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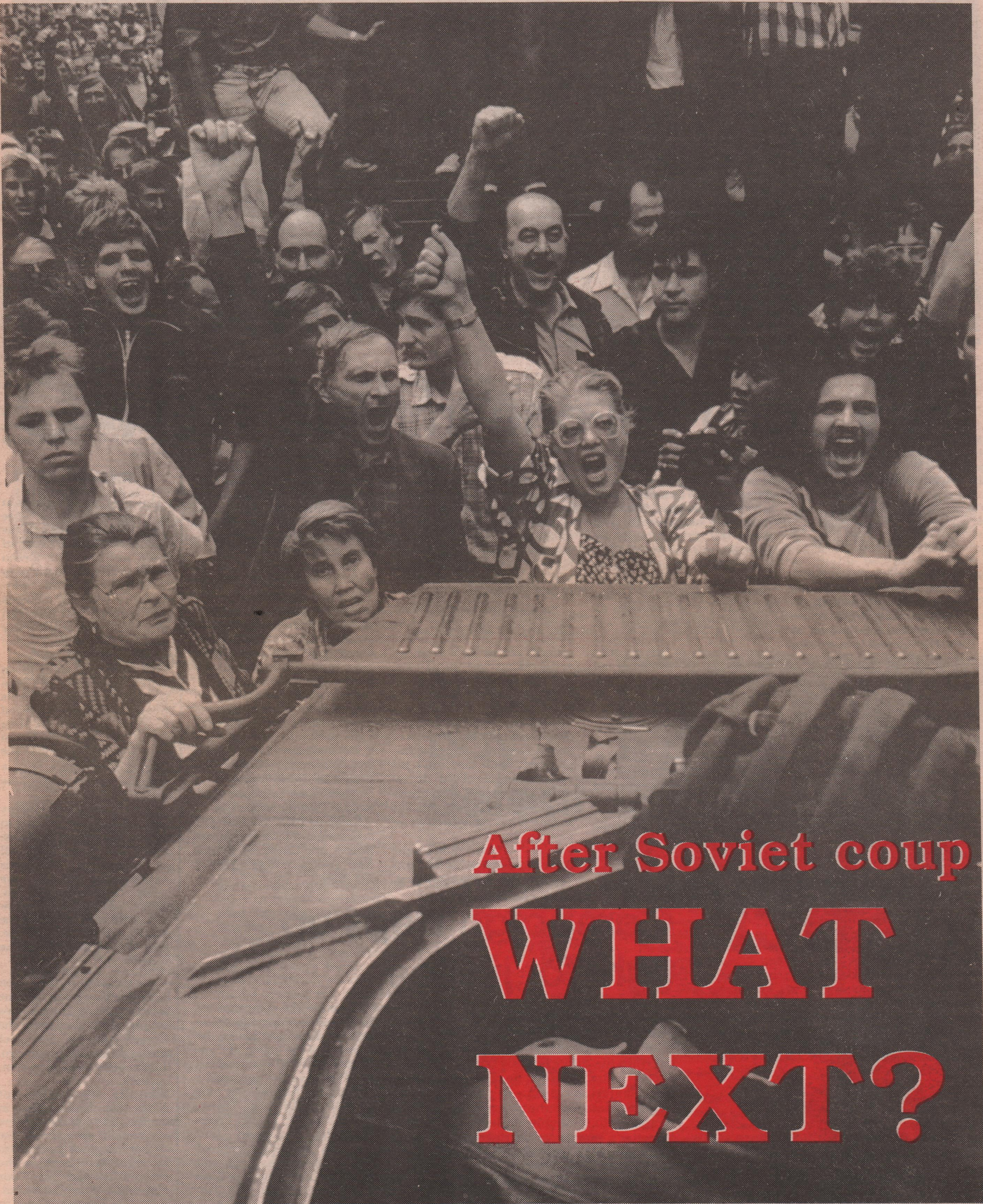
Solidarity price £1

Strikers and claimants 25p

No 7

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socialist OUTLOOK



CREDIT: Jeremy Nicoll/Katz Pictures

After Soviet coup

WHAT NEXT?

INSIDE: ● 4 pages on the USSR ● plus CUBA ●
● TUC ● Labour witch-hunt ● DID David Owen fail? ●



CREDIT: Paul Herrmann/Profile

Solidarity was shown with Poll Tax prisoner Terry Fields MP by a march through Liverpool, addressed by Arthur Scargill and Eddle Loyden MP. Fields has now been released after completing almost his full sentence - but is still refusing to pay!

Heat is on for Green AGM

By Sam Inman

The Green Party AGM next week seems certain to be hot with debate over the party's future. Jonathon Porritt and other party heavyweights have been lobbying hard for this AGM to adopt a document known as 'Green 2000'. This seeks to centralise and restructure the Green Party in order to make it 'serious' and electorally viable.

These debates are nothing new. In fact the current behind Green 2000 have been pushing similar ideas for the last three years or so. But this time the debate comes very close to a possible general election. It will be the first major election since the 1989 Euro-elections where the Greens won a surprising 2.5 million votes.

It will be seen therefore as an important test by the more electorally-inclined Porritt current.

Radicalism

However, many activists at the grassroots of the party see Green 2000 as an attack on the radicalism at the heart of green politics. The Green Party has adopted many of its decentralised and participatory working methods from feminist and anarchist currents. It has shied away from the conventional use of individualistic 'star leaders'.

Far from weakening green politics, opponents of Green 2000 argue that these methods strengthen it. The fear is that if the Porritt current get their way at this AGM, the Green Party will look more like the Liberal Democrats than a party that wants to change the world.

Clearly this has always been a debate just waiting to happen. But it is by no means certain that Green 2000 will get the necessary two-thirds majority for it to become policy. There is even a possibility, because of an expensive conference levy, that the AGM may not be quorate. This would also defer the decision.

For socialists in the Green Party this may result in some breathing space. The left have not organised at all since the Association of Socialist Greens disbanded a year ago. But the debate will keep coming back.

Ideally, it's the kind of debate that should be had in the Socialist Movement - how can socialist greens organise so that left green politics can be organised, both in the Green Party and the labour movement. But socialists outside of Green politics need to wake up a bit before this can happen in earnest.

Green politics is more than tagging a few environmental demands onto the end of your programme. With an estimated forty years to 'save the planet', the left had better pull its collective finger out.

Poll Tax

They can't jail one in four!

By Oliver New, Southall
Against the Poll Tax

PARADOXICALLY, as more people are jailed for non-payment, the Poll Tax looks more unworkable than ever.

In Ealing, the council jailed Stephen Hynes, who is unemployed. Despite having no job, he was charged with refusing to pay the full amount of £345. He refused to negotiate with the Council and was banged up for 30 days. One down, 60,000 to go. In fact the Community Charge office is in such a state they don't know exactly how many people they are dealing with, but we calculate one in four Ealing residents still owe for last year's tax.

Another strange and possibly even paranormal development is 'The Case of the Missing 20,000'.

After studying Poll Tax registers, census returns and the electoral list, Ealing council experts concluded that 20,000

local people have mysteriously vanished. The cause is unknown, although abduction by flying saucers or serial killing are two possibilities. The same thing has occurred up and down the country, with the numbers missing in an MP's constituency sometimes being greater than her or his majority. What price democracy? Unless the Poll Tax is abolished altogether, the government will eventually have to bring in identity cards so that the state can keep us all on computer and watch our every move.

Council tax

But if over the next year or so non-payment continues to rise and imprisonment is seen to fail, then the Government will be forced to admit failure and both the Poll Tax and the council tax will have to go.

The main campaign for the anti-Poll Tax movement today is defending non-payers through information about the law and about the bailiffs,

through legal advice and through campaigning. As more and more councils try to use imprisonment to bludgeon the millions of non-payers, the stakes become higher. The aim of the state is to change the political climate on payment of the Poll Tax and frighten people into using the rent or electricity money if necessary to pay up.

As town hall trade unionists have found out, when their backs are to the wall, Labour councils can be more viciously anti-working class than Tories. Eighteen Labour councils are among the first 28 councils to start jailings, and Labour Burnley has been the worst to date. Pensioners and parents of young children are being imprisoned. Since they can't jail everyone and the object is to terrorise, some councils and courts deliberately try to be brutal. But so far it is having little effect on payment levels.

Every labour movement body should back the anti-poll Tax movement against jailing.

The should affiliate to the All Britain anti Poll Tax Federation and to local campaigns. Activists should get down to the court protests and bring banners to the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign Demo on October 19th.

The Tory 'abolition' of the Poll Tax was a tactical retreat. The crunch is still to come. The campaign against jailings and to defend mass non-payment is poised to finish off the Poll Tax. Our victory would be a huge blow to the Tories and a huge blow to new realism.

Write off all the debts! Free all the prisoners - demonstrators and non-payers. Let's finish off the Poll Tax - now!

Demonstration - 19th October 1pm Caledonian Park, Near Pentonville Jail, North London.

Nearest tube: Caledonian Road. Rally at Trafalgar Square 4pm.

Called by TSDC and local APT organisations. Further details from Brixton Law Centre 506 Brixton Road, London, SW9 8EN Tel: 071 736 7586.

JUSTICE Campaign steps up fight for justice

by Vera Phillips

The Tottenham Three Families' Campaign believe they can win and overturn the convictions of Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Enghin Raghup. As we go to press it appears that even the police investigation into vital new evidence for Winston's case has confirmed that his 'confession' was tampered with (see SO #6).

The Families' Campaign believe that only a broad-based campaign can get the convictions quashed. In recent months dozens of trade union branches and trade councils have affiliated and shown their support. This includes Haringey NUPE Health branch, whose members are nurses at the North Middlesex hospital where those injured in the 1985 disturbances were treated. This is on top of the five national unions that now back the campaign.

In order to build the campaign for justice, the Families' Campaign have called a national demonstration on the sixth anniversary of the killing of Cynthia Jarrett and the 1985 disturbances (see advert). They have also organised a national 'Justice for All' speaking tour which will visit Birmingham, Derby, Nottingham, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Stockport and Manchester. This has been organised jointly with the Birmingham Six and Bridgewater Four campaigns. Speakers on the tour will be Sharon Raghup (Tottenham Three), Paddy Joe Hill and Billy Power (Birmingham Six), Ann Wheelan (Bridgewater Four), Andrew Puddephat (Liberty) and Gerry Conlon (Guildford Four).

For further details of the demonstration, tour and the campaign contact: Tottenham Three Families' Campaign, 247a West Green Road, Tottenham, London, N15 5ED. Tel: 081 809 6483.

JUSTICE FOR THE TOTTENHAM THREE



JUSTICE FOR ALL!

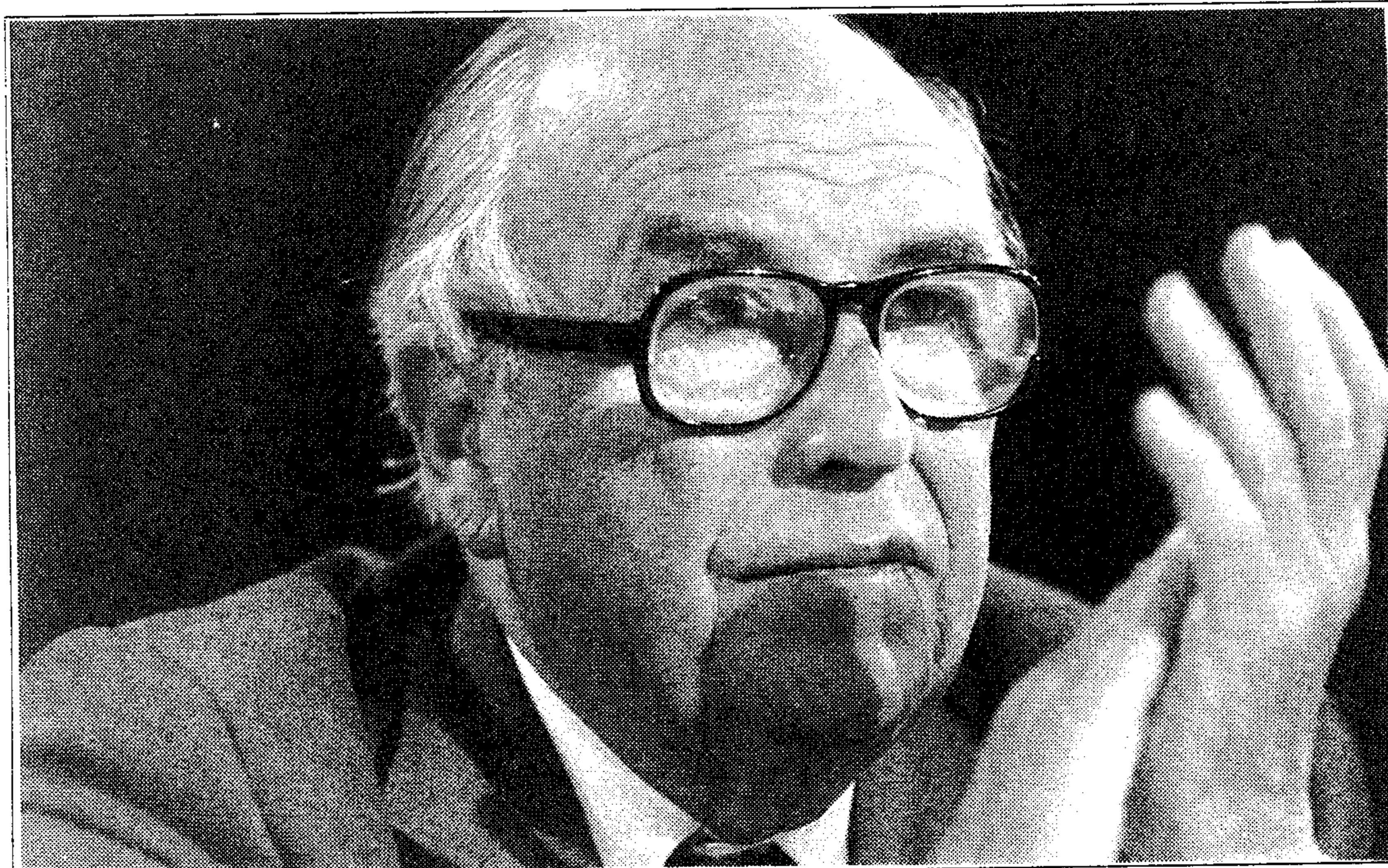
MARCH

SAT. 5TH OCTOBER

ASSEMBLE 12PM CIVIC CENTRE WOOD GREEN N22

(NEAREST TUBE WOOD GREEN)

RALLY 2PM FINSBURY PARK



Never so much red as claret-drinking: Owen's fellow splitter Roy Jenkins.



Did David Owen fail?

By Paul Clarke

THE NEWS that David Owen is standing down at the next election is just a footnote to the death of the SDP.

The time when the SDP-Liberal Alliance was way ahead in the opinion polls, and Roy Jenkins won a spectacular victory in the Hillhead by-election, seems light years away.

All those claims about 'breaking the mould' of British politics appear defunct; the Liberal Democrats are no more significant than the Liberals before the SDP was formed.

So was David Owen's whole project a failure, just another failed attempt to create a new major party, as insignificant as Oswald Mosley's 'New Party' in the early 1930s? In fact, David Owen's political project was highly successful in helping to shape British politics in the 1980s.

Gang of Four

The SDP was formed as a right wing split from Labour in 1981; the 'Gang of Four' - Owen, Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins and William Rogers - formed the SDP as a direct reply to the growing surge of the 'Bennite' left. Their plan was that the polarisation between a Thatcherite Tory party and a radical left Labour Party would create the space for a powerful centre party. But it was not to be.

The plans of leading politicians are one thing, the plans of the opinion formers in the ruling class are another. So long as Labour appeared to have turned left for a whole historical period, important sections of bourgeois opinion accepted the need for a revamped three-party system.

