centrist) and the unorganised masses adhering to them.

The Communists, as has been said, must not oppose such actions but on the contrary must also assume the initiative for them, precisely for the reason that the greater is the mass drawn into the movement, the higher its self-confidence rises, all the more self-confident will that mass movement be, and all the more resolutely will it be capable of marching forward, however modest may be the initial slogans of struggles. And this means that the growth of the mass aspects of the movement tends to radicalise it, and creates much more favourable conditions for the slogans, methods of struggle, and, in general, the leading role of the Communist Party'.

Nothing could be further from the miserable defeatist drivel churned out by today's 'Communist Party', *Marxism Today*, and its echo in the 'new realist' policy reviews and anti-left witch-hunts of Kinnock's Labour leadership. Trotsky's bold assertion of class struggle methods to win support might almost be a specific blast against the likes of Brian Gould and today's TUC:

'The reformists dread the revolutionary potential of the mass movement; their beloved arena is the parliamentary tribune, the trade union bureaux, the arbitration boards, the ministerial ante chambers.

'On the contrary, we are, apart from all other considerations, interested in dragging the reformists from their asylums [places of refuge, Ed.] and placing them alongside ourselves, before the eyes of the struggling masses. With a correct tactic we stand only to gain from this. ...'

Marxists, argues Trotsky, therefore belong not in a cringing front with Liberals and wet Tories, but in the thick of every struggle, alongside the best sections of the working class:

'Unity of front consequently presupposes our readiness, within certain limits and on certain issues, to correlate in practice our actions with those of reformist organisations, to the extent to which the latter still express today the will of important sections of the embattled proletariat'.

At least, if nothing else, the politics of *Marxism Today* are consistent. If you abandon the class struggle, the popular front is as good a front as any to hide behind. Those who want to fight to defend and advance the working class - and also to fight as marxists for the leadership of the mass organisations - will look to formations that provide for 'unity in action' and allow them to retain political and organisational independence: the united front.

JANE WELLS

Further reading

- The first five years of the Communist International*, Leon Trotsky, Volume 2, Monad. (Ch. 8 - 'On the United Front')
- The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* Trotsky, Pathfinder. (especially Ch. 7 and 14)
- Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, Inklinks, 1980. (p.395-397, 'The United Front Tactic' and p.400-409 'appendix - Theses on the United Front')

Chinese and Vietnamese CPs Stalinists – or national communists?

The last issue of *Socialist Outlook* published a lengthy reply from Phil Hearse and Dave Packer to my short letter on the question of what constitutes a Stalinist party. The debate has been going on in the Trotskyist movement for decades, and needs to continue because the world keeps changing (Gorbachev, Euro-Communism, and so on).

In the debate between Dave/Phil and I there is a lot of common ground: on the roots for the growth of the bureaucratic power in the Soviet Union and other workers' states; on the need for political revolutions in those countries to establish a socialist democracy; and on the spread of the Stalinist influence to Communist Parties across the world and therefore the need to build new revolutionary parties. We also agree that some of these Communist Parties actually lead successful revolutions in opposition to the line of the Soviet Union, because these parties wanted to abolish capitalism in their own country, but that the majority of the Communist Parties were and still are opposed to proletarian revolutions.

The debate started in the last issue of *Socialist Outlook* is on whether one should call Stalinist those Communist Parties which have actually taken power or which are actually trying to do so.

Dave and Phil define Stalinism this way:

'Stalinism, surely, is that group of movements and parties which are subordinated to the interests of the bureaucracy of a workers state, or have their origins in such a subordination and today retain the characteristic bureaucratic and manipulative theories and practices of the Stalinists.'

Apart from the possible confusion it can raise by defining Stalinism by the 'theories and practices of Stalinists' (which does not clarify anything unless you define what a Stalinist is) then the implications of such a definition are quite clear: Communist Parties, whether they are pro-Soviet, pro-China, pro-Vietnam etc, whether they are actually trying to abolish capitalism in their own country by revolutionary methods or not, are all Stalinists.

The main weakness with Dave and Phil's definition is that it puts into the same category parties that are fighting to achieve a revolution (at least in their own country) and parties which are willing to do almost everything to avoid a proletarian revolution. In other words it calls 'Stalinist' revolutionary as well as counter-revolutionary parties.

But in Marxism the question of class power is the most important of all questions. So whether a party is a reformist or a revolutionary party is of great significance. According to

Dave and Phil a Stalinist party can be either reformist or revolutionary, if by revolutionary party you mean a group of people who are willing to overthrow capitalism by destroying the capitalist state and replace it with a proletarian one.

Dave and Phil try to explain that it is only under exceptional circumstances that revolutionary Stalinist parties can be found. They mention 'third world' countries like Yugoslavia and China where all sections of the national bourgeoisie refused 'to play the role of counter-revolutionary ally in the popular front' – they did not want to collaborate with the Communist Party in modernising capitalism.

That has been the case in a lot of countries, without bringing any change in the class collaboration of the Communist Parties. But more important: you cannot explain the successful revolutions (led by communist parties) in China, Yugoslavia and Vietnam by the refusal of the national bourgeoisie 'to play the role of counter-revolutionary ally in the popular front'.

