Issue number 111 November 1988

# workers power

British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

## INSIDE


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## ONLY WORKERS' ACTION CAN

# DEFEND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

**THE TORIES are striking blow after blow against democratic rights and freedoms: the right to belong to a trade union, the freedom of the TV and radio to interview Sinn Fein, the right of prisoners in custody to remain silent without this being taken as an admission of guilt. The Tories are systematically undermining the trade union and democratic liberties that working class people have used to defend their health service, jobs, wages and local government services.**

The Tories have never won a majority of the electorate to their project of destroying the welfare state and making the unbridled greed of the City sharks the law of the land. Their attacks on the social and economic gains of the working class lead to an attack on its political rights as well.

For if the majority protest they must be legally shackled. If they begin to disbelieve Thatcher then the press must be censored. If they strike their unions must be banned.

### *"Enemies within"*

Having bribed and threatened most workers at the government spy centre (GCHQ) into leaving the union, having seen the pathetic weakness of the TUC's response, they have now sacked the few remaining trade unionists. Clearly this is intended to ensure that the state security forces can bug, tape and spy on the government's "enemies within" without fear of exposure.

But it also opens up another attack. If unions can be banned in one "essential service" then they can either be banned or their strength destroyed by removing the right to strike in others.

Clearly the health service and fire service will be top of the list, for here are relatively strong unions that have embarrassed the government's plans for run-down and privatisation. Close behind will come the power supply, water and communications industries.

The reason for the latest attack on broadcast journalism is not hard to find. The Poll Tax, the savaging of the health service, local government and housing are beginning to hit millions. Working people are bitter, enraged and frustrated. This anger needs to be put into words and then into deeds.

That is why the Tories cannot afford to leave platforms from which their opponents can speak out to these millions. The popular support for the campaign to defend the health service earlier this year has shown the Tories the need to tighten their control.

This has taken the form of an attack on those sections of the media not directly under the control of Thatcherite millionaires. Thatcher has been waging war on the old-style wet Tories and liberals who run the BBC and ITV. The Home Secretary's diktat silencing Sinn Fein is the thin end of a very big wedge. Firstly it reveals that the government already has the powers to simply ban any material or type of material at will—a power given to it in the Broadcasting Act of 1983.

The government has been waging a war of attrition with the TV stations for several years. Thatcher has been placing her agents in the upper management of the BBC. They have banned programmes such as the one on the Zircon spy satellite on the grounds of national security. In turn this has fostered even greater self-censorship by timid programme makers and journalists.

So far, apart from impotent hand-wringing, Thatcher's assault on the "freedom of the media" has produced no serious fightback, no collective acts of defiance. The new Official Secrets Act, which will be even more repressive than the one it is supposed to be liberalising, could see courageous individual journalists sent to jail. But individual protests in the name of conscience will not stop Thatcher.

### *Lawful protest*

The Labour leaders say that our liberties can only be defended by sticking to the rules of parliamentary politics: "protest, but do not break the law". During the miners' strike the NUM was supposed to turn the other cheek as its militants were cudgelled, sent down, exiled to distant parts of the country and the union's funds were stolen.

While the Labour leaders play the parliamentary game the right to strike, to demonstrate, freedom of speech etc. are being narrowed down by judges' rulings and by Orders in Council.

Our ancestors won these rights by the strike, the mass demonstration, the uprising—not by the craven forelock-tugging of Kinnock and Hattersley.



Big sister waving goodbye to our rights

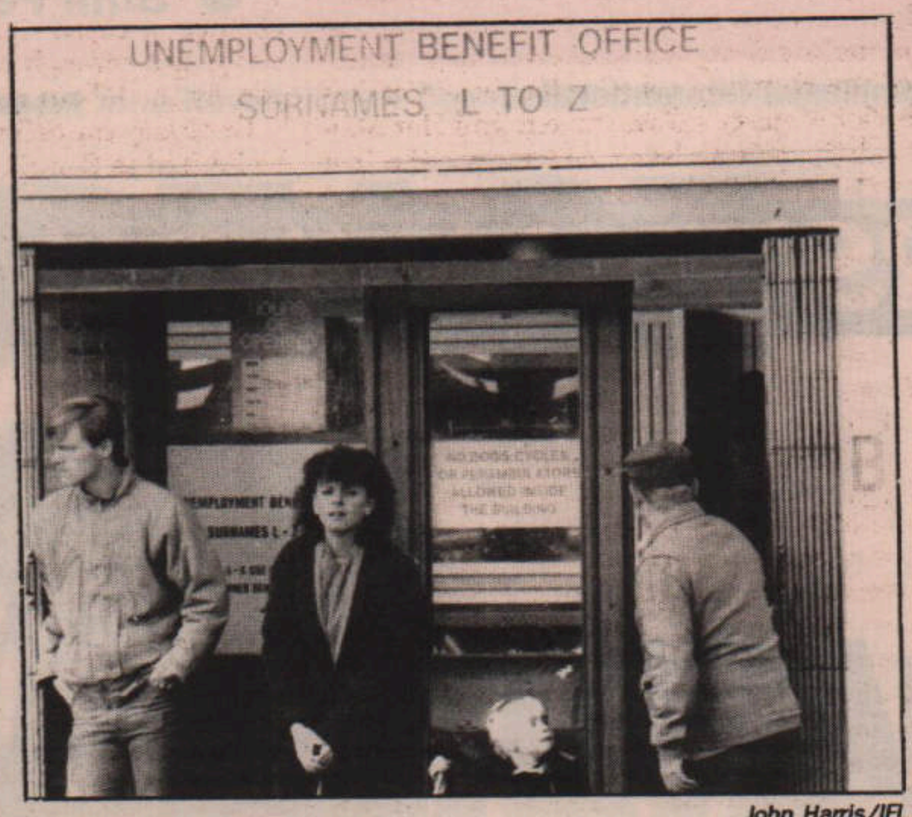
The working class must refuse to be cowed by the "legality" of the attacks. Workers in the media for example should take action to expose government censorship and their management's collusion.

Faced with any censorship they should pull the plugs and demonstrate to millions what is happening. The attack on trade union rights—now likely to be added to by a new anti-union law next year—demands action from the whole trade union movement. It demands no less than a general strike to smash all the anti-union laws and to re-establish the right to strike, to unionise and to picket.

On these bedrock rights all our "freedoms" within capitalist society rest. By fighting all out to defend them we can open the road to the overthrow of capitalist class rule itself.■

# No benefit for women

BY LIZ WOOD



John Harris/IFL

THE FREEZING of child benefit for the second year running is just one more example of the Tories' callous attitude towards working class families. Alongside this penny-pinching exercise to cut £206 million from a £4.5 billion Social Security budget, Minister John Moore announced his plans for "Benefits to People who Need Them Most".

He obviously believes that the top earners of the country need the most benefit, since they gained hundreds of millions from cuts in the top rates of tax, whilst those on the lowest incomes continue to be pushed further into deprivation, poverty and homelessness.

The child benefit issue has caused anger even amongst Tory back-benchers. The "party of the family", with housewife Thatcher at the head, has abandoned its election pledges not to cut child benefit payments. Child benefit has been repeatedly cut in real terms since the Tories came to power.

They argue that the money saved will be used to help those in greatest need. But their "redistribution" of benefits involves stringent means testing and income supplements for those on the very lowest pay. These benefits are always the least successful at reaching the people who need them—only one third of the families entitled to the means tested Family Credit claim it, whereas the universal child benefit has an almost 100% take up.

Moore has talked of undermining the "dependency culture" of those claimants he thinks should be out working for a pittance rather than relying on state aid. When there is high unemployment, when youth receive wages so low they are impossible to live on, he argues that providing benefits encourages work avoidance. Hence the plans to introduce a form of work-for-dole type training schemes.

Child benefit is the only benefit paid directly to women, and contributes significantly to the income of most families. The £7.25 per week per child is an essential, though inadequate, amount to meet some of the costs of raising children. As this fails to keep pace with inflation more women will find it difficult to pay for enough food, and pay bills and buy clothes for the kids. The £70 million which Moore has promised to target towards the least well off will amount to 50p extra a week for the minority of families who claim income support, family credit and housing benefit. The overall result is to increase the poverty and misery of millions of families.

Another example of the Tory concern for women and their children is a decision to threaten the existence of many of the refuges for battered wives. Domestic violence against women accounts for 25% of all violent crime reported to the police.

### Violence

Research shows that women in hostels will have suffered an average of seven years of violence before they seek refuge, often with their children, a few belongings and no money. The women may have no alternative but to go to a hostel—anywhere else they would still run the risk of being found and abused by their husbands. The refuges are not merely providing accommodation, but also safety and support.