The Alliance served the purpose of keeping Labour out of government, since the 'normal' alternation of the Tories or right-wing Labour in power could not be relied on. But once the Labour left was defeated, a very strong centre party was no longer so immediately indispensable for the ruling class.

What in the end defeated the 'three-party' plan for British politics was the complete victory of Kinnockism in the Labour Party. The Kinnock-Hattersley 'dream ticket' was elected in 1983.

Union chiefs

Behind their victory, and behind each successive rightward Labour move since, has stood the power of the trade union bureaucracy, desperate to prove to the ruling class that Labour was 'fit to govern'.

While Bennism swept the constituencies until the middle of the 1980s, the union block vote ensured Kinnockite control of the conference and NEC.

At a superficial level it seems that labour movement politics is back to the situation of the late 1950s. Right wing trade union barons dominate the key unions, the Labour Party has a strong right-wing leadership and the left is marginalised.

But the general political context is completely different. The crisis of British capitalism is much deeper, and so is the crisis of Labour.

David Owen is in part responsible for Kinnockism, but it is a very fragile outgrowth. Politically it is virtually devoid of ideas and incapable of distinguishing itself from Major's Tories. The one idea it does have is to get into power.

Right wing

In this situation it has two possible futures. Either it will succeed in getting into power and result in the most right-wing Labour government ever; or it will lose the next election, and eventually Kinnock will go.

Either way, the many Labour and union activists who have kept their heads down, convinced that compliance with Kinnockism was the only practical policy, are going to be sorely disappointed.

The next British government will result in Tory policies applied by Major or Tory policies applied by Kinnock. That will create a situation in which the

apparent log-jam of British politics will be broken.

The dominance of Kinnockism and its union 'new realist' counterpart is based on the defeats suffered by the unions in the 1980s. The labour movement is paying the terrible price for the defeat of the miners, the printers, the dockers and other groups of workers.

While the immediate aftermath of an election will begin to

produce a political recomposition inside the labour movement, a break with the basic dominance of the right can only be the result of a recovery in the class struggle.

Nobody can predict exactly how and when that will come, but come it will. New struggles will unlock the situation in the Labour Party.

Kinnockism is a product of defeats and can only sustain itself on defeat and quietism. That is why it is an episode and not a

major historical trend in British politics; the basic historical trend is towards a deepening crisis and thus major new class conflicts.

David Owen is retiring to the side-lines, but the ruling class still has the Liberal Democrats as a reserve force in the wings. Stable two-party politics in Britain was the result of relative social and political stability, and that has gone for ever. The SDP is defunct, but multi-party ruling class politics has not.



How Guardian cartoonist Steve Bell depicted the early SDP

NALGO pay defeat

By Brian Gardner
(Branch secretary, Islington NALGO)

NALGO's half-million strong local government membership has voted down industrial action against the employers' 6.4 per cent pay offer by a 2-1 majority.

The union had claimed 12 per cent and a minimum of £9330 - the Council of Europe 'decency threshold'. Once again, the hundreds of thousands of low-paid white collar workers in local government will lose out.

found in the sapping of the workforce's morale through the sustained attack on local government, and the passivity of the union leadership.

The union's local government committee was banking on a 'reasonable' compromise with the employers: the campaign for a 'yes' vote for industrial action was too late and half-hearted. It was a campaign the leadership did not want to win.

In the end the NALGO leadership was out-manoeuvred by the employers, who have been preparing for an offensive on pay and conditions since their defeat during NALGO's 1989 pay strikes.

Representatives of local government Provincial Councils who might have backed a higher settlement



were thrown off the employers' negotiating body.

The significance of the defeat goes way beyond the immediate issue of pay. NALGO members are facing a combined attack over the next year which will pose a major challenge to employment levels and negotiating rights.

The 1992-3 financial year will see dozens of employers imposing massive jobs cuts. Tens of thousands of jobs will go.

So far NALGO's leadership has responded piecemeal to cuts and job losses. While formally backing an industrial action strategy, in reality local branches have been left to negotiate job losses through voluntary redundancy, early retirement or enhanced payments for compulsory redundancies.

This 'roll with the punches' approach has left local branches isolated and unable to respond with effective industrial action.

On top of the job loss and service cuts crisis, the employers are limbering up for a possible break-up of the national negotiating structure.

More than 40 local government branches, especially in the South

East, have negotiated local pay bargaining or personal contract deals. The defeat on pay can only encourage employers locally to push forward their redundancy and restructuring plans.

NALGO's June conference voted for a special conference on strategy to resist cuts. This has been organised as a four-hour conference in Brighton on a September afternoon - ensuring minimum attendance from round the country.

NALGO members have been sold the idea that merger with NUPE and COHSE is the answer to all their ills. But NUPE too this year overwhelmingly rejected strike action on a similar 6.4 per cent pay offer.

A merged union will still face the basic problem of fighting against cuts, redundancies and of low pay in local government and all the public services.

NALGO local government members now face an uphill fight. Only sustained and nationally co-ordinated industrial action will push back the employers' offensive, and prepare for victory on pay next year.



Is he next on Kinnock's chopping list? Dave Nellist MP

Labour leaders in witch hunt frenzy

by Steve French (suspended Lambeth Councillor)

Labour executive elections - defend Benn and Skinner!

by Pete Firmin

The Labour right wing are hoping that the first year of individual ballots (OMOV) will see their stranglehold on the party's executive strengthened. They hope to see Tony Benn or Dennis Skinner removed, the only consistent voices against Kinnockism left on the leadership.

Though OMOV has been heralded as the new dawn of party democracy, the procedure is almost designed to produce a low turn out and no discussion. Rather than voting at branch meetings with a post-

al ballot for those unable to attend, there is one central meeting for most constituencies.

Left unable to agree

In addition, these meetings are not to discuss the candidates - members are referred to biographical details in Labour Party News (LPN). Unfortunately, due to the shambles of the national membership scheme, many do not receive LPN.

Conference against the witch hunt

September 21st
Manchester Town Hall
1pm-5pm

For further information contact 10b
Windsor Road, London N7

LABOUR'S National Executive (NEC) will discuss the 'investigations' into MPs Terry Fields and Dave Nellist on September 25.

Party members from around the country will be lobbying the meeting urging them to oppose the witch hunt, in a campaign leading up to the Labour conference.

In a letter to constituents, Nellist said 'A dossier of 112 pages has been compiled on me. This could not be the work of a few hours. It must have been in preparation for months if not years ... yet I was only recently endorsed by the NEC ... with not one voice raised against. I'm the same man now as I was then!'

Fight against Poll Tax

All socialists should rally to the defence of the two MPs, who were democratically and decisively selected by their local parties. In addition, trade union and Labour Party branches should send emergency motions to the party conference in support of the two MPs, who have led the fight against the Poll Tax in Parliament.

The witch hunt against the left was stepped up in the Spring, with the suspension of left councillors in many parts of the country. There have also been moves against supporters

of Socialist Organiser in Nottingham and Sheffield.

All 13 suspended councillors in Lambeth now face expulsion, proving for some of them that in Kinnock's party, even the odd day trip back to the left is unacceptable. If this wasn't bad enough, the witch hunt has moved into overdrive since the Walton by-election.

Suspended

In recent weeks, three Manchester councillors have been suspended for visiting a Poll Tax prisoner at the same time as Lesley Mahmood. And the Birkenhead party has been suspended for daring to criticise the rigged re-run of the reselection of Frank Field MP.

Meanwhile, three Glasgow councillors have been threatened with a second suspension for refusing to cooperate with implementing the Poll Tax. And councillors in Bedford could be expelled for the 'crime' of opposing a pact with Liberals.

The National Constitutional Committee (NCC), set up in 1986 with the aim of silencing debate on expulsions at the party conference, has had a busy year. Despite Labour's massive overdraft and the threat of redundancies at the party HQ, £300,000 has been spent on expelling just 200 members.

At a rate of £1,600 per expulsion, perhaps party apparatchiks could be won with

a slogan of 'Stop the witch hunt, save our jobs?'

Now Kinnock is keen to purge any elements that might upset his election campaign, demanding that promises are kept to. The NCC is meeting this month, and socialists need to gear up for a fight to stay in the party.

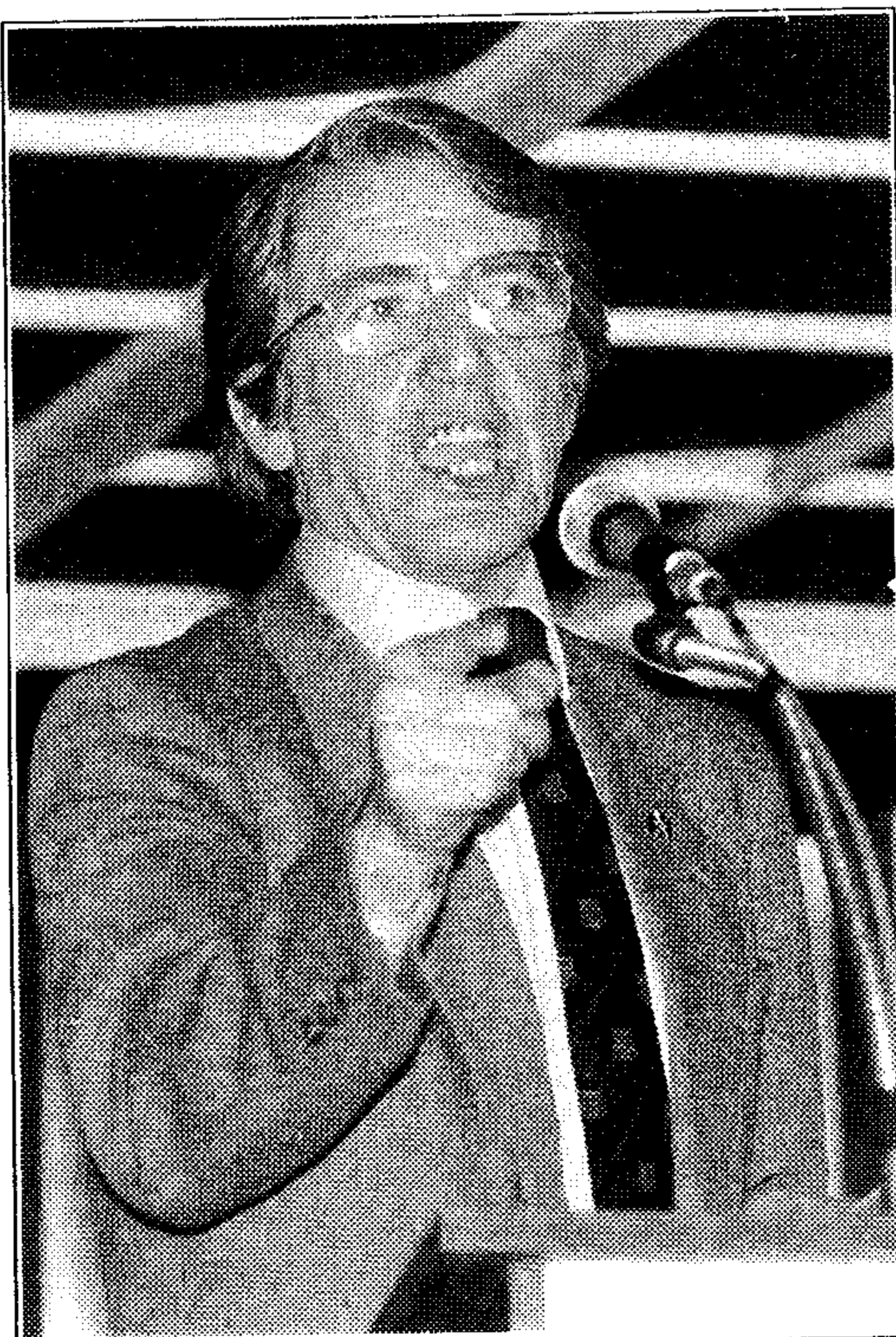
To leave without a fight means to walk into the wilderness. The road of 'Real Labour', not to mention the SWP's call for a new party, does nothing to break the hold of Kinnock's 'New Realism'. Far from aiding workers in struggle, it merely sidelines the debate.

Socialists for Labour

Socialists now need a united, national campaign to link up all those under attack. But we are not just arguing for our democratic right to lose the arguments. We also need to build Labour Party Socialists and a 'Socialists for Labour' campaign to fight for socialism within the party.

Kinnock may have sleepless nights through his inability to rout the Tories, but he positively had nightmares about the prospect of a Labour victory on a wave of anti Poll Tax struggles. We now need to channel that anger into the labour movement.

Anti witch hunt campaign at Labour conference
Contact Steve French 071 733 3403



Skinner (left) and Benn are now beleaguered defenders of socialism on the NEC

To have endorsed the Campaign Group slate would have exposed the rest of the left as 'fair weather' supporters of positive action. To its credit, most of the Left has rejected the slate. Kanta Patel, a Greenwich Councillor and a national vice-chair of the Black Section, is standing and Black Sections drew up a slate replacing Dave Nellist MP with her.

This is far from ideal, particularly when Nellist is facing a major witch-hunt. But to draw up another slate would discredit the left even further.

Socialist Outlook supporters and Labour Party Socialists are therefore calling for a vote for the Black Section slate (see box). This makes it even more important that emergency resolutions opposing the witch-hunt of

Nellist and Fields are submitted to the conference (see above).

Disillusioned members

The left will not make any progress in these elections, but by mobilising the vote we can ensure that Benn and Skinner retain their places and other, lesser-known candidates are established as real contenders for future years. Disillusioned, inactive members need to be encouraged to cast their votes in this election.

The left also needs to increase pressure on the Campaign Group to ensure that this years debacle is not repeated. A democratic method for discussing and deciding on the left slate for future years must be found.

This is compounded by the left's inability to agree one slate of candidates.

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs discussed and drew up their slate in isolation from the rest of the left. Audrey Wise MP is not standing, and the Campaign Group (correctly) decided not to support Jo Richardson because of her support for the witch-hunt and the Gulf War.

Fair weather friends

So they decided to replace them with two white men (Jeremy Corbyn MP and Dave Nellist MP), on the grounds that no other women or black people in the Campaign Group wanted to stand. However, if they had raised their sights beyond Parliament, they would have realised that there are credible left black and women candidates outside.

This put the extra-parliamentary left in the unenviable position of either accepting the MPs' slate, and ditching positive action, or drawing up alternative slates and inevitably causing confusion.

Vote Left!

NEC Constituency Section: Diane Abbott; Tony Benn; Jeremy Corbyn; Ken Livingstone; Alice Mahon; Kanta Patel; Dennis Skinner

NEC Women's Section: Leonora Lloyd; Anni Marjoram; Pauline Purnell

Treasurer: Gavin Strang

Conference Arrangements Committee: Pete Willsman

National Constitutional Committee: Richard Hanford; Bill Murphy

Vote to accept anti-union laws

TUC runs up the white flag

By Alan Thornett

ANY HINT of militancy will give votes to the Tories. That was the message from TUC leaders throughout last week's TUC Congress. It is a disgraceful argument.

Even if it were true, it would be wrong to subordinate the rights of millions of workers to defend their interests to the electoral needs of Labour - even with the importance of defeating the Tories.

It is in defending the interests of the working class that support for Labour is consolidated.

It is not even true that militancy benefits the Tories. Normally Labour's support actually goes up, not down during periods of industrial militancy.

Miners' strike

For example, during the miners' strike Labour was regularly 10-12 per cent ahead in the polls. Higher levels of class struggle under a Tory government strengthen the movement at every level - including support for Labour.

Norman Willis and the TUC General Council, however, are not interested in such facts. This year's Congress was not just a pre-election rally, it was 'new realism' in action.

TUC leaders talked about the need for a 'social partnership at work' and for cooperation with 'efficient management'. You would hardly have known that there was a vicious employers' offensive in progress. Or that workers were facing mass redundancies, victimisations, de-recognition, de-unionisation, single union deals, individual contracts, speed-up, team leaders, quality circles and all the other techniques currently mushrooming throughout industry to increase the exploitation of those represented by the TUC.