How can you explain the Vietnamese CP's sacrifices in 40 years of war by their inability to involve the national bourgeoisie in a counter-revolutionary popular front? They could have established such a popular front in South Vietnam when they took power in Saigon (it would have delighted the national and international bourgeoisie). But instead they started building a workers' state in South Vietnam.

Mao won a bitter faction-fight inside the Chinese CP in 1935 against those who wanted to have a counter-revolutionary popular front.

"Mao won a bitter faction fight inside the Chinese CP in 1935 against those who wanted to have a counter-revolutionary popular front."

(Mao also continued for diplomatic reasons to pay lip service to the official Stalin line on popular fronts, but that is another matter).

What is important to understand is that although all Communist Parties coming out of the Comintern (3rd International) tradition became influenced by Stalinist theories and practices, they did not all become counter-revolutionary parties. One has to make a concrete analysis of each of them in order to judge whether they are reformist or revolutionary.

That work has already been done on the CPs in the imperialist countries and the workers' states. But there are a few CPs in the 'third world' countries (like El Salvador, the Philippines and South Africa) that need to be studied in more detail. The conclusions of such studies will obviously have political consequences for



Stalin may be dead – but his methods live on.

our relations with such parties.

Dave and Phil argue that those Communist Parties that have led successful revolutions have opposed revolutions elsewhere in the world, and have become as bureaucratic and manipulative towards the masses as the Soviet Union if not more. I agree. But that is not an argument for defining all these parties as Stalinist. We need different definitions for different categories of parties, simply to avoid confusion.

If we reserve the term Stalinism to those subordinate to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, we could call Maoists all those subordinate to the Chinese bureaucracy. Such definitions will be independent of what the official ideology of those parties may be. The CPs in these two categories will all be counter-revolutionary, because they subordinate their activities to the interests of a bureaucracy rather than to the interests of the world proletariat. We can call those CPs which have broken links with a foreign bureaucracy, but which still have a reformist line, Euro-Communists.

In order to distinguish the above reformist parties from the revolutionary parties (in 'third world' countries) which are engaged in a struggle to take power, one could call the latter national communists. The national communists do not have a full programme for the liberation of the working class in the world (particularly for a political revolution in the bureaucratized workers' states). Their programme is often national or regional. But despite their limitations in programme and tactics (some of them have rather advanced tactics) we should develop comradely contacts with such revolutionaries.

Some of them might become counter-revolutionary parties once they have achieved power, as we have seen in China, Yugoslavia etc. We can do our best to avoid such a process by getting involved in solidarity work today with the revolutionary struggles in those countries. Just denouncing these national communists as petty-bourgeois nationalists will not be of any help and will only place us on the sidelines.

Finn Jensen

New feminist literature

Reviewed by Judith Arkwright

FEMINIST LITERATURE has proliferated over the last ten years with publishers like Virago, Women's Press and Sheba at the helm. Now Virago and Women's Press have established *Upstarts* and *Livewire* respectively, consisting of literature aimed specifically at young women.

Recent publications by and for women include:

Non fiction

The BBC series *Out of the Dolls House* was accompanied by a booklet containing a lot of interesting source material which is now on sale at £6.95. The author is Angela Holdsworth.

In her book, *From mangle to microwave*, Christina Hardymont also takes a historical look, this time at the

changes in the nature of housework. Published by Polity Press at £16.50

In *Peggy Deery*, shortly to be published by Virago, Nell McCafferty looks at one woman's life in wartime in Northern Ireland and her very special contribution to the struggle for Irish freedom.

Ties of Blood is another political biography, by Gillian Slovo, published by Michael Joseph. Looking through the eyes of the other daughter from the one many have seen in the film *World Apart*, it expands the story of the family of Ruth First and Joe Slovo.

Another fascinating read is *A Woman*, Anne Delbee's biography of Camille Claudel, sculptress and, unfortunately for her, Rodin's lover. Once you have read this book you can see the film, also just out.

Lovers and Comrades is a book of women's poetry from Central America, translated by Amanda Hopkinson and

published by Women's Press. And in a forthcoming publication by Virago, Latin American women in exile talk about their lives and struggles in *You can't drown the fire*.

Mary Helen Washington explores the works and worlds of Black women writers in *Inherited Lives* also published by Virago at £8.50.

On a different topic altogether Faber have just published an anthology of erotic writing by women, with contributions from Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Edna O'Brien and others, entitled *Deep down—New sensual writing by women* and edited by Laura Chester.

Fiction

Cat Eye by Margaret Atwood author of *Edible Woman* and *The Handmaid's Tale* has just been published by Virago.

A new novel by feminist Pat Barker entitled *The man who wasn't there* and published by Virago should be a good read.

Her best selling novel *Union Street* is just about to be released as a film, starring Robert de Niro and Jane Fonda.

John Dollar by Marianne Wiggins and published by Secker and Warburg is, according to the author a kind of 'female *Lord of the Flies*'.

For sci-fi lovers, Women's Press are about to publish a collection of stories by Joanna Russ, *The Hidden Side of the Moon*.

German author Christa Wolf is becoming popular over here and her latest work, *Accident, a day's news* is to be published by Virago at £5.99, out in April.

Audre Lorde's latest novel is published over here by Sheba at £4.95 and entitled *A burst of light*.

Soviet author Tatyana Tolstaya (yes she is related to Tolstoy) is coming to Britain for the launch of her novel *On Golden Porch*, to be published by Virago in May.

And there are lots, lots more.