As Labour and Tory councils implement cuts, it comes as no surprise to find out that few shelters receive funds from local authorities. They are dependent on the extra social security paid to the women in order to cover costs and pay. The staff are there to help the women deal with the practical problems which arise when they leave their brutal partners. Advice on re-housing, legal issues, benefits and physical defence are all aspects which require the employment of staff in the hostels. The Tories now claim that since the staff do not provide "care", benefit for the women should only be paid at the basic rate. This would mean that many hostels will close.

There are several other attacks which particularly affect women. The grant for maternity needs is now £80— half of the old single payment of 1986! In the benefit reshuffles the single parents, usually women, have lost the right to "long term addition". This was an extra payment added to their benefit after one year of claiming. It was a recognition of their not being "available for work" because of child care responsibilities, and that they were therefore likely to be claiming for long periods of time. The extra money was to pay for "wear and tear" renewals of clothing and household goods.

The taking away of this benefit has further implications. It may be the first step to arguing that single parents with school age children are eligible to be forced into schemes like Employment Training. This has already happened in the USA.

### Defenders

The Tories claim to be defenders of the family. This is hypocritical propaganda. What they defend is the situation whereby the family is the only place where support is available to those who are dependent—children, the elderly and the sick.

By cutting benefit to those who stay at home they make youth dependent upon their parents. By refusing benefit to those who voluntarily leave home under 18 they are trying to force the family to be responsible. And then by cutting child benefit, increasing costs such as rates and then the Poll Tax (of which claimants now have to pay 20%) the Tories are insisting—stay in your families and struggle to survive.

And if you suffer violence and abuse, there will be no escape from that family "sanctuary" as refuges are forced to close. That is the model family they want for the working class.■

# Kings Cross cover-up

*A London Underground worker's response to the inquest verdicts*

"BIASED", "FARCE", and "Charade" were the most common words used by the victims' relatives in describing the inquest.

Michael Meacher, Shadow Employment Secretary called the disaster "predictable, predicted and allowed to happen". He went on to say that LRT were guilty of "culpable negligence".

Predictable and predicted certainly; on the day before the fire ASLEF and NUR branches leafletted passengers about fire risks underground, only to be met with threats of disciplinary action from management! The Underground bosses are definitely guilty of "culpable negligence". So why was the coroner at pains to rule out the true verdict of "unlawful killing"?

His only argument was to tell the court he had been advised by the Lord Chief Justice to rule out such a verdict. He told the jury that accidental death was a verdict they could bring in with "no hesitation whatsoever". He added that he agreed with the coroner in the recent Gibraltar inquest into the murder of three unarmed IRA members, that an open verdict should be avoided.

We might think "what on earth is the parallel between Gibralter and Kings Cross"? The purpose of both was to cover up murder by means of legal jargon and procedure.

We can now understand why LRT and LUL (London Underground Ltd) management were exonerated by the inquest when we look at their success in slashing jobs and standards for profit.

In the past five years the London Underground has seen a 70% increase in passengers. It has reduced its operating subsidy from central government from £27 million to around £10 million, a drop of two thirds. Government policy is to reduce the subsidy to zero. Compare this subsidy of less than 10% with subsidies in Turin, Rome, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Paris and Bonn, which vary from 50% to 87%!

This reduction has been achieved by cutting staff and through privatisation. Some 3,288 staff have been cut in five years leaving 20,612. In June 710 more job losses were announced in cleaning, signal and depot maintenance. A new ticket barrier system is reckoned to cost a further 1,110 jobs! The number of staff per million passenger miles travelled has gone down by over 40% since 1982.

*"I question the verdict itself: why should the coroner feel obliged to write to LRT [London regional Transport] of his concern that it should never happen again if this was indeed a complete accident and therefore could never have been prevented."*

Sophie Tarassenko (whose brother was killed in the Kings Cross fire)

Management's entire strategy has been based on running a business, not a railway. The cuts in staff and maintenance have meant that safety has gone to the wall. Recently at Golders Green depot eight trains were cancelled because there was no stock!

Management's attitude was more starkly illustrated on the night of the fire itself. I was working that evening. The line controller informed us that a small fire had started at Kings Cross and we were not to stop at the platform. Half an hour later we were told it was out but we were still not to stop there. Unbeknown to us 31 people were losing their lives. And there have been 19 major fires since 1980.

Cleaning, building and other services have been put out to tender. The November 1988 report of the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority found 64 out of 93 tube stations inspected were dirty and a potential fire risk.

LRT's response to the coroner's letter emphasised its commitment to "profits before safety" when they said that any improvements will have to be funded out of fare rises above inflation.

Unfortunately the response of the unions has been disgraceful: Alan Cooper representing the NUR at the inquest could only express "profound sympathy" on behalf of employees who were themselves involved that night to all those who were bereaved or injured

This statement supported the verdict and even played into management arguments that it was workers who were to blame for the fire!

Instead of state run cover-ups we need a labour movement enquiry into Kings Cross. This would undoubtedly return the verdict that Underground workers and passengers all know is true: killed for profit.■

# Moral drivel from Princess Di

THE BRITISH bourgeoisie never tires of singing the praises of "wonderful family life". No great surprises then, when they recently wheeled out leading regal parasite and mother of two, the Princess of Wales, to espouse the virtues of the happy family.

Speaking on a Dr Barnardo's platform, this hapless individual simpered on about how difficult she found it bringing up two small sons—maybe her posse of royal nannies is on strike and the working class has not got wind of it! Or perhaps the Windsor household is feeling the pinch from the ravages of unemployment, low pay and welfare benefits and pathetically inadequate childcare facilities.

As if this were not enough, another royal mother has been forced to extend her holiday in Australia to a miserable six weeks because of the pressures of child raising in 1980s Britain! This particular idler, known to her friends as "Fergie", now has the scab TVam breakfast programme asking worried viewers to make known their views on whether or not Fergie should be with her Beau!

Amidst the hyped up propaganda and puerile reaction of all this, what of single parent families struggling to get by in draughty council flats? What of the legions of youth caught up in seemingly endless arguments with irate parents because they can't get work? Add these to the thousands of housewives battered and bruised, and yet still attempting to shore up completely incompatible relationships in the name of respectability. Perhaps then the unsavoury and hypocritical picture becomes a little clearer.

Working class people's lives have nothing in common with those of "Charles and Diana", "Andy and Fergie" or indeed any of the parasitical regal flock. The British royal family is constantly upheld as the "ideal" to which we must all aspire. This is because capitalism needs the family unit to supply it with a continual labour force to create its profits and wealth. The family unit can act as a fortress against "unhealthy deviations from the norm"—lesbian and gay relationships do not biologically procreate and thus continue the supply of labour for capitalism. How many members of the royal family are open lesbians or gays? As in all areas of British bourgeois society such matters are beyond public comprehension—apart from what goes on behind firmly locked doors.

The myth of royal mothers bringing up their children in similar fashion to how the working class manages looks flimsier by the day. The whole concept so deceitfully portrayed by the mass media that the British monarchy is really no different from millions of extended working class families must be completely exposed. They are no overhanging curious relic from feudalism. At their head sits the Queen, who still has the power to suspend an admittedly bourgeois parliament, accept or refuse laws and acts of parliament and call for a state of emergency.

Their ultimate demise will come when workers and their oppressed allies sweep away such obscene priviliges in a mighty tide of proletarian revolution.■

# EDITORIAL

# Defend Sinn Fein

THE PAST month has seen a number of assaults on democratic rights, most conducted in the name of the "war against terrorism" in Ireland. Aided by the "public opinion" machine of the gutter press the Tories have "responded" by banning TV and radio from carrying interviews with Sinn Fein representatives or supporters.

Despite the mass readership of the tabloids their political views and even their reportage is widely mistrusted by most British workers. It is otherwise with radio and television. Opinion polls show that most people have little difficulty in seeing through the bias and propaganda of the millionaire press. But enormous illusions exist in the objectivity and fairness of the BBC and ITV.

Of course this "objectivity"is itself an illusion. Trotsky said fifty years ago of the *Times* that it tells the truth over little things the better to ensure that it is believed when it lies over big things. So it is with TV coverage of Ireland—it gives the occasional minute or two to Sinn Fein representatives the better to "expose them" by hours of pro-government propaganda.

It goes without saying that they are never allowed to explain their case, the justice of their demands or the atrocities and repression carried on by the British forces. No. The IRA are "mindless violent psychopaths". Why 35% of the nationalist population of the six county statelet vote for Sinn Fein is never explained beyond racist and chauvinist references to tribalism, emotionalism and an obsession with history.