Last year the TUC, in a major step backwards, voted to toe the Labour leadership line and accept that most of the Tory anti-union laws would be retained by an incoming Labour government.

This year the debate was re-run under the shadow of the 1991 Act, which is in many



Blister memories: Grimwick strikers in the late 1970s felt the brunt of the last Labour government's anti-union policies. Now the TUC want further to hamstring their members in dispute, ready for Kinnock to do more of the same!

ways the worst yet. It shows that they intend to continue with their full scale attack on the unions.

'Cooling off'

The new Act requires a seven days 'cooling off' period before strikes; gives individuals the right to sue unions over strike action; brings the possibility of legally binding agreements; and introduces an attack on the deduction of union dues at source, which would seriously damage unions' finances.

These realities were reflected on the floor of the Congress and produced the best debate of a desultory conference.

The big betrayal - and victory for Kinnock - was from the 'left wing' leadership of the TGWU, which not only repeated last year's support for the anti-union laws, but this year, in the shape of Ron Todd, actually moved the pro-union laws resolution.

Both ways

Todd managed to get the TGWU to vote both ways at its own conference in June - for the repeal of the laws, and in favour of Labour leadership policy; but this week he left no doubt which of those decisions will be implemented.

Opposing Todd was Arthur Scargill, moving the resolution for the repeal of the laws by a future Labour Government.

He quoted Todd's own speech in 1988, before his collapse into Kinnock's line, when he called upon Labour to: 'sweep away all Tory laws lock, stock and barrel'. Scargill said the unions are entitled to be free of state interference, 'that is the difference between these two resolutions'.

While the hard right trooped up to support Ron Todd, Roger Lyons of MSF told the Congress that he was amazed that 'any

delegate here today can have a mandate to support anti-union legislation and keep penal measures on the statute book'. Quite so.

Minority

In the vote there was a substantial minority - 2,270,000 on a card vote - in favour of the Scargill motion. These votes included the print union, the Graphical Print and Media Union, NALGO and MSF as well as the NUM.

The TGWU was crucial to the success of the new realist line. Had it voted the other way, it would have attracted other votes, split the Congress down the middle, and opened a new stage in the debate on the issue.

Neil Kinnock was naturally delighted with the outcome. He told reporters that the decision 'would improve the chances of a Labour government'.

He said the decision signified 'an attitude towards constructive industrial relations which is reciprocated by managers around Britain'.

Anyone who can believe that nonsense can vote for keeping the anti-union laws with a quiet conscience.

Eating for socialism?

By HARRY SLOAN

WHICH is the party of the glutinous super-rich?

No marks if you guessed the Tories: they are now being outdone by Neil Kinnock's new-model Labour Party as it turns its back decisively on the working class.

Farewell totes, jumble sales and collections: today's Labour Party apes the US Democrats and Republicans, raising money at astronomically priced 'Red Rose Campaign' dinners.

Perhaps your invitation got lost in the post? We can inform you that this summer's £500-a-head thrash is to be followed by a relative bargain - a £175 October 21 nosh-up at Frederick's Restaurant in Islington, supposedly to 'mark Labour's commitment to London'.

Discounts are available (a table for ten goes for just £1,400!), but this is clearly not an evening at which socialists, or any of Labour's bedrock voting supporters - working class families from the industrial and inner city heartlands - would be welcome.

Those with sufficient readies and a strong enough stomach can cavort with Labour's affluent, ostentatious elite - not least Glenda Jackson, Ken Follett and Ruth Rendell - as they flaunt their wealth and right wing policies while scoffing back the vol-au-vents.

If such elitism was not enough of an insult to Labour's homeless, unemployed and poverty-stricken supporters, the political implications of this new turn are even worse.

The wealthy do not back Labour for nothing: they expect at least a quid pro quo if Labour ever should take office. In targeting the minute and over-privileged section of the middle class who might be drawn to such events,

Kinnock and co have already abandoned any hint of radical economic policy and proffered promises to limit taxation of the super-rich.

If grotesque displays like this are already happening before the election, imagine how appalling will be the celebrations for those on the gravy train if Kinnock were to win!

Socialist Outlook has a handy hint for any reader intending to join the revelry on October 21: bring some food and drink with you. Top of the guest list is Roy 'The Hoover' Hattersley - and he could eat your portion, your neighbour's, and all the cutlery before you could say 'Jack Cunningham'!

Build the campaign to free Sara Thornton!

By Kate Ahrens

SARA THORNTON, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Amelia Rossiter are all currently in prison serving sentences for murdering their husbands. All three women suffered immense cruelty and violence at the hands of their husbands and were driven to retaliate by the extreme circumstances under which they had been living.

On 29 July the High Court dismissed Sara Thornton's appeal against her conviction. Her appeal was based on a re-interpretation of the law of homicide and provocation. Previously, in order to be acquitted on grounds of provocation, the accused must have acted in 'a sudden and temporary loss of self control' caused by the words and action of the victim. For Sara and

others like her, this ignores the reality of their situation.

In these cases, the law not only directly discriminates against women but also discriminates by failing to take into account the different circumstances under which women kill. For Sara, provocation was not accepted as a defence because she had gone into the kitchen, sharpened a knife and waited for her husband to go to sleep before she stabbed him. This was held to mean that she had cooled off and therefore could not be deemed to have lost her self control.

Sara Thornton, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Amelia Rossiter have now suffered not only years of abuse and violence silently condoned by the state, but are also condemned for fighting back. Domestic violence is the real crime. What is needed is not to put women

in jail, but to provide sufficient resources that they no longer have to resort to this sort of desperate act.

Amelia Rossiter has been granted leave to appeal, Kiranjit Ahluwalia is still awaiting news of her appeal. All three women need support and solidarity to maintain their struggle against the injustice that has been done to them.

There will be demonstrations outside the Home Office every other Wednesday from 11 September from 12 noon until 2pm, calling for the immediate release of Sara Thornton, Amelia Rossiter and Kiranjit Ahluwalia. The campaign is also calling on people to lobby their MPs to support the cases



No sympathy for women: Home Secretary Kenneth Baker

of the three women and to make representations to the Home Office and Lord Chancellor, for an urgent reform of the law of provocation.

For further information on the campaign or to send letters or messages of support contact Southall Black Sisters 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 4DW tel: 081 571 9595

Organising women in the unions **Glossy leaflets are not enough!**

The bosses call it 'Opportunity 2000'. Getting more women into the boardroom and making some cosmetic changes to equal opportunity legislation looks likely to sit alongside the 'Citizen's Charter' in the Tory election manifesto. Meanwhile women workers are under attack, as the Tories and the employers try and strip away the few gains made in pay, conditions and union rights. It has never been more important for women trade unionists to come together to develop strategies to defend and extend their rights. The 'Women in the Unions' national meeting in November (see advert), organised by Women for Socialism and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, is the best opportunity to do just that.

In the run up to this meeting VALERIE COULTAS kicks off a series of articles on women's role in the unions.

ENORMOUS changes have taken place in the composition of the labour force since the Second World War. 48 per cent of the workforce in Britain today is female. The economic crisis has not meant the exit of women from the workforce. Their labour is sufficiently cheap, flexible and semi-skilled for women workers to be difficult to replace.

Since the war the proportion of women trade unionists has almost doubled. In 1940 women formed 18 per cent of all trade unionists. In 1990 they formed 34 per cent of the membership of TUC-affiliated unions, reflecting the rise in white collar/blouse unionisation. The response of the trade unions to this influx of women can be divided into two periods - the late 1960s/early 1970s and post-1979.

Initiative

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, women at the base of the unions clearly had the initiative. The degree of combativity and self-organisation was immense. Struggles around Equal Pay forced reluctant employers to implement government legislation. The women's liberation movement (WLM) in Britain was formed out of an organisation campaigning in support of Equal Pay - the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights (NJACWER).

With the decline of the NJACWER, the Working Women's Charter was launched to fight for a popular version of the demands of the WLM. It was this campaign, backed by several trade unions, that called the first national pro-abortion action in 1975 against the James White anti-abortion Bill. The defeat of this attack was a huge victory.

The labour movement was

Women in the Unions

Fighting for our rights!

Saturday 23rd
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Old-guard male bureaucrat: Jimmy Knapp

on the offensive during this period, having brought down a Tory government and defeated anti-union legislation. Despite discrimination and job segregation, women workers were making real economic gains and finding new confidence. Pro-abortion policy was accepted and eventually the TUC adopted its Charter for Women Workers, a slightly watered-down version of the Working Women's Charter. In 1979 the TUC not only called, but built a mass demonstration to defend women's abortion rights.

Since 1979 the initiative on women's issues has shifted away from the rank and file. The continued increase in the unionisation of women has put pressure on the bureaucracy but the lack of successful struggles has altered the relation of forces between the rank and file and the bureaucracy.

Women have made steps forward in the trade unions however, as a result of their increasing presence and the successes of previous years. Their presence is now an accepted fact.

Sophisticated

The new realist leaders of the TUC, aided by eager feminist researchers, have been forced to adopt quite a sophisticated approach to women's issues today.

They have chosen to prioritise recruitment, training and representation - the 'glossy leaflets' strategy. This can involve many changes that revolutionary socialists and feminists support - establishing a minimum wage, non-sexist codes of language, advice on sexual harassment, new methods of training (including women-only training sessions), childcare provision, establishing equal opportunity officers/departments, quotas on reserved places for women.

But the concentration of

women workers in low-paid manual and clerical jobs, combined with low levels of combativity and self-organisation, has made it difficult for women to make real economic gains in a period of austerity and a ruthless employers' offensive. Without strong unions women will face the sack if employers are no longer free to pay them low wages, or employers will just subvert any minimum wage legislation brought in by a future Labour government.

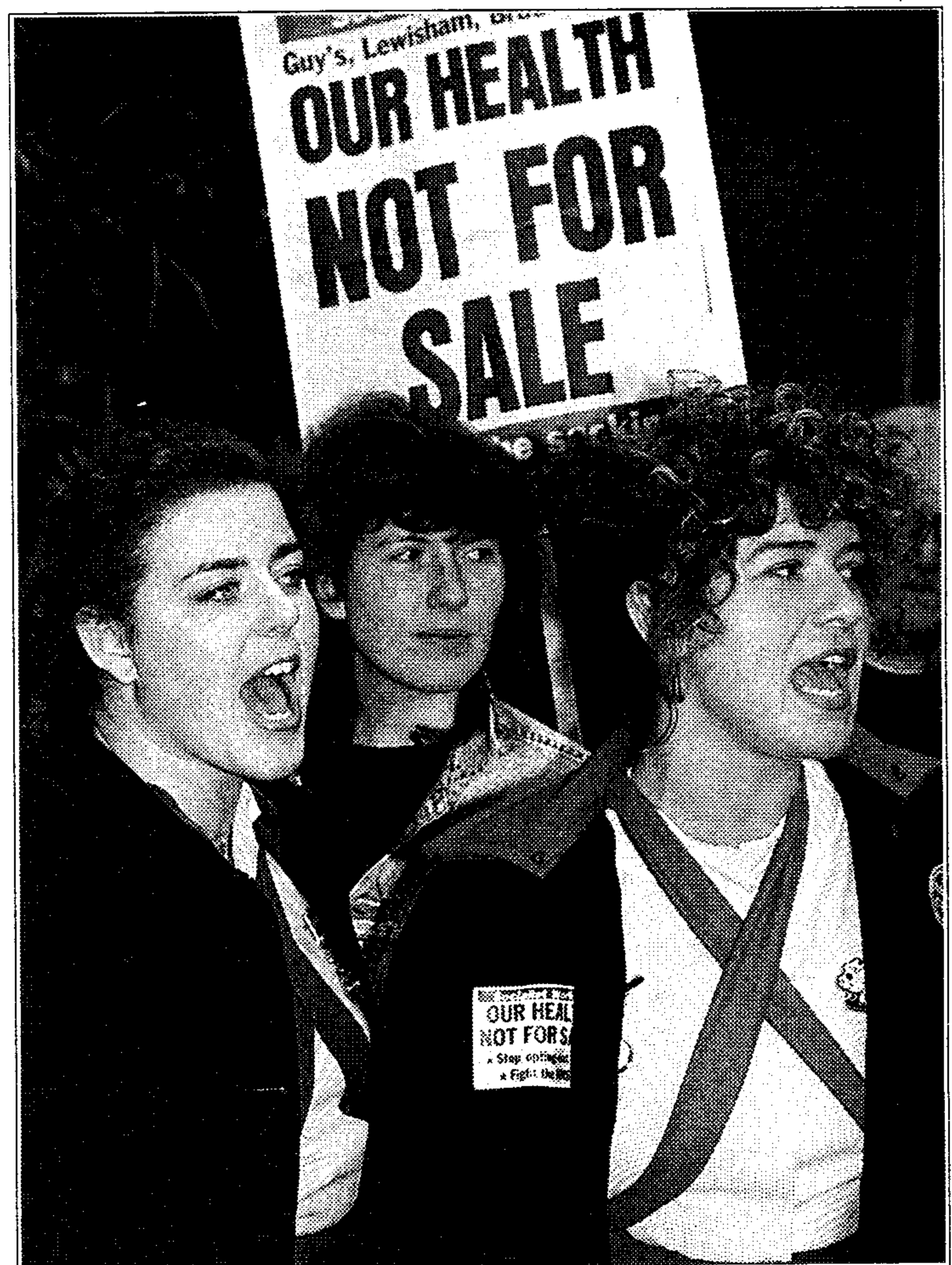
Representation of women in the trade unions has improved with special measures. But there is no cause for complacency. One in three trade unionists are women, but they make up only four out of 75 general secretaries. The Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE) has a 79 per cent female membership, but at its 1990 conference only 34 per cent of delegates were women.

The ideological and political offensive of the Tory government has also not left women unscathed. Whilst a small layer of professional women may have benefitted from the Thatcher years, the vast majority of working women have got poorer. This is while watching a media campaign that makes women judge themselves by ever more impossible standards of perfect mother/wife/career or glamour girl.

Fundamentals

Although the Labour Party manifesto does have a commitment on low pay, it does not address the fundamental economic problems - the dual burden of work and domestic labour - that women face. The new realists do not encourage the kind of self-organisation of women that really will challenge the bosses' profits, win improved childcare facilities and protect the most oppressed workers.

Women workers are clearly better off in a union than out of it. A recent Labour Research survey showed a difference of 33 per cent between women's pay in unionised and non-unionised workplaces. But the last two decades show that women will only get what they want from the unions when they organise themselves to fight for their rights. Glossy leaflets and promises, without a fight, will never be enough to protect women workers from the ruthless exploitation of the bosses.



Healthworkers fighting redundancies at Guy's, the flagship of opted-out hospitals. Now even more hospitals, ooted out and directly-managed, are in financial problems.

CREDIT: Andrew Wliard

Women's hospital under the axe **Save the EGA!**

by John Lister

The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital (EGA), London's last remaining specialist hospital for women, is facing a new fight for survival.

Management want to close Aldrich Blake Ward, with the loss of 11 nurses and support staff - to save just £60,000 by April.

This new cutback would reduce the hospital to just 28 in-patient beds and 8 day care beds, and restrict the numbers of women who can choose the special type of care offered by a women's hospital.

Now some managers in Bloomsbury and Islington health authority are keen to close the EGA altogether, and sell off its prime site near Euston station.

Fighting for its life

The threat is not new: for over 15 years the EGA has been fighting for its life against repeated closure threats. For over three years from 1975 the hospital was 'occupied' by staff who with tremendous support from local trade unions and the community kept it open and treating patients in the first long-running hospital 'work-in'.

This successful fight made

the EGA a household name among those defending the NHS against cuts and closures, and in the women's movement. The hospital was saved and upgraded, and despite recent cuts which forced the introduction of some male doctors, it still offers a very special type of care and support for women all over London and elsewhere.