A green crop of slogans

Ecology and Socialism

Martin Ryle

(Raddus, £5.95)

The Coming of the Greens

Jonathan Porritt and David Winner

(Fontana, £4.95)

Reviewed by JOHN MULLINGS

The Coming of the Greens is not a religious reference or a special Hite report on the sexuality of the Green Party but a mine of information on the influence of the green movement throughout British society.

Some of this claimed influence is rather exaggerated (such as the inclusion of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the National Trust!); but this is linked to another weakness – the a-political nature of the book. It is strange, for example, that the Green Party's opposition to NATO is not mentioned in the book.

In most cases this is the result of the influence of the German greens, which in turn reflects the alienation of German youth from traditional party politics (which

in Germany has little to do with radical movements of any kind). Luckily, despite different strands of thought in the green movement, Winner and Porritt are not at all hostile to open debate. They are however, quite hopeless on the question of class, presenting completely unserious sociological rubbish in place of any real analysis.

The picture presented of the greens is one of a movement committed to 'small is beautiful'. However they were obviously pleased by a joint demonstration held between CND and Friends of the Earth against nuclear power and nuclear weapons on the first anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster in April 1987. This was not so small: it mobilised 50,000 people. Initiatives such as this are the sort of thing the left should propose and support.

The main obstacle to more such joint initiatives is the opposition among some Green Party members to organisation. One wonders how the Green Party ever got set up in the teeth of this opposition. Whether they like it or not, there has to be some organisation if any form of eco-socialist project is ever to be carried out and in any way democratic.

In a book entitled *Ecology and Socialism*, one would expect to find an explanation of the programme of the Green Party

and the strands of political thought on the issue in the Labour Party, if not a discussion on the ideology of marxism and the socialist thinking of the green movement.

Instead this book offers an appalling example of sloganising. Martin Ryle frequently uses phrases such as 'anti-capitalist alternative' and 'parochial and regressive localism' without really explaining what he means. This makes the book extremely difficult to read, leaving the reader exasperated at the use of terminology.

Other aspects of the book are not much better. Ryle sees workers owning cars, videos and washing machines as a problem for those seeking to win them to a brand of radical socialism which must take into account the preservation of the countryside.

He does not answer which class is going to have to implement a radical eco-socialist programme, which would have to include the nationalisation of industry and the financial institutions. Only this can make possible the re-structuring of the economy to enable workers to make socially useful products (such as kidney machines) and reopen closed pits to produce power for consumer use.

The reason for Ryle's sloganising is that he is stuck in the bourgeois democratic

tradition. He raises issues but does not develop them, apparently failing to understand that it is the profit motive which makes big companies move into areas that have not been developed and destroy the environment.

The closest Ryle gets to a critique of the problem of the state is not where we might expect it (in the section on the state) but in references to what he calls the 'formal economy' (for which read 'finance capital'). He ends up saying that people will be willing to pay more through taxes to develop ecological programmes such as the retro-fitting of coal-burning power stations to cut acid emissions. So what need is there for socialist solutions if the bourgeois state, through the rule of law and the government, can enforce ecology programmes? Never mind the class issues, all that would be needed are high enough taxes, and laws to combat environmental damage.

Ecology and Socialism is an annoying book because some parts raise issues that should be extended – for example on self-management – and then stops on precisely how and through what agency socialist policies are going to be implemented.

Political urban cowboy

For *Queen and Country* Film, starring Denzil Washington

Reviewed by
Barbara Green

THE FILM tells the story of a young black man from South London who has had a 'mis-spent' youth and joins the British Army. He serves in the North of Ireland and the Falklands.

After eight years service he leaves because he is consistently refused promotion. The rest of the film concentrates on the problems he has when he returns to his run down council estate.

The film's message is clear: the British imperialist state is quite happy to use black and working class people as cannon fodder but deserts them after they've served their purpose. Not such a new theme, but what makes this film slightly different is that it tries to deal with this in the context of urban unrest. It brings in a Broadwater Farm type situation which all the main characters are eventually involved in.

It is difficult for me to review this film because although I had assumed that I would enjoy it, I did not. My complaint is not about the message, but about the technique. The film is quite long, it is very short on dialogue. I suspect this is because the main character who is supposed to be from South London is in fact an American actor called Denzel Washington of *Biko* and *St Elsewhere* fame, and his accent is appalling. Unfortunately these things matter, particularly if you come from South London — contrary to the image in the film not everyone from these parts greets each other with quaint little ditties like 'I'm ducking and diving — fucking and skiving'!

The director and co-writer, Martin Stellman says he thinks the film is an urban western, dwelling on men with violent pasts trying to hang up their guns and settle down and then realising that this is not possible and ending up even more violent.

So if you fancy seeing an urban western with politics this is the film for you — otherwise I'm not sure it's worth the effort. Sorry!

Unity and diversity

POWER IN THE ISTHMUS: Political History of Modern Central America
James Dunkerley,
Verso 1988

Reviewed by
Maria Astorga

JAMES DUNKERLEY'S book is undoubtedly the milestone that its cover promises. It could become essential reading for anyone interested in the politics of the region were it not for its unpopular price of £29.95 which puts it beyond reach for the many.

The first part looks at the whole of Central America — its history since the 1821 independence from Spain and the formation of a liberal regime to the present crisis and intervention of US imperialism.