The ban was immediate and required only the Home Secretary's diktat. An unsuspecting public discovered that five years ago the Tories had enshrined the powers of unlimited censorship in the Home Secretary.

Why have they done this? Certainly it is not because it will be effective in diminishing Sinn Fein's support in the Six Counties. There the government has at its disposal the repression of the security forces, the full force of the media, the fulminations of the churches—Catholic as well as Protestant—and still it has failed to crush the nationalists.

In reality this measure is not aimed primarily at Sinn Fein's influence in Ireland which arises spontaneously in reaction to British imperialist oppression. It is mainly designed to prevent any undermining of the carefully constructed tissue of lies that both Her Majesty's Government and Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition have woven over the last twenty years to justify the war it is waging against the Irish people in general and the northern nationalist mass support for Sinn Fein in particular.

Twenty years on the British solution is no nearer to being discovered. Thatcher increasingly sees the struggle in the North as a semi-permanent feature of British political life—one that can be used to justify a slow but steady strengthening of the coercive powers of the state in all spheres of British life. Without Northern Ireland and the training for state forces, without the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), it would have been much more difficult to turn the riot squads loose on the black youth of the inner cities or the striking miners.

A similar process is revealed in the erosion of democratic limitations and safeguards, such as they are, of the legal system.

By use of an "Order in Council"—that is, a royal decree—the right to silence is abolished in Northern Ireland. Legislation will be required to extend it to Britain. Already in Northern Ireland and Britain under the Prevention of Terrorism Act suspects can be detained and interrogated for seven days without coming to court.

Repeated test cases have proved that British judges will not restrain the police from using "low intensity torture" to gain confessions. British law already allows the accused to be convicted on the strength of a confession alone. In Northern Ireland "terrorist" cases are heard by Diplock Courts where there is no jury, only a judge. Now the right not to say anything—enshrined in the famous police caution—is to be abrogated.

Of course, says the lying hypocrite Hurd, the right to silence is not abolished, it is just that juries and judges can infer guilt from it. So what is left of the right? Well, you will not be forced to speak. Tell that to people detained in Northern Ireland. In practice it means only that the government is foreswearing the public use of the rack and the thumbscrew, that's all!

In Britain the Tories are on the march against a whole range of our hard-won democratic rights. The defence of those rights must be conducted vigorously, and through the use of class struggle methods, by the labour movement.

But today the defence of democratic rights cannot be limited to Britain. Indeed it does not even start here. It starts in Ireland. We cannot defend our existing freedoms whilst Ireland is in chains.

The most monstrous violation of democratic rights is the denial of the right of the Irish people to self-determination. From this denial, enforced by British troops comes a whole torrent of anti-democratic measures, most of them supported to the hilt by the British Labour Party with its criminal policy of bi-partisanship.

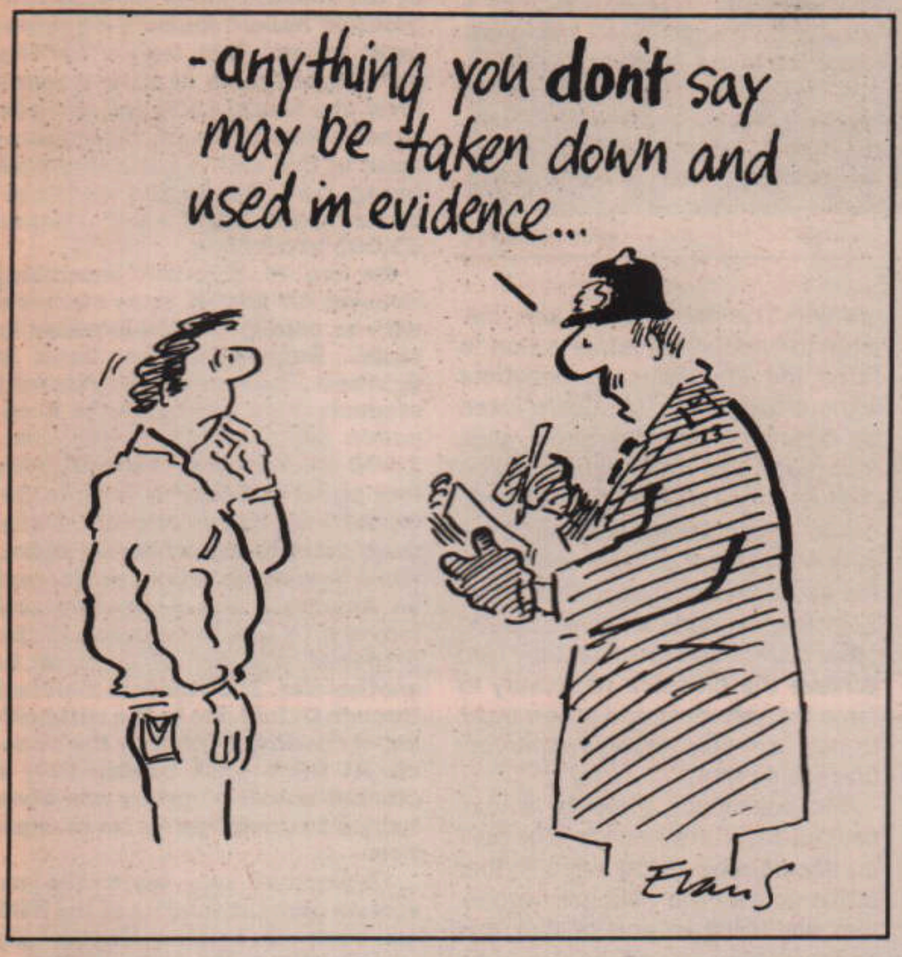
In Britain we must mobilise in the most active way in defence of democratic rights—by mass demonstration, by political protest including by (unlawful) strike action, by the all-out indefinite general strike aimed at compelling the "democratically elected government" to yield, to smash the anti-union laws.

But if we continue to ignore the trampling of democracy in Ireland then our efforts will be in vain. British labour must inscribe on its banners—British troops out of Ireland, Republican prisoners out of British jails, Down with the PTA, the Diplock Courts and the ban on Sinn Fein.

Labour and the trade unions must be forced to give Sinn Fein and the whole Irish resistance movement a platform in Britain. The cause of British labour and its liberties is inextricably linked with that of the Irish people fighting for self-determination and national unity.■

● "Time To Go" campaign: see page 10

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# Angels of doom

AN IMPORT from the USA recently appeared on the London Underground. No, it wasn't the dynamic duo but a posse of vigilantes known as the Guardian Angels. They are set to pay the transport systems in other parts of Britain a series of visits. Indeed they have already visited Birmingham where their intervention at a night club fight ended up with their leader being hospitalised.

These crusaders in Red Berets patrolled the Victoria Line for a whole ride! They have patrolled the streets and subways of New York City for a few years. Their self-proclaimed goal is to prevent crime occurring with on the spot intervention.

There is no doubting the fact that, as the capitalist crisis deepens, crime does increase. And it gets more violent. Many women especially are afraid to travel on public transport. What is more many of us are sick and tired of being harrassed by all sorts of anti-social elements as we come home from work or a night out. In London at the moment the toffee-nosed lager louts of the City of London are a particular nuisance.

But the answer to this problem does not lie with either groups of self-appointed guardians like the Angels or with the oft voiced calls for more and tougher policing. Vigilantes and police are not, and cannot be, accountable to the communities they claim to serve. Indeed both can and do terrorise the communities, targeting young workers, especially black youth, whose only crime is often harmless boisterous behaviour.

The real answer to increased crime in working class communities is for those communities themselves to build workers' self defence organisations, based on, and accountable to, the labour movement.

Such organisations will not only prove more effective in combatting crime on the spot, they will also help workers defend themselves against the police, and potentially the vigilantes, when they attack our communities and our struggles.■

# IN brief

## Birmingham Six

**NOVEMBER 2 1988 marked the anniversary of the start of the appeal hearing on the case of the six men imprisoned for the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings.**

**During this five and a half week hearing clear evidence of confessions obtained under torture and serious flaws in a forensic test used to convict the men were all dismissed by the appeal judges.**

**[illegible] accepting that more than thirty police officers were guilty of perjury and conspiracy.**

**It would open pressure for the review of other framed Irish prisoners—the Maguire family and the Guildford Four.**

**The men have been refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords. Supporters of the Birmingham Six have been organising a national petition to be handed in to the Home Secretary asking him to review the case to effect the men's release. There is little evidence to suggest that this will be successful.**

**The Birmingham Six Campaign must bend its efforts towards building a powerful base of support within the British working class. The campaign will have a diminishing impact if it continues to rely on friendly statements by top politicians, petitions and work mainly within the Irish community as the key to success. Labour movement organisations and workplaces must become the prioritised target of the campaign.■**

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# Democratise the block vote

BY G R McCOLL

THE TURBULENT events at last month's Blackpool conference have caused both the right and left of the Labour Party to review their attitude to the block vote.