Assets stripped

Management admit that the EGA is an early casualty of the Tory government's unpopular NHS reforms, which have deterred doctors from referring women to hospitals outside their local districts. And asset-stripping local health chiefs are moving in for the kill.

They were defeated in the 1970s, and they can be defeated now.

Already staff at the EGA, members of COHSE and NUPE, are taking the lead, balloting for strike action to fight these cuts: but they need support in building a broad campaign to save the EGA, and beat back these Tory cuts.

Contact the unions at the hospital c/o Pat Taylor (COHSE) or Helen Cotter (NUPE) (071-387-2501). Leaflets are available from COHSE, 112, Greyhound Lane, London SW16.

Fighting the privateers

Domestic staff employed by contractors RCO at the Maudsley Hospital on Denmark Hill in south London have staged what appears to be the first full-scale strike over pay by privatised workers in the NHS.

A solid majority voted for all-out action in a ballot organised by COHSE at the end of August.

Meanwhile in South Wales, 350 nursing staff at Cardiff's Ely Hospital have threatened strike action over rock-bottom cleaning standards after contractors Hospital Cleaning Services took over.

NUPE, COHSE and GMB members have united to challenge the new, low standards, and warned that the dispute could spread to involve four other hospitals served by the same cut-price contractors.

Which way after the defeat of the Soviet coup?

Towards capitalism or workers' power?



One simple slogan: down with the junta!

THE DEFEAT of the attempted Stalinist coup is a tremendous victory for the workers throughout the Soviet Union. If the coup had been successful, the democratic gains won during the years of glasnost would have been savagely eliminated.

The coup finally crumbled because of divisions within the army and KGB leadership. These divisions were in part a product of the defiance by politicians like Yeltsin, but above all because of the mass mobilisations to defend democracy.

Perhaps the workers' mobilisations were not large enough to be absolutely decisive; but they showed what would have been necessary to make the coup stick - mass slaughter, new rebellions, probably civil war. All that was too much to stomach for more far-sighted leaders of the army high command.

The defeat of the plotters creates a massive potential for deepening democracy and advancing working class interests. *But there are formidable obstacles to realising that potential.*

The main political victors at this stage are the leadership team around Yeltsin, and those fighting for independence in the republics. Yeltsin has the whip hand against Gorbachev, who is increasingly a spent force.

But the Yeltsin team is openly pro-capitalist, and seeks the restoration of capitalism as rapid as possible. As this is pursued, in the Russian and other republics, it will involve harsh measures against working class interests. A key factor in combatting restorationism must be the fight to deepen democracy.

Constituent Assembly

The demand that encapsulates this is the demand for a *constituent assembly*. A constituent assembly should be elected in each republic with full powers to decide the type of state, government and economy which best serves the interests of the masses.

Yeltsin and his supporters are, at best, supporters of Western-style parliamentary democracy. Socialists should fight for the widest possible elections to public office, with no reserved places for the Communist Party. But they should also argue for going beyond this and putting direct power in the hands of the workers.

During the coup, elements of workers control emerged in some factories, as workers either went on strike or continued production of necessities under their own control. This shows the potential in the situation which must be built on; indeed it is only the basis of deepening mass mobilisations that a new working class leadership can be built.

In a situation of shortages and economic dislocation, the small minority of socialists in the Soviet Union must argue for workers control of food distribution, and the development of a workers' plan for rebuilding the economy with genuine, as opposed to bureaucratic and corrupt, planning. Even if such proposals find only a small echo at first, they will pay enormous dividends as the attempt to marketise the

economy produces further chaos and disillusionment.

Oppose ban

Socialists should oppose the suspension of the Communist Party and the suppression of its newspapers. Of course, the measures taken against the CPSU reflect the hatred of large sections of the masses for this party, whose bosses are seen as criminals complicit in the coup.

CREDIT: Jez Coulson/Insight



Measures which deprive the party of its monopoly control of the state apparatus, media etc should be supported. But while the CPSU represents only the bureaucracy, it should have the right to organise politically, like any other party and publish its own material. The suppression of the CP by decree is a blow against democracy and a dangerous sign for the future.

Socialists can only be for the political defeat of the CP; but that defeat needs to be inflicted by the masses in open political struggle, if democratic rights are to be preserved.

The demand for independence by the republics is now unstoppable. The socialist programme, of course, stresses that democratic socialism can only be built on the basis of *federation* between socialist republics. Socialism cannot be built in one republic.

There can be no road to federation in the territory of the former Soviet Union on the basis of the oppression of the republics by Great Russian chauvinism. Genuine federation could only be built at a future stage by equal and sovereign republics. Concretely, this means fighting for independence now.

Given the relative economic weight of the different republics, some form of economic co-operation between them is inevitable. But this, and other forms of co-operation, must be decided on the basis of sovereign decisions by the republics, and not on the basis of coercion by the Russian federation.

Rejection of 1917

The existing leaderships in all the republics are intent on the rapid restoration of capitalism. Because of the decades of the Stalinist nightmare, socialism in the eyes of the masses is discredited; only a tiny minority supports any kind of socialism. With rejection of Stalinism, goes rejection of Lenin, Trotsky and the whole heritage of 1917. This situation, in the short term, has opened the door to all kinds of reactionary political currents.

The working class in the territories of the former Soviet Union *has yet to conquer political independence*. The CPSU and the official trade unions did not represent the interests of working class. Their demise leaves a situation in which there is no mass working class party, and in which independent trade unions are at best embryonic.

The unorganised working class can assert its interests in spontaneous struggles which pressure employers and governments. However it cannot assert its historic interests without mass organisations that politically represent it. Only anarchists could believe that the working class could conquer direct political power without the anti-Stalinist consciousness of the masses being crystallised in independent mass organisation and leadership.

This does not mean that the present leaderships fighting to restore capitalism will have a free hand. Marketisation will worsen the already appalling living standards of the working class. Resistance to this, and defence of the remaining social gains of the masses, creates the basis for huge struggles to come.

The West does not have the surplus capital for a new 'Marshall Plan' to rapidly capitalise the Soviet Union. This means that a hybrid situation of a decaying nationalised economy, with islands of privatisation, is likely to linger for a prolonged period.

This creates a massive danger. Desperation in the impoverished republics of the ex-Soviet Union can create the basis for attempts to impose marketisation through renewed forms of authoritarian rule. Unless a working class alternative is built, reactionary currents will gain mass support.

Contradictory

Internationally, the death agony of the Soviet Union will create contradictory effects. The coup was part of the final death rattle of exasperated Stalinism, on which the coffin lid is now being finally nailed. Socialists can only welcome the fact that the working class in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has contributed so much to finishing it off.

Simultaneously, imperialism now has a much freer hand, which will in the short and medium-term enable it to make substantial advances. The first spectacular demonstration of this was the Gulf war which was largely made possible because of the weakening of the Soviet Union. The Cuban revolution is now in grave danger; the overthrow of the Castro regime and its replacement by a pro-capitalist regime would be a grave blow to the workers in Latin America and beyond. Third world liberation struggles will be bereft of the limited support which they were able to obtain from the Soviet Union.

A wider problem exists. The events since 1989 have discredited Stalinism, not the project of a socialist future for humanity. But that is not the way it is presented by bourgeois ideologues, nor the way it is seen by millions of workers internationally.

Confidence in a socialist future must be rebuilt on the basis of what the attempt to restore capitalism actually means, and on the basis of the huge struggles internationally which economic crisis in the West, the East and the third world will now inevitably bring.



CREDIT: Jeremy Nicol/Kaiz Pictures

Yeltsin after the coup: now events will show how much of a genuine democrat he really is

Workers must complete the unfinished revolution

By David Shepherd

AUGUST 1991 was the month when the democratic revolution, having swept through eastern Europe in 1989-90, finally came home to the Soviet Union, birthplace – now graveyard – of the stalinist system. The collapse of the Soviet state amid the mobilisation of millions on the streets is a welcome development. The key question now is: what will emerge to replace it?

It is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the possible consequences of the August events. But one thing is clear: they were the beginning rather than the end of the democratic revolution, which remains in many respects unfinished.

The future now depends on the emergence of independent working class politics and organisation – the development of a mass workers' movement able to complete the anti-stalinist democratic revolution.

Meanwhile the immediate political victors are the neo-liberals around Russian president Boris Yeltsin whose project is the more or less rapid restoration of capitalism. Notwithstanding their strident 'anti-communism', these forces (most, like Yeltsin, with their origins in the CPSU) represent a wing of

the bureaucracy, anxious to hang on to political power and ensure its own future as part of a new capitalist class.

Their stand against the attempted rightwing coup was important, but in the light of the coup's defeat their successful move to capture the political initiative (the counter-coup) is a negative development. They now represent a barrier to the successful completion of the democratic revolution.

Pro-capitalist

Paradoxically the existence of a much more enthusiastically pro-capitalist political leadership may not bring the restoration of capitalism any closer. As the Financial Times notes, '...the revolution that has made an economically successful reform [i.e. the restoration of capitalism] politically conceivable has also made it technically still more difficult.'

One reason for this is that the democratic revolution has been bound up with the struggle of the oppressed nations of the USSR for independence, and the collapse of the Soviet state has made independence a possibility. But the restoration of capitalism requires close economic coordination between at least the major republics. Without a

centralised Soviet state this becomes much more difficult.

This is why the western powers, while belatedly supporting independence for the Baltics, are so strongly opposed to the break-up of the rest of the former USSR and why they are backing Gorbachev so strongly as a counterweight to separatist tendencies.

Anyone who thinks that, with the defeat of the coup and the rise of the Yeltsinites, Gorbachev no longer has any 'political base' are looking in the wrong places. He has a 'base' in Washington and Bonn, and it is one that Yeltsin ignores at his peril.

Another reason why the August events cannot be seen in any simplistic way as expediting the restoration of capitalism can be gleaned from a leading article in the Economist which said, 'The best thing about this extraordinary August has been the power on the streets !!!'

The Economist's comment echoes the celebration of 'people power' by such unlikely figures as Margaret Thatcher and George Bush. This journal of liberal capitalism found it expedient to forget its own considerations earlier in the year about the possibility of a 'Pinochet' option for the transition to capitalism in the USSR.

The truth is that the mobilisation of millions in political struggle against the old regime is not the best basis on which to inflict the kind of battering on the working class which would be required for the restoration of capitalism. Leaving aside all the hypocritical guff about 'people power on the streets', the capitalist class are well aware of this.

Insofar as Yeltsin and other republican leaders are serious in their attempts at all-out marketisation, they will be forced into confrontation with the working class at an economic, but also at a political level. The democratic gains of the glasnost years are not safe in Yeltsin's hands, nor are the gains in national-democratic rights in the republics safe in the hands of the likes of Ukraine's Leonid Kravchuk.

Moves towards a new authoritarianism are inevitable. Writing in the Guardian, Zhores Medvedev, argues that 'The emerging Russian business classes...have concluded that what's needed to quickly transform the economy is a just dictatorship not democracy.' The deepening and



strengthening of democracy are incompatible with serious pro-capitalist economic reform.

Is the end of the Soviet Union in a historic sense a defeat for socialism and a victory for capitalism? In order to answer this question fully it is necessary to go beyond the scope of this article and to take a long term historical view of the role of the USSR in the world and its relationship to the struggle for socialism.

But in order to begin to answer the question it is also necessary to examine the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet state. Various arguments have been put forward on this score.

Was the collapse due to the pressure exerted by imperialism, culminating in the massive arms build-up of the early to mid 1980s? Or was it the result of a crisis-prone system imploding under the weight of its own contradictions? Might it have been caused by millions of working people refusing to go on living in the old way? Clearly each of these factors was important. But which, if any, was decisive?

It would be quite wrong, and politically suicidal, for the left to prioritise the imperialist offensive as the main reason for the Soviet crisis. This argument gives imperialism the credit for ending the oppressive regimes in the USSR and eastern Europe. It lets western leaders get away with arguing that the events of 1989-91 were the direct result of their 'standing firm' against 'Soviet aggression' in the renewed cold war of the Reagan-Thatcher years.

Destabilising

There is no doubt that the imperialist offensive in all of its forms (from the arms race to the COCOM restrictions on the export to the Soviet bloc of high technology) provided a powerful destabilising influence on the Soviet economy. But it would be quite wrong to argue that the crisis of stalinism was reducible to this offensive.

For one thing the roots of the challenge to the political legitimacy of stalinist regimes go back way beyond the 1980s, to the struggles of 1953, 1956, 1968, 1970-71, 1976 and 1980-81. You could hardly argue that the rise of Solidarity in Poland (a key development in the unravelling of the stalinist system internationally) was somehow the result of the Reagan-Thatcher arms race.

A similar argument applies in relation to those who argue that the Soviet state collapsed 'under the weight of its own contradictions'. Such an argument implies a process of decay and disintegration which needed only gentle prodding from within and without to cause the system's destruction. According to this view, for example, the coup failed not because of the relationship of social forces and mass opposition on the streets but because the army leadership was split, the coup plotters were incompetent and so on.

Like the view that it was primarily the imperialist offensive that was responsible for the end of stalinism, this position also has the effect of minimalising the active role of the working class and the mass movement in the system's collapse.

In addition it begs a number of questions - such as why was the army establishment split? And why were the coup leaders incompetent? In other words the argument rests on a tautology: the reason for the Soviet crisis was the collapse of the system (i.e. the crisis)!

The question becomes clearer if we look in a little more detail into the reasons for the

failure of the coup, of which it is possible to identify at least five. They are not given in any order of priority.

First, the complete ideological disintegration of the bureaucracy and the lack of any coherent programme for Soviet development other than pro-capitalist marketisation. Thus the coup's plotters in the defence and security establishments and the military-industrial complex, made no mention of 'communism' or 'socialism' in their public statement announcing their attempted seizure of power.

No significant section of the bureaucracy (left or right) had by this stage any even residual faith in the basic tenets of the ideology that has sustained the bureaucracy since the days of Stalin. An appeal for a return to 'Marxist-Leninist' orthodoxy was impossible in circumstances where nobody any longer believes in any such thing.

Half-hearted

The second reason is related to the first: the half-hearted nature of the coup preparations and execution. The comparison with the well organised and devastating clampdown in Poland in 1981 is instructive, particularly since it was supervised by KGB chief Kryuchkov, a key member of the 'Emergency Committee'.

This would tend to indicate that the obvious dithering and incompetence with which the coup was carried out (and which enabled opposition to be organised in the crucial first few hours) are not explicable by any supposed innate ineptitude on the part of the plotters. Rather they were the result of the depth of the political crisis of stalinist rule and the overall relationship of forces in society.

The third reason for the failure of the coup was the existence of an organised centre of opposition, in the form of Boris Yeltsin and the Russian parliament, which, basing itself on the masses, defied the authority of the new regime and called for mass defiance and a general strike.

The fourth reason was the defection to the Yeltsin camp of a number of key figures within the bureaucracy and security establishment (especially General Polyakov of the KGB, General Kobets of the Soviet general staff and air force commander Shaposhnikov). In this way the preconditions for Yeltsin's counter-coup were assembled.

While basing himself on the mass resistance to the coup, Yeltsin simultaneously attempted to ensure that what emerged from the defeat of the coup was a political regime able to impose an 'orderly' transition to a post-stalinist system in which the neo-liberal sections of the bureaucracy can flourish. For many sections of the political and military establishment the Yeltsin option looked like a better bet than throwing in their lot with the hapless coup plotters.

The final, but by no means least important, reason for the defeat of the coup was the active resistance of important sections of the masses, especially in Moscow and Leningrad, but also in the industrial regions of Siberia and Vorkuta and in the Baltic republics, Moldavia, Ukraine and so on.

The response to Yeltsin's strike call was uneven and the mobilisations which took place during the coup attempt were smaller than the demonstrations which took place earlier in the year.

However, the mass response to the calls for resistance was sufficiently strong to discourage the coup leaders and to encourage other sections of the bureaucracy to remain neutral (the wait and see approach) or to go over to the resistance. The role of the mass movement was therefore crucial.