It shows that the ideal of a united single nation was never achieved, as there were no changes in the distribution of wealth and therefore no struggle for a nation. A cluster of city states calling themselves republics, in the shadow of Guatemalan hegemony and an increasing subordination to the 'demands of production for an international market organised on the logic of capitalism' shaped the future.

The capitalisation of agriculture was not paralleled by any industrialisation which would have formed a unified and large proletariat; leading to 'uneven and combined development' as Dunkerley recognises. Capitalist agriculture started with coffee in Costa Rica in the 1830s and was to produce similar one crop economies in all countries, leading them later

to be nicknamed banana republics.

Each country has its specificities that explain the particular formation of the ruling elites, the role of the military and the emergence of revolutionary movements. Dunkerley uses the dual theme of unity and diversity to encapsulate this process. He also introduces the theme of rupture and continuity, insisting on two periods of ruptures that influenced the present situation: the mid-40s and 1979-82. This latter period saw the triumph of the Nicaraguan revolution, changes in the governments of other countries, the 'final offensive' and defeat of the FMLN in El Salvador, the wave of repression in Guatemala, that is reactions by ruling classes and revolutionaries to the impact of the successful Sandinismo.

This book was completed in 1987 and so does not cover the most recent developments with their increasingly rapid pace which might indicate a new period of rupture in Central America. Nicaragua is totally suffocated economically (the latest inflation figure reached 36,000%). El Salvador is on the verge of elections in which the polarisation between the FMLN and the extreme-right wing party ARENA will come to a head. There is a similar polarisation in Guatemala between the most right-wing faction of the army and the popular movement on the rise. Even Honduras does not remain immune to the conflict having inherited a foreign army of uncontrolled mercenaries with the military defeat of the contras.

The second part of *Power in the Isthmus* analyses each of the five countries (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica) up to 1987. A short review cannot do justice to the abundance of material and ideas detailed in the book.

On Nicaragua for example, there is a long analysis of the

political and economic complexities of the country leading the author to state that 'Nicaragua is not a workers' state since a considerable portion of the economy remains in the hands of large capitalist enterprise...' and to proceed with a long analysis of the various elements of this position. It makes compulsive reading but does not attempt to provide any characterisation of the Nicaraguan state, using the unclarified term of Sandinismo. This position is close to that of Carlos Vilas, from whom many statistics are taken, but might not help to clarify the debate among the left. In the very valuable description of the economic factors, the role played by the contra war is somehow underestimated. This is regrettable because the economic impact of the war is one of the key elements in understanding Nicaragua's present situation and the US policy. To downplay it can give support to those who tend to blame Sandinista mismanagement as the main cause for this disastrous state of affairs.

The same in-depth analysis of the political components and evolution of the other countries provides the readers with a wealth of information and a verve reminiscent of the author's previous books on El Salvador (*The Long War*) and on Bolivia (*Rebellion in the Veins*).

Given the density of the information, the myriad of cross references demonstrating an extraordinary mastery of the subject, the academic but elegant style, there is no sense of repetition in the 661 pages that include fascinating footnotes. *Power in the Isthmus* is not an easy read and presupposes a certain familiarity with the situation to be able to be fully appreciated. It is a unique political synthesis.

Heavy on Stalinism, light on answers

Perestroika Annual
Ed Abel Aganbegyan
(Futura, £9.99,
346 pages)

Reviewed by FINN
JENSEN

ROBERT MAXWELL has taken the initiative in publishing yearbooks charting the progress of perestroika in the Soviet Union. They will be edited

by Professor Abel Aganbegyan, a close ally of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

The first *Perestroika Annual* was published at the end of 1988 and contains 12 essays by journalists, economists, artists, sociologists, sports personalities and church leaders. Although all of them fully support Gorbachev's reform programme, the twelve authors do not have a uniform view of events.

The opening chapter, a 'Who's Who of Perestroika',

describes 16 outstanding men, but not one woman! Indeed only one of the twelve contributors to the volume is a woman; not surprisingly the liberation of Soviet women is not mentioned in the book as a special task for perestroika, though there is much about the liberation of the people as a whole. Also omitted is the issue of gay and lesbian rights, while the vexed issue of the national question and the conflicts between nationalities within the USSR is mentioned only in passing, with no solutions proposed other than

Weapon of War

Mapantsula

A film by Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane

Review by David Grant

There is something deliciously seductive about enjoying the fruits of a secretive, subversive labour.

When the resulting product is both challenging and compelling the experience is pleasurable indeed. Such is the appeal of *Mapantsula*, shot directly under the ever-watchful, although in this case seemingly not very alert, eyes of the South African police state. The film makers pretended to the authorities that they were making an ordinary gangster movie. In reality, the film is a critique of, and an attack, on apartheid. Refreshingly, its subject matter is the inter-relationship between the black working class and lumpen proletariat, highlighting the use the apartheid state makes of the latter to contain the power of the former.