The left saw the millions of votes used to marginalise the constituency parties and crush the Benn/Heffer leadership challenge. Neil Kinnock witnessed his plan to dump unilateralism scuppered by Ron Todd and his 1.25 million TGWU block vote. This combined with the other unwelcome outbursts from Todd impressed on Kinnock the need to distance the party from its "embarrassing" links with the organised working class. He wants to convince the bosses that he's in charge—not the unions.

In an interview with the *Sunday Mirror*, Kinnock renewed his call for the introduction of one member one vote, allied to cut price individual membership for trade unionists. Kinnock and Larry Whitty talk of building a million member party composed of passive postal voters who they hope will rubber stamp the Party's every rightward move.

And so Kinnock hopes to ditch the vote-losing baggage of unilateralism. This is a hapless attempt to show himself qualified to become Prime Minister in the eyes of a British ruling class which will never surrender its bomb.

### Intention

Kinnock's intention to re-fashion Labour after the model of the US Democrats has received strong support though from the AEU's Bill Jordan and the GMB's John Edmonds. Even Ron Todd's TGWU deputy, Bill Morris has given it implicit backing. Edmonds, current darling of *Marxism Today*, has categorically stated that "The power of the trade unions should be reduced".

The card waving of parasitic right wing bureaucrats like Edmonds and Jordan claiming to represent hundreds of thousands of trade unionists, is a travesty of workers' democracy. In those unions which balloted their members in the leadership election thousands of workers voted for Tony Benn. Branch ballots in the ACTT and MSF showed 46% and 40% respectively for Benn. Even in the right-wing AEU's individual membership survey Benn captured 15% of the vote despite Jordan and Co. printing a recommendation for Kinnock and Hattersley on top of the ballot paper! None of these minority votes were registered at conference.

Yet while left wing Labour Party members' revulsion at the blatant bureaucratic manipulation of the block vote is understandable, to propose a reduction of trade union influence at party conference is dangerous and wrong. It is dangerous because the response of a left like Eric Heffer sounds not dissimilar to that of John Edmonds: "However, I think it was good that we passed the resolution that the influence of the block vote should be diminished and the influence of the constituency vote increased." (*Socialist Organiser* 13 October)

Now, while the reasons for Heffer supporting a diminished block vote may well be different from those of a bureaucrat like Edmonds, the result of such a move will amount to the same thing. That is, lessening the link with those very working class organisations which alone make the Labour Party a different type of party from the open bosses' party—the Tories.

Historically, in its policy, programme and actions in government, the Labour Party has consistently defended capitalism against the interests of the working class. In that sense the Labour Party is a bourgeois party.

However, also historically, the Labour Party grew out of and has since maintained an organic link with the base organisations of the working class—the trade unions.

This link means that the Labour Party is not simply an open bosses' party like the US Democrats, but is a bourgeois workers' party. Any progressive policies have been the direct result of pressure from workers in the unions , any electoral success depends on massive support from trade union members. Without any link to the organised working class the Labour Party would become yet another open bourgeois party.

If Kinnock succeeds in weakening the connection with organised workers the Party will, like the openly bourgeois parties, treat its constituency members with undemocratic contempt. Constituencies will be "consulted" through individual membership postal ballot, destroying even the limited democratic norms of the labour movement.

At their most effective these norms mean that issues are debated openly, voted on and carried out collectively. Kinnock's plans would turn both the constituency and union members into passive voting fodder, used for "consultation" rather than deciding the policy of the party.

In response to Kinnock's plans and in an attempt to reverse some of the defeats suffered at Blackpool, the Labour left has suggested tinkering around with the arithmetic of the electoral college (Benn) or strengthening the CLP vote (*Briefing*). Neither of these tackles the central issue of how to take forward the political struggle to recruit and activate rank and file trade unionists in a fight against their bureaucratic leaders. This means winning union members to a strategy for fighting new realism, combined with democratising the whole union structure including the control over the block vote.

Rather than weakening or scrapping the block vote it should be taken out of the hands of the bureaucrats. Not through individual postal ballots, but by debating out political issues in the workplaces and union branches, hearing the arguments and voting at the meeting.

Minority positions should be reflected in the delegations holding the block votes, and the actual delegates should be rank and file representatives not head office bureaucrats. In this way the block vote can be retained as an expression of the interests of the organised workers in the unions, and so organised to ensure that a voice is given to class conscious trade unionists in the Labour Party.

We fight for this not in the vain hope of transforming the Labour Party into a vehicle for socialism but as part of the struggle to break workers from reformism through placing the misleaders under maximum democratic pressure from the class. That way we will win the best militants away from Labourism and to the building of a revolutionary party.■



Bureaucrats block democracy — John Harris/IFL

# Technicians' strike

BY PETE ASHLEY

LAST MONTH university technicians in the MSF took part in a national one day strike over pay. For the past three years the union has accepted small interim pay awards following the setting up of an Independent Pay Review Body to investigate technicians' low pay. In October 1987 this body reported that pay was an average 18% below technicians in industry and commerce.

The government and employers have continually refused to act on the findings of the report. Their latest "offer" was to consider paying the 18% rise, but only if the union agreed to the concept of local and regional pay negotiations in the future.

This attempt to wreck the organising strength of the national union was rightly rejected by the technicians' special conference in September. The membership was balloted to support industrial action to force the employers to negotiate without conditions. Members voted by 70% for a one day strike, plus stoppages and further strike action if necessary. This is a group of workers not known for any past militancy.

However there are real dangers in the strategy endorsed in the ballot. Selective spontaneous walk outs and other disruption will not on their own achieve the pressure necessary to force management and government to pay up—only national strike action will do that.

The confidence given by a successful day's strike needs to be built on immediately to organise further strike action. The national negotiators are trying to ensure that this does not happen and are now even delaying the calling of protest action.

Given this abdication of leadership members must ensure that branches discuss what forms of action they think are needed. Locally, strike committees should be elected involving as many members as possible to organise the daily activity of the campaign.

These committees should build for a recall delegate based national conference. Other unions must be drawn into our strike committees to create a real basis for joint action, not only around the pay claim, but against job losses and student loans. In this way the Tory attacks on education can be defeated.■

# Unite student struggles

BY SALADIN MECKLED

**ATTACKS ON education due to the imposition of the Baker Education Bill are coming to a head. Polytechnic after polytechnic is experiencing what the restructuring of education means: the closing of departments, sites, facilities and the selling off of buildings.**

**These attacks are now to be joined by the introduction of loans as proposed in Robert Jackson's government report. This argues for the freezing of grants at their present level, the loss of £100 and all state benefits together with the replacement of this with a £1,000 annual top up loan. This means many students could finish their studies £3,000 in debt!**

**On top of this the impending Housing Bill has hit many students with an unprecedented increase in rents. But there has been a fightback. Recently three hundred students went into indefinite occupation at Sheffield Polytechnic. 1,000 students began an indefinite rent strike at Coventry Poly. In Liverpool 750 higher education students voted in favour of a rent strike, while Newcastle students stormed an Academic Board meeting and forced it to end, in response to the proposed transfer of courses to another site. 300 students marched through Oxford due to the withholding of Housing Benefit by the council. At North East London Poly a student activists' group has been formed to campaign for an occupation.**

**Throughout this wave the response from the leaders of the NUS has been non-existent. It has fully participated in the Jackson Report thus lending it credence. With the investigation into its activities all the NUS has called for has been a demonstration outside the Department of Education on 31 October, and even this was not properly publicised.**

**But the attacks have begun to push new, fighting sections into struggle. In the face of a lack of leadership from the NUS these sections must link up through their struggle, they must look to the education workforce as their strongest allies and they must turn what is already occurring sporadically into mass, united and militant action. Only this will defeat the government's plans, not the passivity of the NUS leaders.■**

# *Labour smashes library fight*

**A WAIST high pile of ruined books is all that is left of three local lending libraries in Hackney, North London. The libraries, kept open for six months by occupiers in defiance of Labour council cuts, were literally smashed to pieces by high court sheriffs and scab contractors in the early hours of 30 September.**