In the light of the coup's defeat, the demonstrations became much bigger as the masses were emboldened to demand a once and for all end to the hated system.

Revolutions don't happen in societies ruled by self-confident, politically united and powerful classes or strata in favourable international circumstances. They happen in societies whose ruling strata are deeply riven, relatively socially weak in exceptionally unfavourable



Yesterday's man clings on as President of a disintegrating Soviet Union

international circumstances. This does not make them any less revolutions.

First phase

August in the Soviet Union witnessed the emergence of the masses onto the political stage in the first phase of a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the political rule of the stalinist bureaucracy.

The struggle to complete this revolution is at the same time a fight against the neo-liberal project of the Yeltsin wing of the post-stalinist bureaucracy, that is a fight against capitalist restoration and authoritarian populism. The outcome of this fight is not predetermined: everything is left to play for.

In this context the most urgent task for socialists is the development of an independent working class politics based on the greatest possible working class self-organisation - through independent trade unions, workplace committees and so on.

Such forms of organisation are required for a thoroughgoing democratisation of society of a kind which cannot be achieved by Yeltsin's populist presidential decrees. The destruction of the Communist Party's links to the state apparatus - an essential democratic task - should be achieved through the creation of mass, participatory democratic structures to replace the old bureaucratic ones.

The fact that the leaderships of some republics leave the Communist Party and declare for independence does not mean they cease to be bureaucrats. There should be no confidence in any section of the bureaucracy to act in the interests of the workers.

The task of really finishing off the old regime through thoroughgoing democratisation and workers' self-organisation is vital from the point of view of preparing for the pro-capitalist offen-

sive. But it is also necessary if inter-ethnic strife - of the kind currently gripping Yugoslavia - is to be avoided.

It is certainly possible that an authoritarian-populism in Russia and in the other republics might seek to whip up ethnic antagonisms and border disputes as a means of hanging on to power in conditions of economic catastrophe and political instability.

Support should be given to the demands for independence of the oppressed nations of the former USSR - but that is not the same thing as supporting the current political leaderships of the republics. Democratic rights of self-determination should be extended beyond the existing fifteen republics to nationalities and national minorities within these republics.

The central democratic principle here is that the limit on the right of self-determination is reached where such self-determination impinges on the rights of other nationalities or national minorities.

Self-determination

The resolution of border disputes, inter-ethnic conflicts and so on is only possible in the context of the fullest possible democratic self-determination for the various groups involved. Only genuine mass participatory democratic structures can provide the institutional and political context in which real negotiation and compromise on the myriad issues of national-democratic rights can be reached.

The only way to avoid inter-republican and inter-ethnic strife can be avoided is through finishing off the democratic revolution against bureaucratic rule. It is of course only on the basis of complete respect for the national-democratic rights of all the nations and national minorities that any deep and lasting working class unity can be built.

"the most urgent task is the development of an independent working class politics, based on independent trade unions, workplace committees and so on"

WELCOME
BACK
TO POWER,
MIKHAIL



Now the danger could be Yeltsin

by Catherine Verla

THE BREAK UP OF THE SOVIET SYSTEM has accelerated since the beginning of the 1990s with the discrediting of perestroika as a project for the modernisation and humanisation of the bureaucratic system.

The deterioration of the economy implied 'radical' remedies and there were already rumours of a coup d'état, during a polarisation in which Gorbachev had lost his popular base.

Significant divisions appeared in the state apparatuses, in the first place the army and the party. They reflected the movements from below which have shaken the system to its roots. It also reflected the weakening of the powers of the centre in relation to the republics summed up in the new union treaty.

In addition, the loss of power by the party/state, and the loss of control of the economy, contributed to its downfall. Its break up was announced before the coup by the political regroupment of liberals and Communist reformers led by Shevardnaze and Yakovlev.

This explains the extreme fragility of the putschists. But what was the political logic of the coup?

The press has generally characterised the coup as 'conservative' or 'right wing', led against a left supposedly incarnated by Yeltsin. But there are several varieties of 'conservative' and several right wings.

The putschists made no appeal for mobilisation. Evidently they were counting on the passivity of a population profoundly discontented by the degradation of everyday life. They appealed to this sentiment by announcing lower prices and referring to the dangers of famine linked to the reforms.

International Policy

Their main stated aim was the maintenance of a Union, with a powerful centre, and a strong law and order policy. But they did not disassociate themselves from the liberal market projects.

The only international 'policy' put forward by the putschists was a contempt for western 'aid' and a 'patriotic' point of view. The participation of General Kryuchkov (head of the KGB), who had denounced the plot by foreign secret services 'seeking to destabilise the Soviet Union' last winter, supports this view.

The coup did not represent an 'anti-imperialist' turn, nor was it conservative in the sense of a return to the old system.

The putschists seem to be 'mutants' between the old system of non-capitalist dictatorship, of which the administrative machinery has collapsed, and the new pro-capitalist dictatorship that is emerging.

This underlines the real ambiguities of



LIBERTY GUIDING THE PEOPLE (or Boris the Big Russian Takes Over)

the coup, linked to the cleavages running across the bureaucracy, with those who have opted for reconversion in the 'market economy' strengthened.

All the bureaucrats are pragmatically guided by the defence of their material interests. The putschists represented firstly those attached to a strong central state apparatus on the internal and international level.

Second, they represented those who saw the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the new sovereignty of the republics, plus the drastic reduction in the central budget and arms expenditure, as a threat to their jobs and privileges.

This 'conservatism' of a part of the state apparatus could find a resonance with a part of the neo-Stalinist apparatus of the Communist Party (CPSU) and the trade unions. These layers feel threatened by the economic and political reforms such as Yeltsin's decree against the Party organisations in the workplaces.

Conservatives

The Russian Communist Party, created by the conservatives, the United Front of Toilers of Leningrad, and the Interfronts based mainly in the non-Russian republics were, in this respect, potential allies of the putschists.

They could support them, with their rhetoric of pseudo 'defence of the interests of the workers' and of the USSR. But they were not the obvious initiators of the coup and do not seem to have been mobilised to defend it either.

They have nonetheless been held responsible and are suffering in full from the effects of the coup's defeat.

The ambiguities of the putschists reflected the common ground between 'market stalinism' and state capitalism in the current period. The state apparatus is one of the essential tools for the capitalist restoration underway.

The fact that Yeltsin and the liberals in power in Moscow and Leningrad were not arrested could express the uncertain orientation of the putschists. Or perhaps it was because they wanted to leave a door open to negotiations with supporters of the liberal market, rather than a reflection of amateurishness.

The coup leaders were favourable to market reforms, but at the level of the Union and controlled by the strong state, without counting too much on foreign capital. There is probably no difference on goals, but simply on strategy, between Rykov and Silaev or Pavlov and Shatalin.

The tide of capitalist restoration does

not have the political, social or economic strength to be completed, except in Germany. Everywhere else, it is stagnating.

There are different currents, some advocating a national capitalism protected from foreign investments, others the most open insertion into the world capital market.

Some call for a rapid privatisation at no matter what cost and whoever benefits, others a slow privatisation controlled by the state. But who will control the state?

One of the difficulties of capitalist restoration is the lack of new personnel. Although state capitalism appears the logical 'solution' from the point of view of the restorationist projects faced with the lack of private capital, any reinforcement of the state based on the same apparatuses will be seen as 'conservative'.

Liberal market offensive

Those who are most able to advance a restorationist project are those who originate from a break or a struggle against the old system. Thus in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia it is those who were explicit opponents of the Communist Party (even if they are a product of it) and new layers of the technocratic intelligentsia who are in power.

Thanks to his previous break with the CPSU and his role in opposing the coup, Yeltsin has prepared the way for a liberal market offensive, but not the conditions of its success. This offensive will no doubt benefit, as in Poland, from a brief honeymoon period and increased foreign aid.

But crisis and political uncertainty mean that foreign capital (and US economic support) is still reticent. And the honeymoon will be shorter than in Poland and made more problematic by the breadth of the national questions.

These exist both between the Union republics and within the Russian federation itself. The USSR as a 'prison house of nations' is no more and cannot be revived.

The defeat of the coup and the offensives led against the CPSU and its instruments of repression make declarations of independence, but also new forms of union, more likely.

The consolidation of a powerful Russia with a powerful leader and the declarations by Yeltsin threatening the frontiers of the separatist republics, and the large numbers of Russians nominated to governmental posts, have alarmed the other republics.

At the same time, Yeltsin's power in Russia facilitates the bypassing or weakening of the centre. Several factors

mitigate against the simple disappearance of the central state, in spite of the growth of direct relations between the republics.

These include fear of the dispersion of nuclear weapons, the search by certain nationalities for federal protection, and the need for common management of a currency and infrastructures.

This is compatible with the sovereignty of the republics in several domains, which, in the USSR as in Yugoslavia, will be at the heart of the negotiations and conflicts to come. In international policy, the republics want to have their own representatives in world bodies alongside the Union (as is formally the case with the Ukraine, and as is envisaged with Yugoslavia).

Effects of 500 day reform

As for the armed forces, each republic wants to be able to protect itself and the right of its conscripts to serve where they wish. Finally, there is the question of the economy - what degree of independence each republic has, and what monetary space it operates in.

The defeat of the coup accelerates the change and break up of the USSR on three levels - the Union, the Party/State and the economy. It was essential to fight alongside Yeltsin against the coup immediately. But it is also necessary to point out what the effects of the 500 day reform that he supports would be.

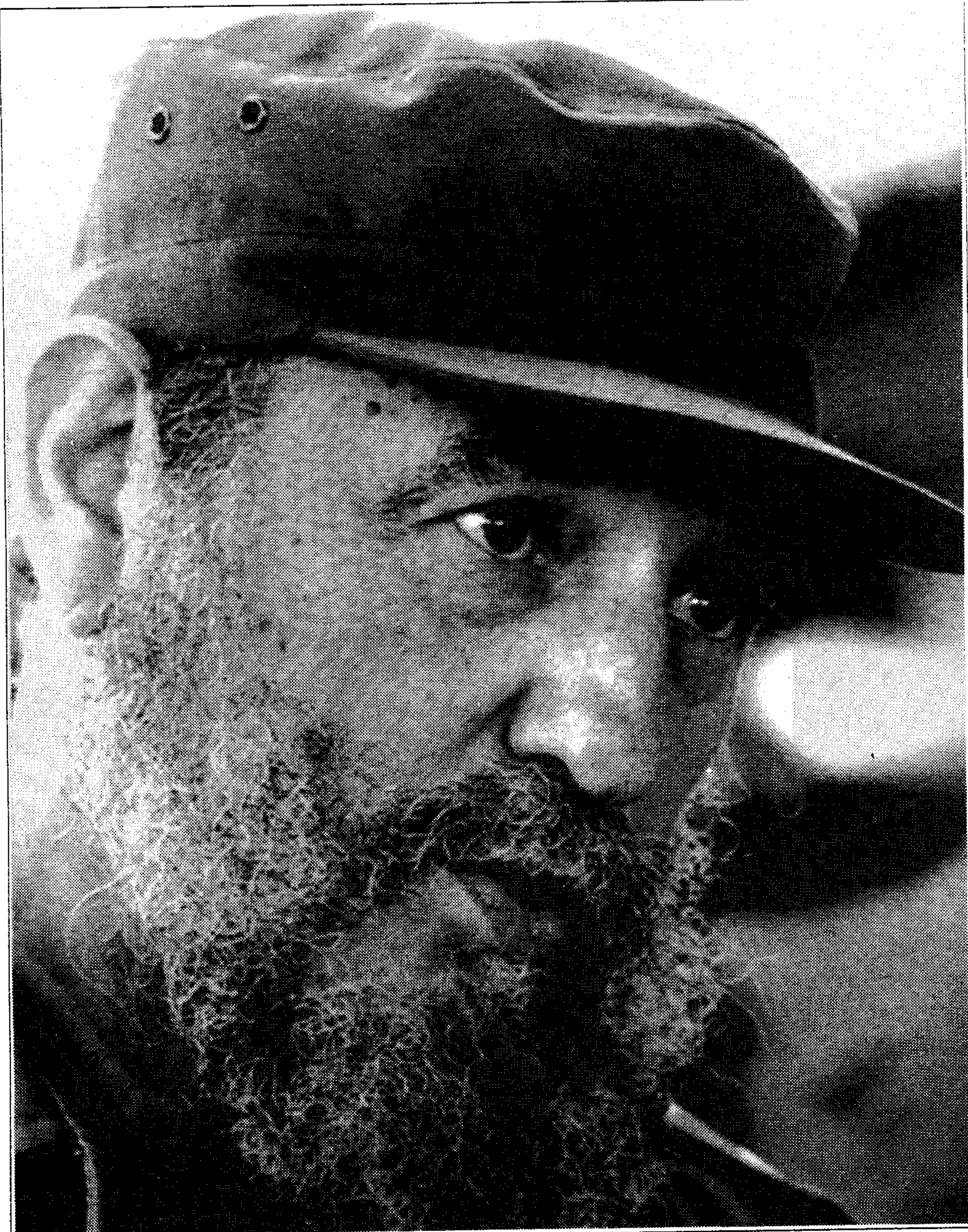
The development of political pluralism and freedom of speech are the only guarantees of democracy. They are the real defence against future coups, wherever they come from.

Such self-organisation and such liberties should be respected in the workplace and the localities. This is why we are against the decree forbidding the workplace cells of the CP, but for the generalisation of the right of organisation and political debate.

We are for the nationalisation of the property of the CP and the official trade unions. But we are for their redistribution under the democratic control of the different political organisations, including the CP.

In the same way, we do not accept the banning of the CP, because we reject the confusion between the necessary struggle against the Party/state and its monopoly, and the forbidding of the expression of ideas or limits on the right of organisation of those who still adhere to Communism.

It is no accident that Yeltsin is seen by the socialist and pro-self-management left in the Soviet Union as a potential danger.



Isolated and vulnerable: common ground between Gorbachev and Yeltsin is a pledge to cut aid to Castro's Cuba

Trotskyists visit Cuba...

Cuban leader Fidel Castro has pledged to continue the fight for socialism. But the revolution is now under threat, given the situation in the Soviet Union.

ALAIN KRIVINE AND JEANNETTE HABEL, leaders of the French Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, visited Cuba in July. The following interview, translated from 'Rouge', the LCR's newspaper, records their impressions. The translation is by Patrick Baker.

Q: How did you come to visit Cuba?

AK: We were invited by the Communist Party after discussions with Cuban comrades in Paris. A trotskyist delegation officially received in Cuba is quite a first - it shows how things have changed.

We visited factories, building sites, universities, barracks and held political discussions at all levels. These covered many subjects very frankly: economic reforms, relations with the USSR, stalinism, democracy and pluralism. We explained our analysis of stalinism and the politics of the Fourth International.

At the end of the visit, we met Carlos Aldana, secretary to the Central Committee. Outside of the official meetings, we were able to meet people from other milieux, giving us a broader picture of the problems of the revolution.

Q: Alain, this was your first visit to Cuba. What were your impressions?

AK: I knew a number of third world countries and some in eastern Europe. Other than a few points, no comparison is possible - there were no beggars, no shanty-towns, no unemployed.

A second striking thing is the economic crisis, particularly relating to food, which seems to have hit the population very rapidly. You have to queue for more than an hour for buses - old Hungarian buses which are about to give up the ghost, which you can't get spares for. You have to queue to get rationed products, without any certainty that the rice or the meat have actually arrived.

Apart from that, there are hardly any shops or newspapers left in Havana, which is serious. Faced with this sudden poverty, the egalitarian traditions of the revolution remain nonetheless. As for the leaders, the situation is more contradictory.

To take one example, it was reassuring to sit down to dinner with a vice-minister at his house and hear him say, terribly put out 'You know, with my ration book, I only have the strict minimum and can't invite people round.' But a few hundred metres away, a senior official was sleeping above his garage containing six cars.