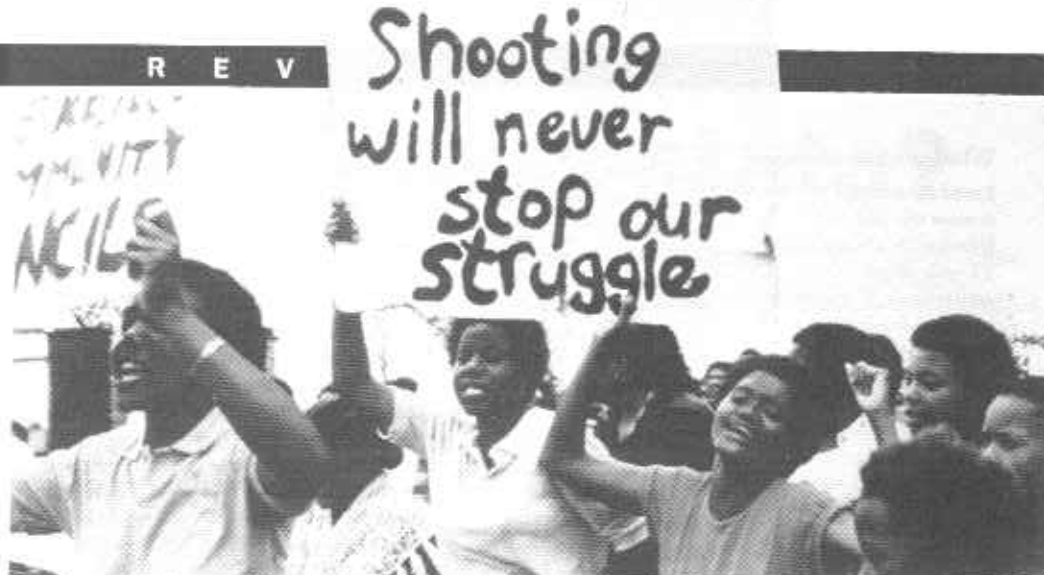
The focus here is most definitely black. And high time too! *Cry Freedom* left a distinctly liberal taste in the mouth. Were we really supposed to take seriously the transformation of Steve Biko into a latterday Christ figure, wandering through gardens, relating the teachings of (peaceful, what else!?) black consciousness, sermon-like, to an open-mouthed, white liberal? Still, what can we expect from a film director prepared to kneel before the monarchy?

Our hero is Panic, a small time petty criminal from Soweto. Through a circuitous route, which ends in his incarceration, he comes into contact with the township 'comrades' and the

'going back to the Leninist conception of nationalities'.

The *Annual* does describe and discuss many fundamental changes in different areas of Soviet society. All twelve authors see perestroika as a response to the Brezhnev years, the 'period of stagnation'. Throughout the book the criticism of this period of political, social, cultural and economic stagnation is severe, and on the descriptive level is nearly as harsh as a Trotskyist critique.

However what is lacking is any understanding of the roots of stagnation and Stalinism. Too



Reality as fiction — the people of Soweto as themselves in *Mapantsula*.

trade unions. A well structured use of flash back takes us through Panic's journey towards understanding. His isolated, marginal and subjective rebellion is contrasted to that of his politicised cell mates. They enjoy a profound solidarity that empowers them even in the face of imprisonment and torture. The gaols may be full, but they are also filled with singing and defiance. One of the 'comrades' observes that life in a prison cell is not that much different to life in the Sowetan township. Indeed, it has advantages! 'At least we don't have to worry about being arrested', he shouts at a warden.

Mapantsula shares common ground with Pontecorvo's *The Battle for Algiers*; the politicisation and heroic transformation of the petty thief/central character; the refusal to simplify and stereotype so that even the white policeman/torturer is a character with some complexity; the images of the masses moving into action as a politicised force rather than a mob. Director Oliver Schmitz and lead actor (also co-writer) Thomas Mogotlane, however, deliver their film in a more restrained, less epic manner. *Mapantsula* is a major contribution, through

film, to asserting the centrality of the black working class to the struggle against apartheid. It wrests the imagery of this struggle away from the news organisations and the mainstream film industry whose liberal, so called balanced, ideological viewpoint has, up until now, gone unchallenged. *Mapantsula* states that there is another way of seeing these same pictures. The film's

militant stance invests images we are used to seeing with a new content, giving them a subversive, dangerous twist.

The fact that it was filmed in such an audacious manner, in the very heart of the beast, adds much to the pleasure of this excellent film which, in the best traditions of oppositional film making, is both work of art and weapon of war.



Don't Panic! It's only Thomas Mogotlane as the *Mapantsula* (wide boy) of the title checking his wedge.

often the explanation is reduced to blaming 'bad leaders' or the cult of personality. None of the twelve contributors mentions the fight waged against Stalinism by Trotsky and the Left Opposition in the 1920s and 1930s, though Aganbegyan at least has certainly read Trotsky. World politics, too, are treated very superficially, arguing vaguely that 'political systems will have to learn to live together if mankind is to survive', but offering no analysis of the economic systems which underlie the political systems, or the class struggle.

The supporters of perestroika will have to challenge its

opponents inside the USSR. One of the essays is entitled *Friends or Foes? Social forces working for and against perestroika*.

Taryana I. Zaslavskaya, a sociologist, openly admits that 'executives of the apparatus are probably the staunchest agents of the ideology of the stagnation period....Conservatives still constitute a majority in the apparatus'.

She writes that even among the law and order agencies there is an 'influential and dangerous mafia of organised crime'. In order to defeat these forces a 'radical democratic revolution' is needed;

'Is any revolutionary transformation of society possible without considerable social struggle? Certainly not....It is obvious that even the present early moves towards revolution are giving rise to extensive social struggle'.