**The occupiers had been evicted once already, a week before, but simply reopened two of the buildings (Goldsmiths Row and Somerford Grove) shortly after. This time the council took no chances. The sheriffs smashed the doors in with sledgehammers at 1·30 a.m. on Friday morning and all the books were piled in the back of BRS lorries. They were later dumped at Stoke Newington Reference Library. Two arrests were made at Goldsmiths Row. Both libraries were then wrecked with the sledgehammers and broken furniture was heaped on torn and shredded books in the lorries.**

**Two weeks later, Labour chair of Leisure Services, Tommy Sheppard, defended the use of private (scab) labour, saying they had been hired for their "special expertise" in these matters. This "expertise" has rendered approximately 36,000 books useless, destroying virtually the only public service left in some of the poorest council estates in Hackney.**

**Despite protestations from the constituency Labour Parties and NALGO little has been organised in the way of protest barring the vocal lobbying of a small group of dedicated occupiers.**

**If we are to get our libraries back and prevent all further cuts and closures (and there are plenty in the pipeline) it is essential that the campaign is taken into the council unions, especially in the Direct Labour Organisation which is due to be closed in April next year with the loss of up to 600 jobs. An anti-cuts campaign firmly based on delegates from the tenants' associations and community groups but especially the unions, must be built now.**

**This is a tall order but it is the only way of securing any substantial victory, not only against a cynical Labour council, but the battle-hardened Tory central government.■**

# Strike against regrading con

NURSES ALL over the country are reacting angrily to their new grades. Hospital managers have not only downgraded nurses to keep within government cash limits. They have handed out the grades in the most petty and vindictive way. They have punished militant nurses with lower grades and used the threat of withholding back pay to pressure nurses out of appealing against their grades.

Despite a total lack of preparation by the national unions there is already a wave of action mounting in response. Charing Cross Hospital in London voted for a two hour strike, while nurses in the North East spontaneously walked out on receiving their grades. After their empty gesture of walking out of talks with management the union leaders are scurrying to contain this anger with a planned "work to grade". COHSE branches are balloting on a "work to grade" and this has already started in some hospitals.

The RCN has already denounced "work to grade" and called on its members to "act professionally". In fact "work to grade" is not action at all. Any nurse who takes on more than his/her defined duties is working for nothing. It should not need a ballot for "work to grade", it must begin immediately. By carrying out only the duties they are being paid for, nurses could bring the hospital system to chaos within days.

But as a tactic on its own the "work to grade" cannot win. It leaves individual nurses to face the moral pressure of management alone, and will inevitably crumble in the less well-organised units.

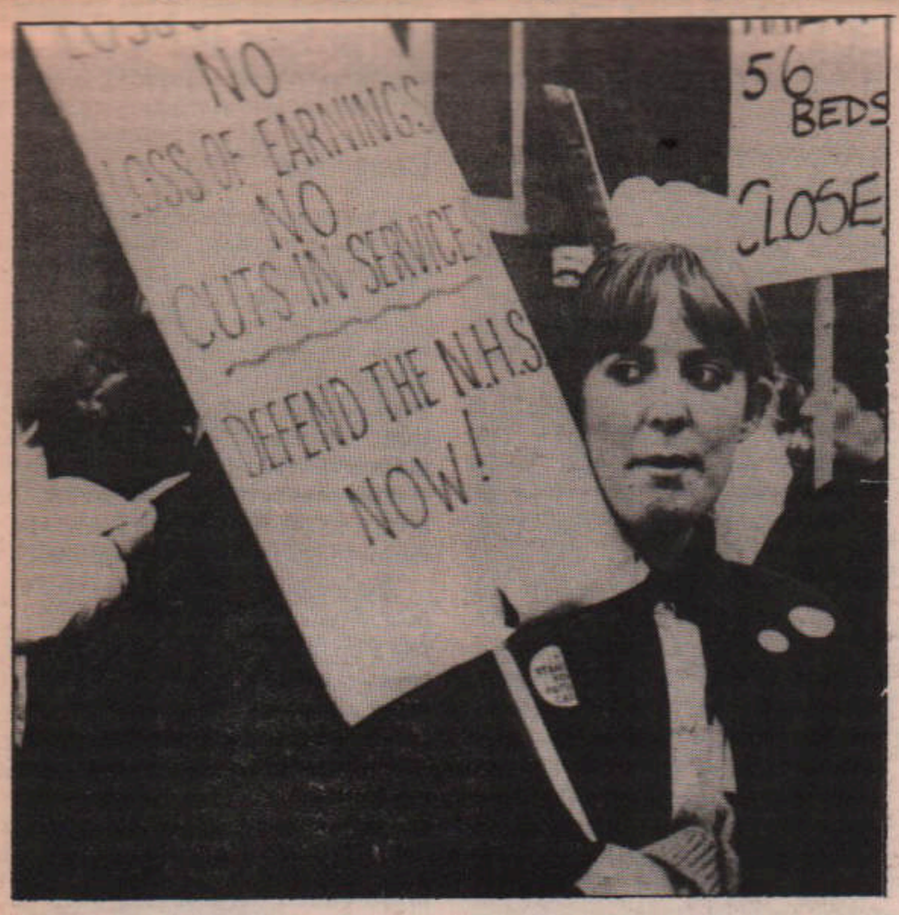
Nurses need to organise strike action now against the new grades. Every nurse put on a lower grade than the highest for their qualification and experience should put in an appeal now. The unions must organise this and commit themselves to strike action for an immediate upgrading of all those appealing. Threats of withholding back pay, and provocations such as in Leicester where midwives were locked in management's office until they signed their grades, should be met with immediate walkouts.

It is essential that nurses act quickly, and co-ordinate their action nationally. Otherwise the mood of anger could quickly turn to despair as more and more nurses accept their grades. Nurses need to organise a national rank and file conference to discuss how to fight back. They should bombard the union executives with calls for an immediate indefinite strike, with emergency cover only under workers' control, until every nurse receives the grade he/she deserves.

Unless there is a fight now the union leaders will yet again have squandered the militancy and economic strength of nurses. They will have turned a situation which forced the government to concede over £1 billion extra cash into a defeat for nurses.

Whatever the outcome of the struggles in the coming months, nurses must learn the lesson that the Pay Review Body (PRB) leaves them powerless to shape their own wage claims. Kenneth Clarke is already signalling that he will "do his bit" against inflation by preventing any significant pay rise next April. Faced with this nurses in COHSE and NUPE must start a campaign now to commit the unions to break with the PRB.

- Work to grade, appeal and strike!




# Tube sell out

**BY A LONDON UNDERGROUND WORKER**

**"BETRAYED"! PINNED onto the noticeboard at Golders Green depot, the word had been taken from a newspaper headline. The words "by ASLEF and NUR" were written underneath.**

**And betrayed we certainly have been. On 4 October, two days before train crews were due to strike on the Northern Line, the unions put out notices saying that the strike was off, pending negotiations with management.**

**Nearly two weeks later an agreement was announced on pay. It is nothing more than a sell-out.**

**Drivers had demanded pay at One Person Operation (OPO) rate (see WP 110). Our executives negotiated the rate, but with strings attached. Drivers will now have to cover guards' duties when management deems necessary.**

**Guard/motormen, instead of receiving OPO rate, get a mere £5 per week rise. But the biggest kick in the teeth was dealt to guards, who will get the original management proposal of £2 per week!**

**Reaction to the sell-out has been mixed. Whilst drivers feel angered by the deal, many are prepared to accept the strings as at least they'll have the money in the bank. But guards and guard/motormen feel totally let down and are still in favour of strike action. At the same time they realise that our unions are not prepared to take a lead.**

**This has led to talk of a mass desertion from the unions. Although this is understandable given the treachery of ASLEF and the NUR, it would play into management's hands.**

**Instead of leaving the unions, rank and file tube workers need to turn back to them. If enough of us can get to our branches we can kick out the time-servers who use them as drinking clubs and start to build real class struggle unions that will win our demands, not sell us out at the drop of a hat.■**

# Bradford in revolt

COUNCIL RENTS up £3 per week; fifteen old people's homes to be sold off; school meal prices up; charges for home helps and two thousand five hundred job losses. A total cut of £5.8 million.

With these savage proposals Bradford's new Tory council showed what Thatcher has in store for local government and services across the country. But Tory leader Eric Pickles had reckoned without the resistance of the council workers and of organised labour in Bradford.

As we go to press, mass opposition to the cuts is growing. On 25 October council workers struck for half a day in opposition to the proposals. The council meeting which ratified the cuts was besieged by angry workers. The package was pushed through only on the Lord Mayor's casting vote.