Q: Alain speaks of a lack of food. What effects does this have?

JH: When you get to Havana, it's true that you are surprised by the length of the queues. They are longer and more numerous than before. Difficulties with supplies are made worse by transport problems, so daily life has become very hard.

Food has been rationed for a long time, and Cubans have bought basic goods in state shops. This system was

complemented previously by parallel state markets which supplied goods unavailable elsewhere and, up to 1986, by free peasant markets. These were relatively expensive, but provided a wider variety of foodstuffs, particularly fruit and vegetables.

Nowadays neither exists. The latter were shut down by the Communist Party because they made it easier for private peasants to enrich themselves. And the middlemen who transported the goods from the cities found it easy to use state transport for their own ends. This was made worse by the lack of social control.

So there has been an increase in inequality and corruption, as well as the enrichment of some small farmers. There were protests, and finally, free markets were banned by Fidel Castro. This is strongly questioned nowadays, because while the speculators have been abolished, the free markets have been replaced by black markets. Now everything is rationed - only four eggs per week, meat is only available irregularly, and the bread ration has just been set at 80 grams a day.

Q: What are the real causes of this terrible situation?

JH: I will outline five. First, you can't understand what's happening without taking into account the food blockade, implemented by the US for the last 30 years. It even includes medicines and could be extended soon, given that Bush has been considering an amendment penalising American companies that trade with Cuba via a third country.

Second, the consequences of events in eastern Europe. The USSR is only respecting one point of the 1990 agreement - oil. So a whole series of foodstuffs like powdered milk and wheat no longer come. All of this explains the considerable reduction in quantities available to the population.

Supplies of petrol have been reduced and become less regular. This makes daily life - which was already hard - worse through its effects on transport. The number of buses has been reduced, for example. This creates enormous difficulties for the people and also in transporting food from the countryside to the towns.

The third comes from previous errors in economic policy. One example - the Cuban leadership is trying to solve the food shortages through a plan which mobilises workers from every sector and volunteers from Havana. 70% of the population live in towns and cities, and they have to be fed in a situation which is much harder than before.

The plan aims to increase production of fruit and vegetables in the outskirts of the capital, but it's too early to judge how successful it's been. But everyone's saying the same thing: why has it taken 32 years for decisions to be taken making Cuba self-sufficient?

The answer lies in relations with east European countries and a political analysis of these regimes - which the Cuban leadership never really made. They relied on stable supplies in the very long term. Now, some people are demanding the re-establishment of free peasant markets.

The questioning of the self-enrichment of the 'Kulaks' by Fidel evidently

has some resonance. However, even if the state sector can't replace small private production, it is they who will have to solve the shortages.

The same is true of most small businesses - getting a lock mended, a pipe installed, or your shoe mended, can be a real nightmare. Experience proves - at least until there is new society - that state centralisation can't solve this kind of problem.

Fourth, tourism. In the short term, it is a very important source of hard currency. But tourists need to eat - even to eat well. This leads to the diversion of produce to the tourist hard currency sector, which Cubans are barred from, which causes even more tension.

Finally, the Panamerican games - though this is a less important factor. The Cubans have been organising these for a long time, putting massive investments into infrastructure, building works, and so on. Fidel Castro said recently that in the current situation, Cuba would never have hosted the games, but now it is too late to pull out.

For a month or two, there will be a big influx of money - but also problems in feeding the tourists. It will certainly bring in hard currency, but the building works will be very costly.

Q: Is the imperialist threat as present as ever?

JH: Since Soviet-American relations improved, Washington has changed tactics and put more emphasis on economic and political pressure to destabilise the regime.

For the moment, military intervention is unlikely. The most reactionary layers of Cuban emigrants in Miami - who participated in attempts at overthrowing the regime over the last 30 years - have failed.

The threats of military intervention have in fact had the opposite effect from that intended - popular mobilisation has been strengthened. This explains the current tactics, which involve trying to aggravate internal tensions, to weaken the popular base of the regime.

They have tried to create a bridgehead in Cuba, a base of support for supposedly 'democratic' elections with the blessing - and of course financial aid - of the USA. The idea is that if this created conflict, that would provide an excuse for intervention.

So it really is a dangerous situation - in the aftermath of the Gulf war, the US government is convinced that it can destroy the Cuban revolution by snapping its fingers. This is why withdrawing aid to Cuba has been put forward as an essential precondition of US aid to the Soviet Union. Cuban leaders are asking themselves how much they were sold for...

Q: Given the situation, you must have discussed the problems connected with the fall of stalinism, democracy and pluralism with the Cuban leaders...

AK: The events in eastern Europe have really shocked people in Cuba. 'We depended on trade with these countries for 85% of our supplies. Then the Berlin Wall fell and we went with it.', a revolutionary commander told us. Some leaders, who never accepted stalinism, are developing an analysis similar to ours.

But most people we met believed in 'Russian socialism' anyway, even if they'd never liked it much.

In particular, they say that they don't receive foreign aid any more. However, all of the leaders we met regretted 'having tried to copy the USSR'; some say so voluntarily, others only when pushed. So the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia is no longer defended by anyone.

The feeling of having been betrayed by the 'socialist camp' is being reinforced. The official argument consists of hiding behind the 'rectification' campaign, started in 1986, as a struggle against bureaucracy.

Part Two of this interview will appear in Socialist Outlook No 8



Standing room only in this bed, fellas!

And the little one said...

In Bed With Madonna

Reviewed by Gill Lee

If the sight of a grown adult fellating a wine bottle or sticking her hand in her crotch while fully clothed excites or shocks you then you'll enjoy this film more than I did. The main shock of 'In Bed with Madonna' is how tame it is.

As a role model women can do worse. Madonna is sexually assertive, controls her own business empire, likes women and is anti-homophobic. She also stands up to the Moral Right, refusing to self-censor her show in Canada and Italy.

But, as the movie shows, she has achieved her power to project this image by leaving behind her aging father, alcoholic brother, first 'finger-fucking' woman friend and recreating herself as Madonna the star.

The role model of Madonna is one of individual escape from oppression. Madonna has made it, why can't we all?

The 'real life' of the story behind the *Blond Ambition* tour is filmed in grainy black and white, while colour and light are reserved for the pulsating concert scenes. Unlike a real documentary, 'real life' here is being acted out for the camera. As Warren Beatty says 'She doesn't want to live off camera. What's there to say if it's not

said in front of the camera?'

Madonna has reshaped her past to make it 'shocking' while denying those from her past who have not similarly reshaped their lives, dignity and earning power. Her overawed childhood friend asks Madonna to be her child's godmother and is told 'I'll get back to you' - which Madonna never does.

Her father comes on stage to hear 'Happy Birthday' sung by 20,000 fans while in 'real life' Madonna didn't get time to shop for a present for him.

Madonna's attitude to her entourage of dancers is one of control and patronage. 'All my dancers are emotionally crippled in some way or another. That's part of why I chose them. I like to mother them', she says. Five out of six are gay, the majority are black. Only one of the dancers, the heterosexual, is developed as a 'character' in the film, with Madonna defending him from the bitchy queens who make up the rest of the group.

When the young woman make-up artist reports she has been drugged and raped, Madonna laughs. Before each concert Madonna holds a short prayer meeting for the singers and dancers to pray for a 'good voice' - and to berate them for in-fighting.

Madonna on stage is energetic, exciting and gets on top. Off-stage she seems too busy creating herself as a star to do any living.

The left and G.B.H: defending or betraying Trotsky?

In SO No.3 Julia Stevens reviewed *G.B.H.* This brought criticism from some who saw it as one-sided and premature. Here STEVE TAYLOR looks for historical parallels to analyse how the left has responded to questions of culture.

The most depressing aspect of the criticism levelled at *G.B.H.* was not the uniform hostility with which it was greeted by all sections of the left. It was the political assumptions and perspectives which lay at the heart of this criticism. That the left should have universally condemned a seven-part drama on the basis of one screened episode, two at most, is an act of supreme and thoughtless arrogance.

The fact that the conclusions drawn were so definitive, adds

more than vulgar insult to injury. It transforms a general clumsiness and idiocy into something that approaches totalitarianism. The summary trial and conviction of Bleasdale for *G.B.H.* had all the insight, subtlety and self-awareness of a Stalinist show trial. Indeed, the actual language used by the left critics and commentators was entirely consistent with the language employed by the Stalinists in the debates and discussions which followed the October Revolution.

At that time, the Stalinists, proto and embryonic, demanded that all forms of art should conform to strict criteria. The conventions of this orthodoxy began as a series of open discussions, where one set of artistic rules vied for prominence over another. What made these debates intrinsically reactionary was not the profound disagreements which emerged. Instead, it was the insistence, especially amongst the theorists associated with Proletkult, that valid art could only

flow from a singular doctrine or school of thought.

This insistence led inexorably towards the stagnant impasse of a state-supervised culture under Stalin in the 1930s. Imposing a totalitarian regime actually became easier because a dogmatic, ahistorical and inflexible approach to art and culture was already implicit in the terms of reference adopted by so many of the protagonists.

It is worth mentioning that the sides taken in these arguments over culture should reflect, almost to perfection, the later dichotomy between those who supported socialism in one country and the internationalists.

Indeed, the most ardent opponent, from within the Central Committee, of an ideologically dictated or determined art was Trotsky. It is ironic that so many English Trotskyists should be among the most vociferous in the condemnation of *G.B.H.*

In addition, the left argued not merely from a partial view- ing of the drama, but also from

a partial - in both senses of the word - understanding of art. The concentration by left critics on the surface content of the work ignored the complexities of form and style. Not only in the collision of one type of drama against another, but also in the way in which perspectives were constantly shifted or undermined.

To have arrived at a definitive interpretation of the play, especially in the light of what might eventually transpire, ignores both the dynamic of the plot - things develop or change as a plot unfolds - and the fundamental ambiguity which distinguishes art from propaganda.

And if art is not ambiguous, and therefore open to variety of interpretations, then why are bourgeois dealers and their clients willing to pay many thousands of dollars for street posters which celebrate the Russian Revolution? It is unlikely that these posters have the same meaning for collectors and commodity brokers as they

did for the Soviet people in 1917.

Art is not a formal commodity in which ideology (or value for that matter) is fixed by simple virtue of weight, or materials or size. There is not a simple, linear, declamatory and purely mechanistic relationship between art and the rest of society. Art is a highly mediated form of production and consumption.

The interpretation of a piece of work is neither rigid nor scientifically verifiable, and neither is it a football match where the opposing sides can be identified by the colour of their shirts. If we demand such conformity from art then we are doing nothing more than demanding the confirmation of our own prejudices.

It would be the beginnings of a Marxist approach if the left in this country at least bothered to view something in its totality before we open our collective mouth, or perhaps we should only study Trotsky up until 1905?

Return of the reprogrammed revolutionary

Terminator 2

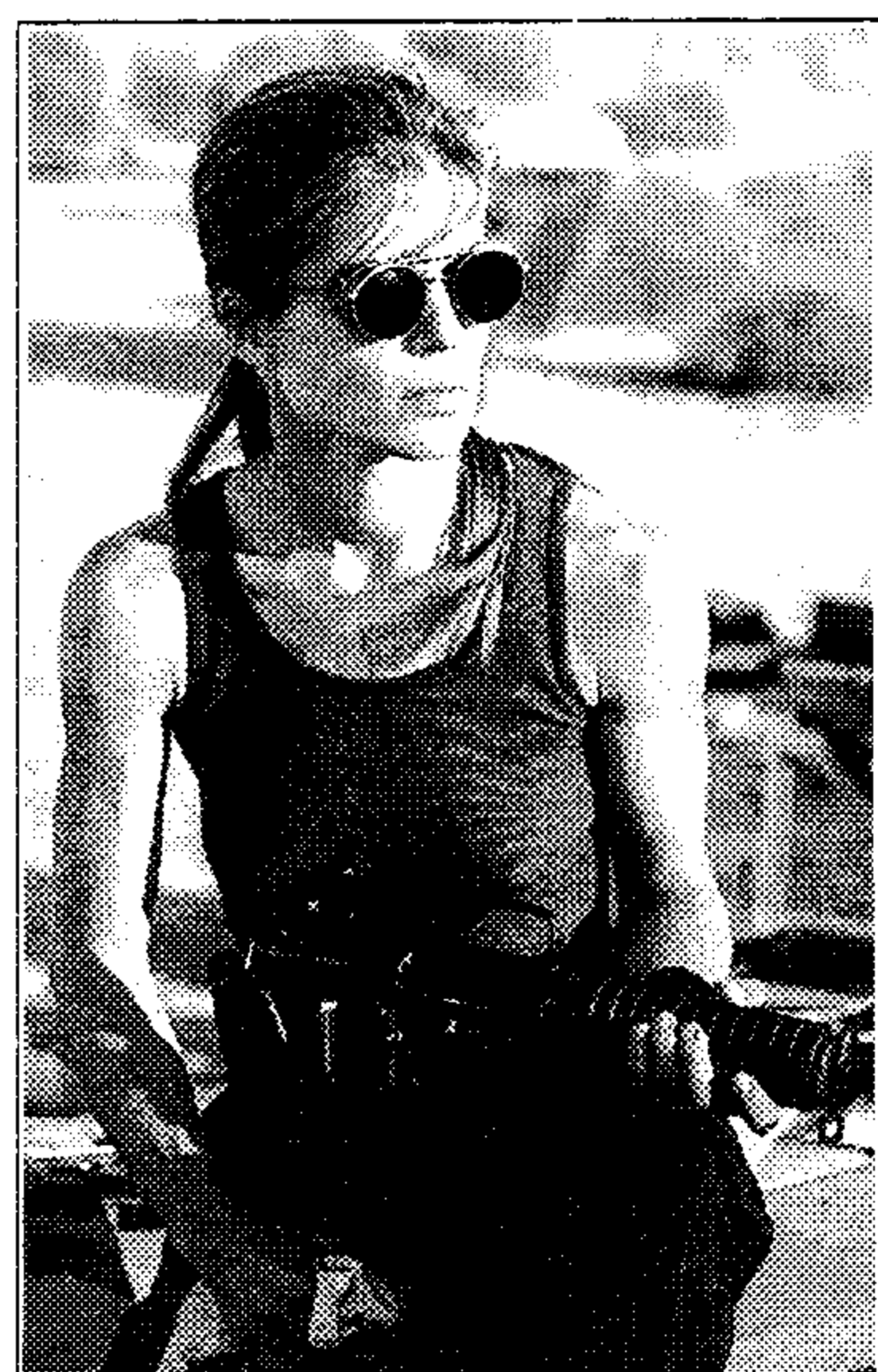
starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton

Reviewed by Jodley Paton

TERMINATOR 2 is the most expensive film ever made, and has been a box office blockbuster. Its star, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is fondly called 'Conan the Republican' by George Bush. With its emphasis on weapons and violence, Terminator 2 seems an unlikely candidate for subversive interpretation.

But if you travel back in time to the first Terminator movie you can see its sequel's radical roots. In it, revolutionaries inhabit a futuristic, post-nuclear war landscape. Led by John Connor, their aim is to overthrow the tyranny of robots. The robots send a cyborg back to the present to kill John Connor's future mother.

Some saw the film as pro-revolutionary, an analogy for 'the people against the corporate machine'. For whatever



Linda Hamilton as the pistol-packing momma

reason, the film was a success and eventually there had to be a sequel.

Jump forward in time to 1991. Arnold Schwarzenegger again plays the cyborg, this time reprogrammed to protect the young John Connor. His enemy is an advanced liquid metal robot that can assume many shapes (and do many special effects!). Like Terminator 1, there are many refer-

ences to the future nuclear war. But unlike the previous film this has become merely a dramatic device with little radical content.

In contrast to the mid eighties, people think the nuclear age is over, and that worry about it is irrational. In this context emotive and horrific scenes of nuclear fires becomes strangely nostalgic. With renewed confidence that this is pure fantasy, the audience is allowed to forget that they ever felt nuclear war was possible.