It is wrong to call perestroika a 'revolution', since it does not aim to abolish the political power of the ruling bureaucracy and replace it with a pluralist socialist democracy. But the real question is whether Gorbachev's supporters will be able to control the 'extensive social struggles' that are yet to come?

What sort of history?

I read Jane Kelly's review of Cliff and Gluckstein's book in SO 12 with some amusement. If the book had avoided drawing political conclusions appropriate to the SWP's practice, it would have been criticised instead for being too abstract. But the review also raises the more serious question of what sort of history revolutionaries should write.

No doubt we could all agree that revolutionaries should produce history books that have as their 'starting point the interests of the working class'. But in fact, the drift of Kelly's review is that we should not make specific suggestions as to what should be done. Yet, I would argue, most of the best Marxist histories do in fact do this.

Trotsky's 'History of the Russian Revolution' is certainly a general history, but its purpose, directly political, was to reassert the revolutionary process in a period where Stalin and social democracy had almost obliterated its memory. E.P. Thompson's 'The Making of the English Working Class' is not just a general history, but has the concrete effect of furthering his own socialist humanist political position. Finally, John Foster's 'Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution' deals with the history of class politics in Oldham in the first half of the nineteenth century. But the methodology and analytical categories used are clearly drawn from, and designed to reinforce, Stalinist politics.

Should we find this surprising? I would suggest not. It is, after all, the ruling class who think it is possible to write neutral history, albeit 'naturally' from their world view. Marxist

history, on the other hand, examines the past in order to suggest ways of changing the present. Cliff and Gluckstein's book more than passes this test, even if the reviewer is unhappy about the specific changes suggested.

**Keith Flett
Tottenham.**

Thatcher's active base

The debates which have opened in the last few issues of SO are not about whether the way forward is *Marxism Today*-style defeatism; nor are they really about how one is to characterise Thatcherism. They are about the balance of class forces and the tasks facing those who claim to be revolutionary marxists.

Phil Hearse's sober assessment of Thatcher's progress towards the strong state (SO 11) was a refreshing departure from the tendency of some on the left to focus on the supposed weakness of her government 'if only the working class had a decent leadership'.

The Thatcherites have always sought to build up an *active* popular base for their strategy, setting in motion the nouveau riche, enterprise-oriented elements who have found seats on the gravy train and increasingly populate the pivotal jobs in our society - the management levels in manufacturing and service industries, education, health, social services, and so on. The destruction of the public sector is helping to build this profit-seeking, ruling class-supporting cadre.

These people represent a mass base of a sort and in a real sense are part of a mobilisation - against the left conservative, liberal and social democratic forces who used to dominate at least in the public sector. In

their new positions of power they are let loose on all aspects of working class interests.

With reactionary ideology also finding support in sections of the traditional working class, there is significant social weight behind the attack on our basic rights. The Conservative Party has been transformed by these layers, the pretensions of social democracy severely punctured, and the stalinist bureaucracies given much food for thought. Whatever it is, it is not 'business as usual'.

As Phil says, this is not a fascist mobilisation; but it would be wrong to dismiss the fascist threat. There is a growing underclass of the dispossessed and despairing. Grinding poverty and disillusion cannot breed to no effect indefinitely. On the wastelands of big city estates, the fascists can move with an ease the Thatcherite yuppie cannot. If we on the socialist left do not seek and find a road to the dispossessed, then the 'left' fascists will, and therefore can play a useful supplementary role in the ruling class offensive.

Phil is right on the need to develop the widest possible support for democratic rights. In the past we have shied away from alliances with non-working class forces, but we have also avoided taking responsibility for fighting abuses of democratic rights ourselves, such as the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four campaigns, where Chris Mullin, Robert Kee and church leaders have taken the lead. Shouldn't we be making a priority of the Broadwater Farm Three case?

Clearly we must vigorously fight to defend every inch of democratic rights, and our *only* criterion for alliances must be

agreement on the issue in hand - 'Free the Guildford Four', 'Maintain the right to silence', and so on.

What is more, on issues which arise within the labour movement we must be interested enough to have developed a view in advance of the Labour right's initiatives. We were left unprepared and wrong-footed over one person one vote; we are only now beginning to tackle the block vote; and we must urgently discuss proportional representation.

No doubt some sectarians will be busily misinterpreting Phil's formulas as incipient 'popular frontism'. This is not how I read his proposals at all, but I do feel his views would have been less open to misunderstanding if he had fleshed them out somewhat. He does of course emphasise the 'political independence of the workers' movement'. Clearly his use of the term 'semi-bonapartism' has confused the issue, but the real point must not be lost: real steps are being taken against our democratic liberties, thus weakening our ability to resist the general onslaught.

What Phil fails to do is address the relationship between the fight to defend democratic rights and the socialist programme. Such a programme needs to be developed urgently if we are to challenge the successes of the Thatcherites. Dave Packer's article in SO 10 on 'The Transitional Programme - a programme for our times' should mark the start of such a process.

Let's make 1989 the year in which we begin seriously to develop a workers' international plan to save the world.

**Keith White,
Coventry**

Fighting 'state capitalist' theory

There was a typing error in my letter in last month's SO (No 12). Instead of reading that a number of us fought as an opposition for a 'defencist' position in the International Socialists/SWP against Tony Cliff, it should have read 'defencist'.