NALGO has recommended a vote for indefinite strike action. But the council workforce must not go it alone. A recent referendum showed that only 372 out of the 15,000 questioned supported the sale of homes for the elderly. The basis is there for joint action with workers in the private sector to hit the Tories' paymasters where it hurts—in their pockets—and force the council to abandon the cuts.

A city-wide general strike is both a necessary and realistic demand. But it cannot be left to the union leaders to organise it. Local labour leader Philip Beeley wants to challenge the Tories' procedure in the courts. But across the country Labour councils from Birmingham to Brent are slashing services themselves. These Labour councils have budget cuts comparable to Bradford, but the trade union leaders have forestalled the kind of resistance seen in Bradford. The battle cannot be won in the courts or the council chambers.

Rank and file council workers must take the lead in convening a city-wide council of action, drawing in delegates from the unions, the estates, schools and community organisations which could channel the mass resentment into an all-out strike until total victory.

Bradford has become the trail blazer for Tory councils. The city's workers have the chance to blaze a trail against council cuts nationwide.■

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE ECONOMY

# Privatising British Steel

THE TORIES are pushing ahead with privatising British Steel (BS). Under Thatcher, BS management has turned a loss of £1 million pounds a day in 1979 into a profit of £410 million last year, and the ailing British steel industry into the most profitable European steel producer.

The Tories have portrayed this as a keep fit exercise, forcing British industry to work out in the gym in order to shed excess flab. But for the working class the reality is different. Tory propaganda does not show the social effects of the loss of 130,000 jobs in the state owned industry since 1980. Nor does it show the industrial wastelands created in towns like Sheffield and Consett.

While it is true that some skilled workers have seen significant wage rises, most of Britain's steel workers' wages have remained low. Weekend work and regular overtime is the norm. As usual the bosses' drive for profit has scant regard for the lives and well being of the working class. Though the number of workers in the steel industry has fallen since 1982 the number of deaths and serious accidents has actually risen.

The response of the labour movement to the privatisation has been predictably pathetic. The ISTC has uttered barely a whimper while the Labour Party has merely warned of the dangers of the British steel industry falling into foreign hands, as though somehow a foreign boss is likely to be more ruthless than the home-grown variety.

During the 1960s Wilson's Labour Government nationalised a number of key sections of British industry. These nationalisations were carried out with the interests of the capitalists uppermost. The 1960s were boom years for capitalism. To feed the expanding engineering plants, car factories and construction boom the bosses needed an efficient steel industry.

### Decrepit

But the British steel industry was in such a decrepit state that no single capitalist was prepared to finance its reconstruction. The bosses were quite prepared to let the Labour government restructure the steel industry through the state on behalf of the boss class as a whole.

Labour's first act was to compensate the former owners generously. The shares of a steel company called Colville were worth £1.40 in 1965; they were compensated at the value of £2.40. Between 1967 and 1970 BSC paid out £220 million to the former owners. To pay these astronomic sums the government borrowed heavily from the banks. So much so that when BS was running up its heaviest losses in the late 1970s, half of the total loss (£0.5 million a day) was accounted for by interest to the banks. To cap it all the most profitable sectors were left in private hands.

For the workers in BS, nationalisation did not mean an island of socialism in a sea of capitalism. A nationalised industry is managed, like any other on the basis of maximising profit. BS was run entirely on the basis of satisfying the needs of private industry. Real wages fell on a scale worse on average than private industry and jobs were slashed by 60,000 in less than ten years. The losses of BS increased profits for the other capitalists eager to buy at "competitive" prices.

With the onset of recession in 1979-82 British capitalism's willingness to subsidise the steel industry came to an end. Along with the steel bosses of Europe the BS bosses launched a co-ordinated shake-out of "excess capacity". In their way stood the steel unions.

Almost immediately after coming to power the Tories attacked the steelworkers. A desultory pay offer of 2%, with inflation at 17%, provoked a national strike which lasted 13 weeks. The potential for generalising this strike, was frittered away by Bill Sirs the leader of the ISTC. He sold out the strike, effectively destroying the fighting power of his own union.

With the ISTC weakened the Tories set about restructuring the steel industry with the ruthlessness for which they are renowned. The workforce was cut from 182,000 at the time of the strike to its present level of 53,000. Real wages were slashed and the union—never one of the most militant—was destroyed as an effective defender of workers' rights and conditions.

### Popular capitalism

The myth of popular capitalism is that the £430 million profit of BS is now to be made freely available to the British public through share ownership. The *Financial Times* was more honest when it said that "it is clear that emphasis is being placed on potential institutional investors"- those who already have loadsamoney and want to make more.

With the established leaders of the Labour Party and unions offering no effective resistance to the Tories' de-nationalisation plans socialists need to be clear on what our position should be.

We should be against privatisation; if BS is profitable we can use the £430 million to help pay the nurses rather than give it to the Tories' pals in the City of London.

All industries which have been sold off by the Tories should be re-nationalised immediately, without compensation. We should be in favour of more nationalisations, but this time as a weapon against the bosses. Every firm which declares redundancies or refuses a decent pay rise using low profits as an excuse should be nationalised; not in the old Labour way but using the weapon of workers' control.

Workers' control means using the power of the working class, organised in the workplace to impose on the bosses manning levels, hours worked, wage levels, speed of work etc. All this can be won without accepting any responsibility to make the plant or industry profitable. If one boss cannot guarantee a decent level of wages and jobs, force the other bosses to pay through nationalisation and steeply progressive taxation. If other bosses plead bankruptcy or the banks try sabotage, nationalise them too.

It is only with this form of nationalisation, under workers' control, that we can avoid the trap of accepting responsibility for the bosses' crisis and use nationalisation as a stepping stone to an economy planned on the basis of human need.■



Demonstration against the régime in Rangoon

# Militant and Burma's "Socialist Programme"

*Recent events in Burma have focused attention on the class character of such a state. For over 20 years the Militant Tendency has argued that Burma is a "deformed" workers' state like Cuba and those of Eastern Europe.* ***Peter Main*** *looks at the evidence from the Burmese economy and assesses its class character.*

SINCE THE Second World War a series of countries in Eastern Europe and South East Asia, as well as Cuba, have seen capitalism overthrown. Not by proletarian revolution but by a process of bureaucratic liquidation by a Stalinist party, backed by an armed force which has smashed the existing state apparatus as well as suppressing the revolutionary independence of the workers and peasants.

We have dealt with this history at length in *The Degenerated Revolution*. In each case the material aid and tacit or open support of an existing degenerated workers' state was crucial.

Ideologically and politically the party that carried through the social overturn was either Stalinist in origin or was transformed into a Stalinist party in the process. Having liquidated the capitalist class the degenerated workers' states instituted bureaucratic planning which, while not eliminating the operation of the law of value in the economy, decisively subordinated it.

The modern history of Burma does not fit this pattern. The Burma Socialist Programme Party—which came to power during 1962 via a coup—was not Stalinist—it did not enjoy the aid or the support of any workers' state. Moreover, the officers who led the coup did not smash the state apparatus but emerged as a section within it to take political power. It took over ten years for the new government to realise it was "socialist" and its belated attempts at planning have been essentially thwarted.

Still, none of this has deterred *Militant* from declaring Burma to have been a workers' state for the last 26 years. *Militant's* argument is very simple and has not changed since Ted Grant analysed Burma in 1962:

"After the 1962 coup, the army made a clean sweep of the entire state apparatus . . . The purges were followed by draconian legislation which eradicated every vestige of capitalism in Burma . . . All foreign firms, all banks and all the larger Burmese firms were taken into public ownership.

Almost overnight the "Ireland of Asia" was transformed from a feudal-capitalist satellite of imperialism into a proletarian-Bonapartist state (a deformed workers' state similar to the Stalinist state in Russia)".(*Militant*, 5 August 1988)

## Survey

Ten years ago in their general survey of countries like Burma entitled "The Colonial Revolution and the Deformed Workers' States" *Militant* argued:

"On that basis [state ownership of the means of production—WP] they [Burma, Ethiopia, Syria, Benin, Aden—WP] can plan and develop the productive forces with forced marches at a pace absolutely impossible on their former capitalist-landlord basis."

Unfortunately for *Militant* reality did not turn out much like that. The "official" economy in Burma is very small. With a gross domestic product in 1985 of US$ 7.1 billion the UN classified it as a "Least Developed Country". In the league table of the "Low Income Economies", (average gross national product US$ 270 per head of population) Burma was close to the bottom with US$ 190 per head.