Established institutions come in for a bit of a pasting and it's good to see Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) fighting a few more of the battles. Arnie and Linda take on an oppressive psychiatric institution, rampant technology and the cops - and win!

The film cleverly taps in to genuine fears of technology and the power of massive industries, but this doesn't make the film subversive. There is no explanation for the invention of the cyborgs in the first place, no mention of capitalism, which uses technology to benefit one class over another. Technology itself is seen as the enemy and so the film has an ultimately



Arnie does his version of 'Roll out the barrel'

backward message.

Victory of the revolution depends on the salvation of one person in both Terminator movies. This is where any Marxist Arnie fan has to admit the film's failings. The film lacks any concept of solidarity, let

alone class. The course of history can be changed by killing the inventor of the cyborg.

Despite these problems with what, after all, is a Hollywood movie, Terminator 2 is well worth seeing. When Arnie says 'I'll be back' he means it!

Feedback

We welcome letters on any subject but please keep them brief. Letters over 350 words will be cut. Send your letters to: *Socialist Outlook* PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU

Not so much simple as superficial

Sean Tunney's article on postmodernism (SO6) was superficial and muddled. Tunney's need 'for simplicity' (why should cultural analysis need this anyway?) allows him to analyse the contents of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* and pass this off as the orthodoxy on postmodernism, despite his admission that there is 'no agreed orthodoxy on postmodernism'.

But he quickly goes on to say there is a certain unity to thinkers he dubs 'postmodernists' - namely that they think that 'history has no meaning or subject'. But it is not quibbling about labels to say that Tunney here is simply confused - substituting postmodernism for post-structuralism.

The intellectual reaction to structuralism - evidenced by the thought of Baudrillard, Foucault and Lyotard - should not be confused with what is truly germane to postmodernism; namely that there was a

fundamental mutation in capitalism after World War 2. The Marxism Today version of this mutation which Tunney criticises is not the strongest or most relevant version.

This belongs to Frederic Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. This seeks to elaborate at the level of culture the central tenets of Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*. It is strange that a review in *Socialist Outlook* should overlook this.

There are further problems with Tunney's assertion that postmodernism is 'modernism gone rotten'. The assumption here is that the 'modernist' theories and artistic styles which predominated through much of this century represented 'confidence on the part of the bourgeoisie and the working class. Really? Durkheim and the concept of anomie? Weber and bureaucratisation? Can anyone really describe TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* as confident in tone? There are many other similar examples.

In truth Tunney has simply moved an old set of goalposts. Georg Lukacs condemned the work of Joyce and Eliot as pessimistic and contrasted this with the earlier generation of healthy realistic bourgeois art. Undoubtedly much cultural work at the present time may be linked to irrationalism, although Tunney's view that this starts with Nietzsche perhaps overstates the influence of philosophy, rather than the rise of irrationalism as a defence of class divided societies.

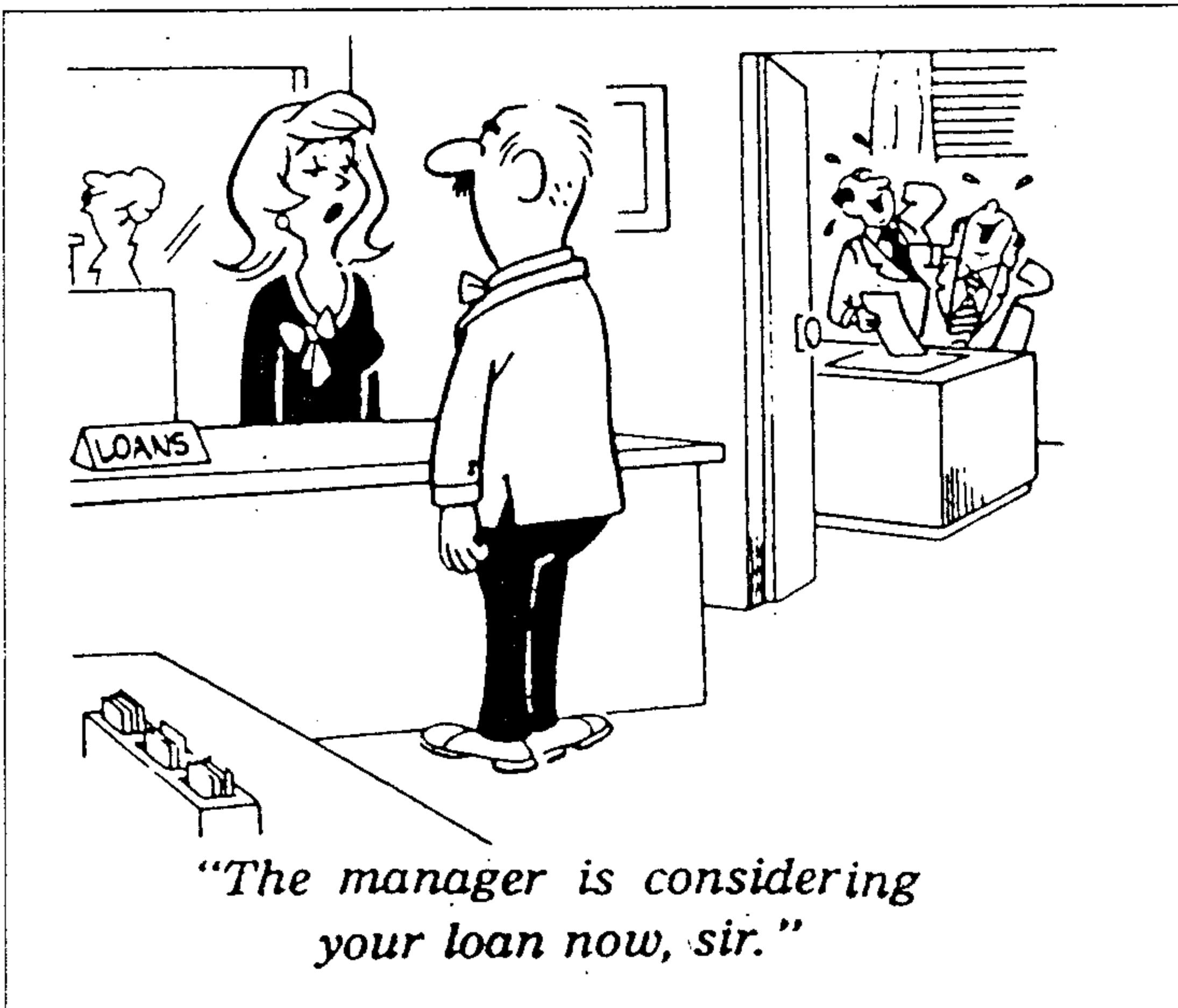
Such an admission should not however be confused with the quite separate issue of which phase of capitalism (if indeed capitalism has distinct phases, which is the essence of the debate about postmodernism) is being justified by the said irrationalism.

Tunney concludes stirring-ly: 'The claims of postmodernism will collapse when a new period of advance for the working class develops in the major capitalist countries'. As a mode of argument in cultural analysis this is suspect per se. Substitute relativity theory, or Trotskyism or Catholicism or anything you like for postmodernism, and see if you don't begin to have doubts yourself.

Then suppose Tunney is correct. This line of argument becomes the dominant tone of the *Socialist Outlook* approach to cultural analysis. In that case, why not simply extend the industrial struggles section for another couple of pages?

Terry Murphy
Oxford

Editor's note: Owing to a typesetting error the article criticised by Terry Murphy was incorrectly attributed to Sean Tunney. In fact it was written by Paul Clarke. Clarke will reply to this letter, and to the article by Steve Taylor on the opposite page, in our next issue. Terry Murphy is being invited to make a longer contribution on this debate in a forthcoming issue.



"The manager is considering your loan now, sir."

Rake off, not rip off?

Your article in issue 5 on the collapse of BCCI miseducates. Under the headline 'Banks means fraud' you argue that 'finance capital, by definition, is based on usury and fraud', and 'fraud is at the heart of the capitalist system'. Not so.

Banking is another means of circulating profit made in one sphere to investment in another; it enables the mobility which is a fundamental feature of capital. The profit made by banking capital is normal capitalist profit: capital is necessary to run a bank, and banks are entitled to an average rate of return on this capital. Competition in banking moderates this return. There is nothing fraudulent about all this.

Nor is capitalist banking 'usurious', if that means arbitrary or monopolistic profit. The interest rates of the 1980s, which you cite, were indeed high by historical standards; but this was due to strong demand from firms, consumers, and states - the market in money capital. Moreover, interest is always limited by productive profit, from which it is a cut. In the 1980s this was perhaps 3-6% per annum out of 15-25% productive profit.

High interest rates are anyway not

the same thing as high bank profit, which is a marginal difference in interest rates. It is therefore wrong to describe either interest rates or bank profits as 'usurious'.

BCCI was involved in fraud, both in conniving in the illegal activities of its customers and in ripping off its depositors. But this fraud is against capitalist rules of capitalist states. States regulate banking in order to stop capitalists ripping off each other, and in order to head-off disruptive collapses, that is, in the interests of capital as a whole.

Certainly the nature of capital valuation as 'fictitious capital' gives opportunities for fraud. And certainly, competition for deposits has loosened state regulation, which is why the Bank of England ignored BCCI for so long. But the rip offs and instability this allows are a problem for capital. You ignore all these contradictions.

Populists have always portrayed profit, especially bank profit, as deriving from trickery. One of Marx's main arguments in *Capital* is to show that this is not so. Our paper should present popular marxism, not populist rhetoric.

Jamie Gough
London WC1

Falling out over the united front

NO TACTIC has been so controversial among Marxists as the united front.

Some who claim to be Marxists (like the RCP today) write off the existing labour movement, and insist the only way forward is to make propaganda, sell newspapers and journals, and recruit to Marxist organisations. But for Socialist Outlook supporters, the united front is a central guide to socialist activity.

The united front was developed by Lenin and Trotsky in response to the situation in Europe after the Russian revolution. The revolutionary wave which followed the First World War rapidly receded.

The new mass communist parties, like those which emerged in France, Germany and Italy from the splits in the existing social democratic parties, could not conquer power immediately.

Tactics

In this situation the leadership of the new Communist International, founded on the initiative of the Bolsheviks in 1919, argued that communist tactics had to be posed in a new way.

Where mass social democratic parties existed, where the labour movement was dominated by reformism, the first task of communists was to win mass influence. Outside of a revolutionary period, this meant engaging in the day-to-day struggles of the working class, which generally had partial economic and reformist demands.

The Communist International reasoned that only a small vanguard could be won to communism through propaganda - the masses would only begin break from reformism through their own experience of the betrayals of reformist leaders.

This meant that communists had to fight alongside reformist workers in every partial and limited struggle, while explaining that the final victory of working class demands could only come through the destruction of capitalism - socialist revolution. As Trotsky put it, the task of communists was to 'share the struggle, but not the illusions' of reformist workers.

Underlying the tactic of the united front was the understanding that to win leadership

By Paul Lawson

communists had to *recompose and renovate the existing labour movement*; and that meant competing and contesting with the reformist leaders over the allegiance of the working class.

This in turn implied encouraging and supporting every move to the left, rather than passively denouncing it as impure and 'inadequate'.

Trotsky in particular fought to urge the small Marxist organisations of the 1930s, when the Communist International had been conquered by Stalinism, to turn towards every manifestation of opposition to the right wing leaders in the unions and mass working class parties.

Militant

The communist leaders who elaborated the united front approach did not regard it as a trick or manoeuvre to win over the base of the social democrats.

Rather it served a *dual purpose*, on the one hand responding to the need for the maximum unity of the working class in struggle, and at the same time creating the preconditions for winning over the most militant and determined reformist workers.

To carry through the united front the method of making demands on the reformist leaders was developed. Trotsky described this process as 'dragging the reformists from their asylums'.

It meant instead of just criticising the social democratic leaders, proposing concrete campaigns and demands to them, to test out their willingness to fight in practice.

The Communist International under Stalin broke with the united front most spectacularly



Hitler rode to power in 1933 by exploiting divisions in the powerful German workers' movement

during the 'third period' (1928-34). It was declared that social democracy had gone over to fascism and was now 'social fascist' - the main enemy of the workers.

The third period 'storm in the streets' policy was most drastically applied in Germany. As the Nazis got stronger the Communist Party concentrated its fire against the social democrats. Often Nazis and communists collaborated in smashing up social democratic meetings.

Stalin

This had a two effects. The leadership of the social democratic SPD isolated the communists by blaming them for working class disunity. This of course was hypocritical because the SPD leaders didn't want unity either; but the communists gave them a perfect get-out.

At the same time, the fight against the Nazis was severely damaged. Only in a few localities did communists and social democrats defy their leaders and fight shoulder-to-shoulder against the Nazis.

The debacle in Germany, when Hitler came to power in 1933, led to a huge lurch by Stalin - not towards the united front but the *popular front*. This meant Communist parties building government and election alliances not just with social democrats but bourgeois parties as well.

The united front policy of the Communist International in its revolutionary period meant not just attempting to build unity of the whole labour movement where possible, but actively building alliances between the

communist and non-communist left against the right wing workers leaderships.

This was most successfully applied in Britain during the mid-1920s when the Communist Party built the Minority Movement in the unions and the National Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party.

Both won support from hundreds of thousands of workers, but were closed down by the CP as it followed Stalin's orders and turned towards 'third period' ultra-leftism.

United Left

In today's conditions the united front has to be posed in a new way. Mass revolutionary parties no longer exist; direct proposals from small revolutionary groups to reformist leaders lack credibility.

Moreover, social democracy itself has changed. In the 1920s and '30s reformist leaders claimed to be fighting for socialism, albeit by piecemeal and gradual methods.

For social democratic leaders like Kinnock, Mitterrand and Gonzalez, this is hardly true; socialism is barely mentioned by these people. While socialists can demand that these reformist leaders should break with pro-capitalist policies, this kind of demand serves a purely propaganda function. It is not a serious proposal for immediate joint action.

Today the primary axis of the united front is towards creating the maximum unity in workers struggles, the struggles of the oppressed and political campaigns.

It is here that the dispute about the united front is most acute among the far left. Be-

cause of their formal adherence to many of Trotsky's ideas, political currents like the SWP and Militant tendency pay lip-service to the united front.

Propagandism

But in practice their activity is often guided not by the strategic guide of fighting to advance the objective interests of the working class and oppressed, nor of maximising the impact of left opposition to right wing leaders, but of simply the needs of selling more papers and recruiting more members.

Sectarian abstentionism and propagandism is generally the result. A genuine united front policy today must stress the need to build the maximum unity in support of struggles, and the maximum unity of the left, in support of class struggle policies, within the labour movement.

Far too often in recent years we have seen the Militant and SWP determined to take over united campaigning bodies and utilise them as 'front' organisations.

Militant's ham-fisted insistence on organisational dominance in the Anti-Poll Tax Federation and the SWP's November 1990 coup to take over the NALGO Broad Left are typical examples.

Such antics are effectively a policy of division, of putting the interests of particular left organisations against the interests of the working class and united militant action by the left.

They have nothing in common with Lenin and Trotsky's conception of the united front.

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Summer School success

NEARLY one hundred people attended the week-long Socialist Outlook residential summer school, held in North Wales in August. Held almost immediately after the defeat of the attempted Stalinist coup in the USSR, analysis and debate about the character of the coup and the future of Stalinism was a central feature of the school.

In fact, the main theme of the event, the history of the Trotskyist movement since World War 2, neatly dovetailed with the discussion on the USSR. It provided an opportunity for the many younger comrades present - and some not so young! - to familiarise themselves with how the issue of Stalinism had been dealt with in the movement in previous years.

Plenaries and workshops dealt with issues such as the post-war defeat of capitalism in eastern Europe, the Chinese revolution and the nature of the Vietnamese Communist Party. In addition there were workshops on such diverse topics as women's liberation, ecology, sexuality and the work of Marxists in the trade union movement. Each evening a session of basic Marxism was well-attended.