This means 'defencist' of the gains of the October 1917 Revolution. We saw a basic contradiction in the IS/SWP's 'state capitalist' view. Whereas anarchists and others who hold a 'state capitalist' view of the USSR deny that the Russian Revolution was a workers' revolution, the Cliffites do support 1917.

The question then arises: if the working class took power in 1917, when precisely did the counter-revolution take place, since the capitalists (or bureaucrats, if you see them as a class) would need to take power at some obvious point in history. The alternative, as Trotsky points out, would be a gradual reformist return from working class power to capitalism - a type of Fabianism in reverse which is contrary to marxism.

Our argument was then that 'defencism' was the key issue, since the Russian Revolution was a step forward for the international working class, it must be defended against imperialism - whether you call it a degenerated workers' state, 'state capitalist', 'bureaucratic collectivist' or whatever.

That is why the question of defensism is a key one to put to *Socialist Organiser* today.
**Dave Spencer
Coventry**

Not such a strong state?

PHIL HEARSE
replies to critics of
his *In Depth* article
in *Socialist Outlook*
No.11.

My article 'The Coming of the Strong State' excited a flurry of critical interest in the pages of *Socialist Outlook* #12. A large part of John Lister's article was devoted to rejecting some of its ideas, and on top of that there were three critical letters.

Socialist Worker Review devoted an editorial to rejecting the idea of the 'strong state', and quoted from my article – though of course it failed to actually name *Socialist Outlook*. It is impossible to cover all the ground mentioned by the critics. The main point I want to make is that we should debate the substance of the article and not definitions or labels.

OK, so I started it. I said that Thatcher's style of rule – the extreme concentration and personalisation of political power in the government – had been called 'semi-Bonapartism' by *Socialist Newsletter* and that seemed as good a term as any. Clearly it wasn't, because hundreds of words were devoted to refuting the idea that we had fully-fledged Bonapartist rule – see Trevor Wongsam's letter for example. Well, actually I didn't say that we had Bonapartist rule, but leave that aside. If comrades object to the label 'semi-Bonapartist', let's dump it: the central core of my argument remains intact.

What in fact did I say? First that the repressive apparatuses of the state had been considerably strengthened under Thatcher, through a battery of new anti-working class laws

and the jettisoning of 'corporatist' styles of government which attempted to incorporate the trade union and labour bureaucracy. Second that all this amounted to a qualitative 'strengthening' of the state, despite Thatcher's anti-state rhetoric. Third, that these powers of government were the most extremely repressive this century outside of wartime (an argument hardly refuted by John Lister saying that Winston Churchill also enjoyed such powers!). And fourth that the left had every interest in building alliances with democratic public opinion to defend democratic rights.

The most sustained and serious critique of what I said was John Lister's article 'Getting to grips with Thatcherism'. I thought it was a good article, and agreed with much of it, reflecting as it does much of *Socialist Outlook*'s thinking. But the nub of the disagreement I have with John seems to be this: to what extent has state repression been a source of Thatcher's victories against the working class? To what extent has it changed the balance of class forces? And isn't it true that the main problem has been lack of militant working class leadership rather than state repression?

It goes without saying, I hope, that the question of leadership, and the need for a class struggle leadership, must be to the forefront of every Marxist analysis of Britain today. But to say, as do John and Brian Elkington, 'who needs Bonapartism when you've got Kinnock?' misses out an important dimension. The Thatcherites don't just have to deal with the Labour and trade union

leaders, they have to deal with the workers and the oppressed – and their struggles. State repression has played a key role in some central disputes (I restrict myself to industrial disputes only for space reasons, although many other examples could be given), even given the betrayal of the bureaucratic leaders. The example of the Seafarers' strike illustrates this.

The turning point – the point at which Seafarers' leader McCluskie effectively capitulated – was when the High Court sequestered the NUS funds and property. Of course we opposed the sell-out by the NUS leadership, and the lack of solidarity from the rest of the union bureaucracy. But to say that the course of this dispute was just determined by the sell-out of the leaders – that's a joke. The new anti-union laws added a crucial dimension, a key pressure on the leadership, which hastened their capitulation and materially worsened the chances of winning the strike.

The 'betrayals of the leadership' line of argument holds good for dozens and dozens of struggles so long as the labour movement is dominated by the bureaucracy. The point is however that bureaucratic intentions operating in different circumstances get very different results.

The TUC betrayed the miners and the Wapping printers. Of course. But didn't the intervention of a nationally co-ordinated police force against the pickets in the miners strike worsen the relationship of forces significantly? Wasn't the fact that Orgreave couldn't become another 'Saltley Gate' an

important element in the strike? And didn't para-military style policing at Wapping significantly, even decisively, prevent the TNT lorries being stopped by the mass pickets?

The deepening repression by the police and courts was of course just one part of my argument. Thatcher has attempted to centralise national government control of local and regional government; has intervened to overturn the post-1945 consensus by intervening in a whole range of industries and institutions like education in a unprecedented way; and has personalised power around herself and a few advisers in a way, as I said before, unprecedented outside of wartime. None of this is really challenged by any of my critics. Some comrades don't even like the term 'strong state' because they think it implies military dictatorship or fascism. But no one can deny that we have, at least a much stronger state, a more repressive state, a more centralised, determined and authoritarian bourgeois leadership team – and a very right wing one at that – than has existed since 1945.