These figures, in themselves, do not tell us anything about the class nature of the Burmese state. Nonetheless they are of importance because, for most years since 1962, population growth almost exactly matched growth in output per capita. Within the officially measured economy, the years 1962 to 1980 saw output grow by 2.3% p.a. while the population increased by 2.2% p.a. Since 1980 annual production growth has risen to an estimated 3.7% in 1986/7 while population increased only by 1.98% p.a. In other words most of the years since the supposed defeat of capitalism have seen something approaching economic stagnation.

Nationalisation and planning are clearly important economic weapons of a workers' state in its struggle to defeat capitalism. Through them the state can limit the operation of the law of value and begin to restructure the economy in the interests of the working class rather than of the capitalists. In countries which were previously semi-colonies this would involve correcting the warped development of the economy towards the production of unprocessed or semi-processed raw materials for the imperialists' economies.

In the degenerate workers' states, of course, the interests of the state are not those of the majority of the population but rather those of the bureaucratic caste which has usurped political power. Nonetheless, their planning and control of the economy also shows the effects of restructuring, usually by means of a drive towards industrialisation.

No such changes can be seen in Burma. Between 1962 and 1987 manufacturing remained at just under 11% of gross domestic product. After some 25 years of planning and development, "at a pace absolutely impossible on their former landlord-capitalist basis" the economy showed virtually no transformation! Whether the official economy is measured in terms of output per head or in terms of structure, the alleged overthrow of capitalism has made hardly a scrap of difference.

Moreover, the share of agriculture in GDP has grown in the same period from 26 to 27.9% of GDP. And 95% of agricultural production is in the hands of a mass of private smallholdings. These embrace over 9 million peasants compared to the 80,000 in state farms.

## Dominant

Private property is, uniquely for a supposed workers' state, dominant in the consumer goods industries. In fact, the private industrial sector as a whole has grown relative to the state sector since 1971. And this is in the officially statised economy! Of the 41,417 factories in Burma in 1984 only 4% were state owned. Admittedly these did comprise the bulk of the large employers and what heavy industry there is, but their weight in the economy cannot be considered decisive.

The most serious case for considering Burma as some form of post-capitalist society does not come from the nature of the productive economy but rather from the state's monopoly of foreign trade and its monopoly of rice procurement. Through this the state sets prices below "market levels".

This, however, leaves out of account the "unofficial" economy of the country which is reckoned by the authorities to be, "at least as large" as the official one. Measuring the precise size of an unofficial economy is never easy. It is made much more complicated in Burma by the nature of probably the most important product of that economy, opium.

Whatever the amount earned by the world's largest producer of opium it is very large and in convertible currency. It finds its way into the Burmese "unofficial" or "shadow" economy and, whilst it cannot be quantified, it clearly wrecks the state's attempts to regulate the economy, providing an arena for the unbridled operation of the law of value.

Even if we leave that aside, it is generally accepted that the unofficial market for rice inside Burma is huge and in it prices are three to four times higher than those given by the state. The same breakdown has occurred in the export of rice. According to Burmese government statistics, reproduced in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER),(7th July 1988), rice production grew from 4.11 million tonnes in 1960 to 7.78 million tonnes in 1987. In the same period rice exports fell from 2 million tonnes to 600,000 tonnes.

Thus, "official" production has increased and a greater amount has been retained for domestic consumption. This is particularly so since 1977-8 with the introduction of high yield strains of rice, provision of fertilisers and extra labour in the transplanting and harvesting seasons and the extension of credit by the state.

However, the same issue of FEER reported that at least 1.5 million tonnes of rice was being exported via the "shadow economy". So, given the increase in population, the state investment in rice production was actually being used to subsidise the maintenance of the private export trade in rice.

This is hardly surprising since, despite a formal "nationalisation" of the land (by the clearly capitalist government of U Nu in 1958, not, as *Militant* claims, the "socialist" Ne Win in 1962) agriculture, the basic economic activity of the country, is still in the hands of smallholder farmers. Earlier this year the government conceded to reality and formally abandoned the state monopoly over the rice export trade.

In total it has been calculated that, excluding the drugs business, the clandestine export of goods has reached a volume of US$ 3 billion per year.This is the equivalent of 40% of the "official" gross national product and leaves out of account entirely the domestic "shadow economy".

Taken as a whole, these figures do not present a picture of an economy whose direction and structure has been radically altered by nationalisation and state planning. On the contrary, they show an economy which, in large measure, simply has not been nationalised or planned.

What we have actually seen in Burma is the failure of a military Bonapartist regime to nationalise and plan an economy. A failure not just to, "scrap every vestige of capitalism" which, in the short term, would be impossible even for a healthy workers' state, but even to take effective and systematic steps to curtail capitalism.

What it did do was launch a xenophobic attack on the largely Indian and Chinese merchant petit-bourgeoisie and attempt, via nationalisation, to regulate and co-ordinate the already existing capitalist economy whilst cutting it off from the direct control of international capitalism.

Not surprisingly what they achieved was not co-ordinated growth but bureaucratic strangulation of the economy. With only 1.7 million of the country's 15.8 million workforce employed in the directly government controlled manufacturing sector the shadow economy began to find ways to operate outside of government control.

## Congress

After ten years of ruling Burma, the Burma Socialist Programme Party held its first (!) congress to review progress. It concluded that little had been made and that it should introduce a series of Four Year Plans to overcome stagnation. The main features of this planning were to be a more efficient system of taxation and, after 1975, a turn to the World Bank and the major imperialist powers for loans.

The principal creditors are Japan, Australia, the USA, Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany and France, countries with whom Burma carries out the bulk of its trade. Those debts now stand at US $4.4 billion, about 60% of its GDP.

Burma's present crisis is not caused, fundamentally, by a crisis of bureaucratic planning such as grips Eastern Europe today. It is the product of the failure of a semi-colonial Bonapartist state capitalist regime to break free of the grip of imperialism, and of the growth of the shadow economy to the point where it is outstripping the official one.

The imperialist powers, especially Japan, are enjoying Burma's difficulties. Like predators they hover over the country demanding the legitimisation of the more dynamic private sector economy and the privatisation of the nationalised sector. Opening up a free market, resource-rich, low wage economy in Burma to super-exploitation by imperialism will not satisfy the needs of the Burmese masses. They will be its victims. Only the full expropriation of capitalism in Burma by a genuine workers' state can resolve the crisis in the interests of those who are at present under the heel of the military regime.■

# The German Revolution

*Seventy years ago this month the workers of Germany overthrew the Kaiser and established workers' and soldiers' councils throughout the country. But the German Revolution which began in 1918 was ruthlessly betrayed by reformism. **Simon Burrows** looks at the early months of that revolution and draws lessons from them for today.*

TOWARDS THE end of the first world war the workers of Russia rose in revolt agaist Tsarism. By October 1917 they had pressed on to establish, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, a Soviet (workers' council) Republic, the world's first workers' state.

This revolution was like a detonator. In its wake revolutionary struggles exploded all over Europe. The most important—for its result affected the fate of Russia and all of Europe for decades to follow—was the German Revolution, which began in November 1918.

Germany was ruled by the old Prussian landowning aristocracy, the Junkers. Their figurehead was the monarch, the Kaiser. Democracy was severely curtailed.

The big German capitalists—who stood to gain through expansion of a German empire achieved through the war—had no need for or interest in achieving a fully-fledged bourgeois democracy. They had become the allies of the Junkers and the enemies of the one consistently democratic class, the workers.

By late 1918, however, it had become clear that despite its firepower and efficiency the German war-machine could not crack the bloody stalemate that the imperialist war had become. The working class, and the workers in uniform in the army and navy, were breaking from the unthinking patriotism that had tied them to the war effort.

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the major working class party in Europe—and the one that betrayed the international working class in 1914 with its support for the imperialist war by Germany—was unable to contain the anger that was rising in the armed forces and the factories.
On 30 October the German High Command issued an order for a final naval assault on the British. Sailors in the northern port of Kiel, outraged by the futility of such an assault, refused to carry out the order. Over 1,000 of them were duly arrested.

## General Strike

Four days later the working class of Kiel came to their support. A general strike was launched and a mass demonstration freed the sailors. Following this success 2,000 armed workers and sailors marched to the town hall, occupied it and established a workers' and sailors' council. This took over control of the city. The German revolution had begun.

From Kiel the workers' and soldiers' council movement—undoubtedly inspired by the Russian revolution—spread rapidly throughout Germany. In Bavaria a socialist republic was declared.

In the industrial heartland of the country, the Ruhr, factories, armed units and whole towns were brought under the control of the councils. By 7 November the revolution reached Berlin. Strikes and marches in the capital culminated in a massive demonstration outside parliament, the Reichstag, on 9 November.