Three things particularly contributed to the success of the school; first the incredibly efficient organisation by Socialist Outlook's education commission, and second their determination that the school should mark a break with the primitive educational techniques (long lecture followed by discussion) characteristic of so much of the Marxist left.

Discussion at the school was also aided considerably by the presence of a delegation from the Irish Marxist organisation People's Democracy, who made several presentations and ran some of the workshops.

The success of the school means that Socialist Outlook is determined to make it an annual event. We hope to advertise the date and venue of the 1992 school in the near future.



Protestors in Telford demonstrating against the police shooting of Ian Gordon, who was carrying an unloaded air pistol

CREDIT: John Harris

Nottingham fights back against fascists

by Gail Squires

While ministers from all over Europe meet behind closed doors to discuss immigration controls alongside drug trafficking and terrorism in preparation for 'Fortress Europe', fascist activity and racist attacks are increasing.

In Nottingham, where both the British National Party (BNP) and the National Front (NF) are present, local communities are organising to drive them out.

Incidents of racist violence have been reported in a number of inner city areas, particularly Forest Fields, which has a large black community. In April, the Madni Masjid mosque was attacked while worshippers were

inside. There have also been break-ins, theft and damage.

Young black people in the area have been subjected to racist abuse and assaulted. A young Asian man was stabbed by a gang of white youths. BNP attempts to leaflet the area shortly after were quickly halted.

A meeting called by local people from Forest Fields in response attracted over 200 people, who established the Forest Fields Anti-Racist Action Group (FFARAG). The group unites the Mosque Defence Committee, black community groups, local residents associations and socialists. A demonstration organised by the group attracted over 500 people.

The response from local police to the racist attacks has been a predictable lack of interest - if not worse. Some black shopkeepers who had property damaged were arrested after complaining. Meanwhile, the Chief Constable has refused to meet Muslim leaders - but has now conceded a meeting 'some time before Christmas'!

The Mosque Defence Committee have called for the suspension of the Chief Constable in response. While individual councillors have been supportive, the Labour City and County Councils have yet to take any action. Now moves are afoot to organise a city-wide anti-racist group.

BBC - the gathering storm

by Dominic Mallard

Industrial relations at the BBC are now at a stage where you could build a dinosaur skeleton from the bones that the unions have to pick with management.

Nationally, management are trying to impose the 'Pay in the 1990s' package. Roger Bolton of the main BBC

union BECTU, said this offers 'a 5% increase, but require the almost complete control of our lives'. 'Pay in the 1990s' would mean that any employee could be made to work on a day off, or endure a shift change at very short notice. Many workers are mothers with young children, and they feel particularly angry. Members of BECTU and the

journalists' union NUJ are being balloted on the unions' response.

Both are calling for rejection of the proposals. If NUJ members vote 'no', a further ballot will be held on 'selective industrial action'. BECTU members are being urged to vote 'yes' to four proposals - to reject 'Pay in the 1990s', to take limited industrial action, action including strikes, and to support victimised colleagues.

At the BBC at Caversham, the picture is stormier. Management gave an employee one month's 'resettlement' - a month's notice - because she had serious Repetitive Strain Injury. The victimised employee has been temporarily transferred, but feelings are still running high.

Though BBC monitoring staff were praised by management during the Gulf war, when links with the US and British governments were particularly evident, it is now clear that staff are expendable. Industrial action - general or localised - seems inevitable in the next few months.

TUC climbdown on Trades Councils

TUC leaders have been forced into a dramatic climbdown over Trades Councils. After abolishing the Trades Councils' annual conference and their coordinating body last October,

the TUC General Council have been forced to back down.

The about-face was the result of a sustained campaign by the Trades Councils to win back their national support, including an unofficial national con-

ference in May. By July the TUC leaders had sent out a circular rescinding their withdrawal of support.

The mood of Congress delegates was overwhelmingly in support of the Trades Councils' campaign. Willie O'Brien of the train drivers' union ASLEF said 'We are telling Congress House: Hands off Trades Councils. We are pleased to see the moves to reverse the dictatorial and anti-democratic decision on Trades Councils and related issues. Now we want that diktat chucked away'.

Consultation

The only opposition to the motion came from the right wing president of the engineers union AEU, Bill Jordan. Now that the coordinating body and the annual conference have been reinstated, there will now be a one year consultation process on the future role of trades councils.

Diary

September 18 -
Rally for Socialism

- Manchester Town Hall, 7.30pm. Organised by Labour Party Socialists. Speakers include: Tony Benn MP, Dennis Skinner MP, Terry Fields MP.

September 21
National Conference Against the Witch Hunt

- Banqueting suite, Manchester Town Hall, 1-5pm. Speakers include: Terry Fields MP, Speaker from Campaign Group of MPs. Contact: 10b Windsor Road, London N7. Tel: 071 263 8289.

Lobby the Labour National Executive against the witch hunt

- 150 Walworth Road, London SE17, 9am. Contact: as above.

October 5
Demonstration 'Justice for the Tottenham Three!'

- Assemble 12am Civic Centre, Wood Green, London N22. Rally at Finsbury Park 2pm.

October 5
Conference on Domestic Violence

- Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1, 1-5pm. Organised by Women for Socialism. Speakers include: Southall Black Sisters, Free Sara Thornton Campaign. Contact: Kate Reynolds on 071 272 7030.

October 19
Demonstration 'Free all Poll Tax prisoners!'

- Assemble 1pm Caledonian Park, near Pentonville Jail. Nearest tube: Caledonian Road. Rally - Trafalgar Square 4pm

23 November
Conference 'Women in the Unions - Fighting for our rights!'

- Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1, 10am-5pm. Organised by Women for Socialism and Socialist Movement TU Committee.

30 November
Socialist Health Association/ Socialist Movement Conference

- Camden Town Hall. Contact: SHA, 195 Walworth Road, London SE17.

Fighting for a future
NALGO
demonstration
against Local
Government cuts

Saturday 28 September
Assemble: 12 noon, Victoria
Embankment
March to Geraldine Mary Harmsworth
Park for Rally

Advertisement
Workers Power
Memorial Meeting
Dave Hughes 1948-1991
Founder member of Workers
Power

Sunday 15th September 3pm
Large Lecture Theatre
Polytechnic of Central London
155 New Cavendish Street

Admission £1
Nearest tubes: Goodge St, Warren St, Oxford
Circus

Blackbird Leys Cops make a crisis, then a drama

By Harry Sloan

THOUGH sensationalised out of all proportion, the recent relatively small-scale clashes with police on Oxford's Blackbird Leys estate do have some common features with inner-city uprisings of the 1980s.

Blackbird Leys is not an inner-city area, but it is isolated and socially deprived, a pool of poverty and unemployment, with families overcrowded in housing from which they can't afford to escape.

Only a small minority of the 10,000 residents of Blackbird Leys are black, but the estate is regarded as a kind of ghetto by the police, who display their innate racism by terming it 'the jungle' in their radio messages.

Beaten in cells

A focal point in the escalation of the conflict came when police arrested a random vanload of black youth, and later beat them up in cells at the police station.

As in several inner-city rebellions, black and white youth joined forces to fight back against harassment, showing their hatred and contempt for the police and for a society that offers them no sense of purpose, hope or achievement.

Despite the threadbare list of council-funded 'amenities' on the estate, it offers no music or entertainment, and little but

boredom to most teenage youth, especially on hot summer evenings.

The joyriders produced a source of illicit excitement, and immediately became a focus of attention.

They are no politically enlightened vanguard: the young car thieves are among the best exponents of Thatcher's anti-social pronouncement that 'There is no such thing as society, just individuals and their families'.

Stunts

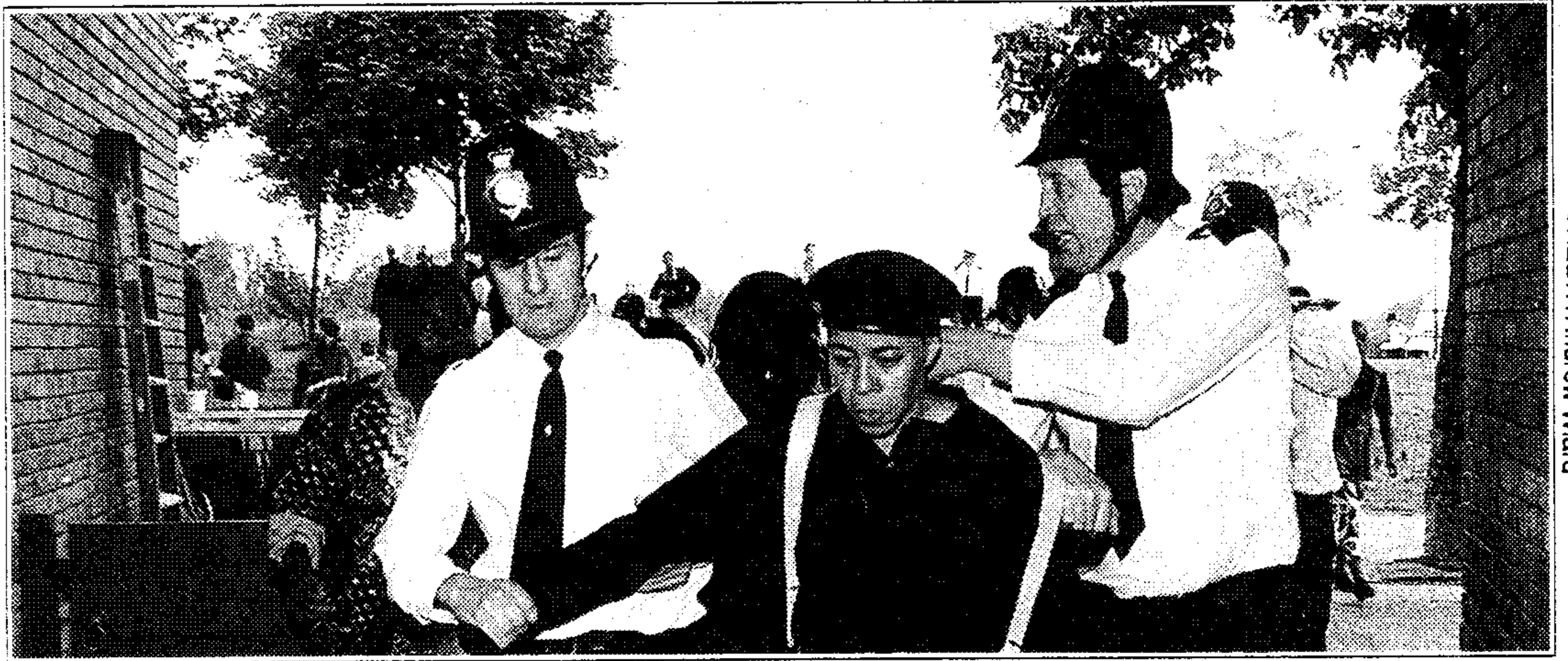
Having snatched a high-performance car, they thrash it in a series of reckless stunts in front of an audience, before frequently setting it ablaze. Their activities have left a trail of 'auto-crime' throughout Oxford, with at least 20 reported incidents each day.

For 18 months the police - unconcerned about a solidly working class estate - largely ignored these problems, making no effort to investigate car thefts and publicly declaring they would not pursue joyriders for fear of accidents.

The joyriders' displays became fully-fledged rallies, with two or more cars lined up to race, and hundreds turning out to watch. Often ordinary traffic could not get through the estate late at night - but still the police did nothing.

At the high point, Thatcherite entrepreneurial skills became

socialist OUTLOOK



A pattern of victimisation and racism: police picking on black youth in London's giant Thamesmead estate:

more evident, with burger vans selling food and drink, and joyriders charging admission to the best places to watch - £1 for locals, £2 for outsiders.

Eventually, under a barrage of complaints from residents over the noise and danger to life and limb, the police made a tentative effort to restrict the joyriders. The first police cars to do so were attacked with bricks and bottles, with the police driven off the estate.

They came back with reinforcements, and predictably their first victims were black youth, arrested and beaten up simply for being there.

As the crowds became bigger and angrier, with militant youth mingling with adults hostile to the police invasion, the police brought in riot gear. Again predictably their main fury was directed not against the joyriders but at the innocent onlookers.

Several people were arrested for the 'crime' of crossing the road for a Chinese takeaway.

Others were beaten with batons where they stood or sat or in their own doorways.

Sensationalised press coverage reached saturation point when a woman - who has herself since been charged for an alleged stabbing - came off worst in a stabbing incident outside her house, and her boyfriend attacked.

Within a few days the police had gone from inactivity to create a riot, grabbing front page silly season press coverage, and offering the Tories some extra 'law and order' propaganda. Since then, heavy-booted policing has continued to provoke anger and hostility on the estate.

Labour's leaders have joined hands with the Tories to demand that youth be arrested wholesale and jailed.

Withdrawal

In contrast to this, the left must demand the immediate withdrawal of the riot squads from Blackbird Leys: as always,

they have primarily victimised the innocent.

There should be a full public inquiry into the police beatings of black youth which helped trigger the confrontation.

The local community knows who many of the joyriders and their key organisers are: it must be the community itself that organises to deal with them: but this must be organised in a way that gives no scope to racist would-be 'vigilantes' to blame the problems on black families.

Roy Hattersley's ignorant outbursts confirm that today's Labour Party has no time or space for working class youth, whose elemental, anti-social revolt is the result of a frustration and an unchallenged diet of Thatcherite individualism.

The big issue facing the left of the workers' movement is to find ways in which the instinctive rebellion of these young people can be turned into more productive, concerted action against the system that degrades us all.

A response to the open letter published weekly in Socialist Worker

The worst time to split from Labour

THERE CAN be no doubt that many socialists have left the Labour Party in disgust at Kinnock's policies - probably the vast majority of the 25% of party members who have left in recent years.

But is the appeal for an 'inde-

pendent socialist alternative', recently launched by the Socialist Workers party (SWP), the 'only viable one' as they claim?

The disgust that the SWP expresses at Kinnock's slavish support for the Gulf war, and the implementation of the Poll Tax by

Labour councils, is undoubtedly shared by the left in the Labour Party.

The left is at a low ebb - a fact recently confirmed by the 2-1 defeat of call for repeal of all anti-union laws at the TUC. Many socialists have grown tired of seeing defeat, time and again.

But does this mean that now is the time to join with the SWP - and some others, no doubt - to try and outflank Labour from the left?

The idea of the SWP appealing to socialists to leave the Labour Party is not a new one - indeed, it is what they have been doing for many years. Their claim that Labour is a party that 'bases itself on elec-

toral alliances and respectability, not on the power of its main supporters - working class people' is nothing new.

But the question that the SWP do not adequately answer is 'Is this the way - and the right time - to launch such a party?'

The fact is that it is not just the left, but the labour movement as a whole, that is at a low ebb.

Strikes are at their lowest level for more than 30 years. And despite the shift to the right in the Labour party, it retains its organic links to the mass organisations of the workers - the trade unions.

The only way that a serious alternative to Labour can be built is through the mass struggles of the workers themselves. Surely a period of defeats of mass struggles such as we have seen in the miners strike, Wapping, the dockers' struggle is precisely the worst time to launch such a split.

In such a period, the left needs an alliance that can bring together socialists inside and outside the Labour Party - which can respond to struggles such as the anti-Poll Tax movement, and organise in the Labour Party and the unions.

Such an alliance exists - admittedly on a small scale - in the Socialist Movement, launched by Tony Benn MP at Chesterfield in 1987. With its different wings organising among women, socialist greens, trade unionists, and among Labour Party members, it can bring together the left in a way that no SWP open letter can.

Unfortunately, it takes more than an open letter or a by-election campaign to replace Labour with a fighting, socialist alternative. Unless they represent real, mass workers' struggles they will be doomed to remain a tiny minority, as with Lesley Mahmood's Liverpool campaign.

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