Now, there were some hasty formulations in my original article which might have suggested that this all amounted to a change in the form of state. Britain remains a bourgeois democracy – albeit a very repressive and authoritarian one. But the label doesn't leave any room for complacency. Civil liberties are under sustained attack, and it is whistling in the wind to say, well never mind, we can still define this as bourgeois democracy!

Two final points. First, some critics (particularly

cdes Elkington, Collier and, by inference, *Socialist Worker Review*) suggest that this whole analysis is a cover for popular frontism. My reply is, quite honestly, I think these comrades don't have much idea about the distinction between a popular front and a united front. To unite with (bourgeois) democratic public opinion in defence of particular democratic demands or rights has nothing to do with wanting to create a class collaborationist coalition government with the bourgeoisie. Did these comrades think that the campaigns against Clause 28 and the Alton anti-abortion bill were dreadful popular fronts? They involved mobilising democratic public opinion, middle class liberals, clerics and the like: and quite right too. Predictably *Socialist Worker Review* has the most crass line, finding it hard to see that the fight on democratic rights is part of the class struggle.

Finally, one of the weakest points in the debate between the far left and *Marxism Today* over the years has been the denial by some comrades that there was anything special about 'Thatcherism'. Some even denounced the term 'Thatcherism' as a mealy mouthed concession to rotten *Marxism Today* popular frontism!

Thatcherism is something very special indeed for the bourgeoisie. It is a decisive attempt to overturn the welfare state, mixed-economy, post-1945 consensus. It has had many successes. And its methods, to quote the title of Andrew Gamble's excellent recent book, are *The Free Economy and the Strong State*.

URGENT SOLIDARITY NEEDED!

DEFEND HUGO BLANCO

AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN is under way to defend one of the world's best-known Trotskyists, Hugo Blanco, who was kidnapped on February 9 by Peruvian police during a mass demonstration, and has not been seen since.

Blanco was seized by machine gun-toting cops while sharing a communal meal with 200 peasants at the headquarters of the Peruvian Peasant Confederation (CCP) in the jungle town of Pucallpa, after leading an 8,000-strong demonstration of small farmers. Also arrested was CCP general secretary Luis Tuesta de la Torre. Police shaved Blanco's head on the spot before leading him away.

This escalation in the repression came in the midst of a strike by Pucallpa peasants demanding the payment of debts owed to them from the state, better prices for their produce and bank loans at affordable rates. 28 peasants have been killed in clashes with violent police, and over 200 imprisoned in the local barracks. The Peruvian Ministry of the Interior has announced that Blanco is being held in Pucallpa prison, and that he could face serious charges of inciting armed rebellion and carrying arms.

Blanco came to prominence in the late 1960s as the principal organiser of the Peruvian peasants' movement. He became the leader of thousands of Quechua Indians in their fight to take back the lands stolen from them. As a consequence of these armed occupations of the land he was sentenced to 25 years in prison. While there he wrote his account of the peasant movement, entitled *Land or Death*.

Two days after his release in 1970, Blanco was addressing a rally of 10,000 people, and he has subsequently been active in all the major struggles of the oppressed and exploited in Peru. He has served as a deputy to the Constituent Assembly, elected on a revolutionary platform, and



Hugo Blanco

is currently, along with Luis Tuesta, a leading figure of the Peruvian Partido Unificado Marlateguista (PUM).

The campaign for the release of Blanco and Tuesta has been promptly taken up with public statements, demonstrations and appeals in many countries, including Mexico, Sweden, Spain, France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland. The seriousness of the charges raised against them underlines the urgency of mobilising in their support.

Letters, resolutions, petitions and telegrams from individuals and organisations should be sent at once to the Peruvian embassy in Britain and to Peruvian President Alan García:

Peruvian Embassy,
52, Sloan Street,
London SW1
Telephone 01-235-1917

Alan García
Presidente de la República,
Palacio de la Gobierno
Plaza de Armas
Lima
PERU



José Ramón García

José Ramón García still missing

IN MEXICO, the campaign continues to demand the return of a leader of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), José Ramón García, who disappeared over two months ago.

PRT leaders have blamed the police for this attack, and point to the fact that García was a prominent member of the Committees to Defend the Vote, aimed at combatting precisely the kind of electoral fraud which secured the election of new Mexican President Salinas. His disappearance follows a number of attacks on PRT premises, and has been followed by police interrogation of PRT activists.

Telegrams of protest at the abduction of García, and demands that the Mexican state return him, alive and unharmed, should be sent to:

Carlos Salinas de Gortari,
Presidente Constitucional,
Estados Unidos Mexicanos,
Palacio Nacional Mexico D.F.,
Mexico

and to
Antonio Riva Palacio Lopez
Governador Constitucional
Estado de Morelos,
Palacio de Gobierno,
Cuernavaca,
Morelos,
Mexico

READ **SOCIALIST OUTLOOK** EVERY MONTH - the magazine for the serious left

**Special rates for regular individual subscribers:
1 year's subscription (ten issues) for
£7.50 (inland); £10 (Europe); £15 (outside Europe)
(multi-reader institutions £17 inland, £30 overseas)**

Name.....

Address.....

Subscription to start from issue number

(Return to *Socialist Outlook*, PO Box 705, London SW19 1HA, England.)