The old rulers were terrified. The scope and strength of the revolutionary movement led them to panic. The Kaiser abdicated and the question of the Republic was poised point-blank. It was at this point that they turned to the SPD to save them from the insurgent masses.

Just as they had obliged the bourgeoisie in 1914, so in 1918 the SPD—the archetypal social democratic reformist party—came to the rescue of capitalism once again.

Faced with the mass demonstration and desperate to contain it, Scheidemann, an SPD leader, declared the Republic from a Reichstag balcony.

But Sheidemann's action did not mark his sudden conversion to the revolution, despite him being attacked by other SPD leaders for his impetuosity. It was rather a calculated attempt to demobilise the mass movement that had made the declaration of the Republic an inevitability. From that point on the SPD strove to preserve the bourgeois Republic from the working class which was clamouring for a socialist one.

November 1918 created a situation of dual power in Germany. Workers' and soldiers' councils existed as one pole of administrative and military power. The new SPD government, based on the machinery of the capitalist state, parliament and the military general staff formed the other. Such a situation was, of necessity, unstable. The struggle that ensued was dominated by the conflict between these two centres of power.

In the first phase of the revolution the overwhelming majority of workers and soldiers looked to the SPD as their party. Despite its betrayals, its organisational strength and its socialist traditions had enabled it to maintain this allegiance. The influence of the revolutionary left, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, was marginalised. Thus, when the party formed a cabinet made up of SPD members alone the Executive Committee of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' council recognised the cabinet as the "Council of People's Representatives".

Using this authority, the SPD began to campaign for the closing down of the councils, establishing the supremacy of a National Assembly (parliament), and restoring order in the armed forces.

By thus placing themselves completely at the service of the bourgeoisie the leaders of the SPD revealed once again their fundamentally pro-capitalist nature.

In Berlin the SPD moved quickly to try and close down the councils. The SPD dominated Executive Committee declared, as early as 11 November:

"All provisionally formed bodies in Greater Berlin, dating back to the beginning of the revolution, including those called workers' and soldiers' councils . . . are now defunct."

But the combativity of the working class itself prevented the SPD from peacefully carrying through their goals. As the revolution unfolded they proved themselves willing and able to secure their objectives by ruthless and bloody counter-revolutionary measures.

In Russia, the Bolshevik Party—armed with a programme for power and rooted in the workplaces—was decisive in 1917 in leading the revolution forward and defeating their own reformists, the Mensheviks. In Germany in 1918 no such party existed.

To the left of the SPD stood several groups. The Independent Social Democrats (USPD) led by Hasse, Kautsky and others, were the largest. They were also the most irresolute, offering from the beginning to bury their differences with the SPD and support the government. In a word, they were centrists of the classic sort, vacillating all over the place and useless in the revolution.

The key problem that both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries faced was resolving the dual power. This meant a workers' council republic or a parliamentary republic. The two could not coexist. Caught in the middle of this debate the USPD, through Kautsky, urged the combination of the two! He wrote:

"Therefore, it is not a question of national assembly or workers' councils, but both."

The USPD's attempt to combine two different types of state was an attempt to harmonise two antagonistic classes. They failed miserably. Their best elements joined the Communist Party while their right-wing rejoined the SPD. The most decisive force on the left was the Spartakist group, the forerunner of the Communist Party, led by Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

## Vanguard

The Spartakists, who rallied many of the best revolutionary young workers to their ranks, especially in Berlin, represented the vanguard of the revolution. It also represented the political immaturity of that vanguard.

It was not, in the first stages, a party. It had, in many ways, to be built from scratch. Moreover, despite their brilliance and revolutionary courage, Luxemburg and Liebknecht did not have a clear programme for victory, nor really the means of hammering one out. They lacked both the organisational and political advantages that stem from a previously built revolutionary party.

Liebknecht tended towards voluntarism, believing exhortation and example (he was a marvellous speaker and tireless agitator) would activate the masses. Luxemburg tended to view the very presence of the masses in the revolutionary process as a guarantee of victory. After a series of economic strikes exploded in December 1918 Luxemburg, speaking for the newly formed Communist Party (KPD), declared:

"By its mere appearance on to the scene of the class struggle, the proletarian mass has skipped over all the revolution's shortcomings."

The vanguard, then, was ill-equipped to weather the storm that was about to break. Knowing that the Spartakists were still too weak to stage a successful uprising the SPD government decided to act. It knew full well that the strike movement would strengthen the Spartakists and jeopardise its counter-revolutionary moves.

Unable to use the regular army it built up the Freikorps, staffed by the most reactionary dregs of the professional soldiery, many of whom later became ardent Nazis. Following an armed clash with sailors in late 1918 it prepared to strike a death blow against the Spartakists and the revolutionary workers of Berlin.

In early January a poster appeared on the streets of Berlin. It was issued by the "Front Soldiers" and declared:

"Workers, Citizens:

The Fatherland is close to destruction. Save it! It is not threatened from without, but from within, by the Spartakus group.

Murder their leaders! Kill Liebknecht! Then you will have peace, work and bread."

## Provoked

A few days later the first stage of the counter-revolution began. The SPD deliberately provoked the workers of Berlin by dismissing a USPD police chief, Eichorn, from his post. When he refused to give up his post a general strike engulfed the city and a crowd of 150,000 gathered outside the police building.

The KPD, revolutionary shop stewards and USPD of Berlin immediately formed the Revolutionary Committee to meet the challenge. As the SPD threatened force to remove Eichorn, Noske, another SPD leader, placed himself at the head of the counter-revolutionary troops. Noske grimly declared: "Somebody must be the bloodhound".

This situation was unfavourable to the Spartakists. The bulk of the city's troops were confused and not ready to engage in a struggle for power. A defensive action was clearly necessary in the face of the SPD attacks. Such action may have won the support of the troops. But a struggle for power was premature.

Yet, the Revolutionary Committee decided to go on the offensive and launch a rising. As a result many of the city's regiments declared themselves neutral in the ensuing battle between the revolutionaries and the Freikorps.

On 7 January numerous key buildings such as telegraph stations and newspaper buildings were occupied. The call for a demonstration that day was heeded by 500,000 workers, many of whom were armed. But then the Revolutionary Committee hesitated and left the crowd standing in the cold, which dampened the enthusiasm of the Berlin masses. When the USPD then betrayed the revolutionaries by entering into negotiations with the SPD, much of the impetus of the previous few days was lost.

In the final battle for Berlin the Spartakists and the workers who supported them fought a heroic battle against the Freikorps, but they were isolated and overwhelmed. The reformists danced with delight. In an orgy of violence following their victory they gave the Freikorps leave to murder Luxemburg and Liebknecht and a host of other communists. Reformism was happy to drown the revolution in blood, smashing in the brains of the finest and most courageous class fighters in the process.

While we will never forget the martyrs of the January rising, the eagles as Lenin called them, we will honour them by taking to heart the lessons of their defeat. The counter-revolutionary character of reformism, the uselessness of centrism for the purposes of revolution and the centrality of building a revolutionary pary are those lessons. And by remembering them we will ensure that one day the murders of Karl and Rosa will be avenged.■

# WHERE WE STAND

**WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.**

**Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.**

**Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.**

**The Labour Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party and the LPYS, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.**

**The misnamed Communist Parties are really Stalinist parties—reformist, like the Labour Party, but tied to the bureaucracy that rules in the USSR. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) inflicts terrible defeats on the working class world-wide.**

**In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations.**

**In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.**

**We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions and councils of action.**

**We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.**

**We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.**

**In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.**

**Workers Power is the British Section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.**

**The MRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.**

**If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!**

# The Unions

**EVER SINCE 1979 the Tories have been engaged in battle after battle to break the power of organised labour.**

They knew that the strength of the unions was a potential obstacle to their plans to restructure British capitalism. They introduced a series of laws aimed at outlawing effective trade unionism. They targetted key groups of workers for decisive trials of strength. The trade union chiefs have been shoved out of the corridors of power.

What have been the effects of the Thatcher years on the organised labour movement? How close are the Tories to achieving their goals?

It is beyond question that the numerical strength of the trade unions has declined consistently throughout the 1980s. Back in 1979 over 50% of employed workers were in TUC affiliated unions. Now that figure has dropped to less than 38%.

## Recruitment

The Tories' attacks on the heavy industrial and manufacturing sectors have also cut into the recruitment base of a number of traditionally important unions. The NUM has lost over 60% of its members. The AEU had lost close to 30% and the TGWU 33% by 1986. Unionisation in the new industries and the banking and finance sector has not kept pace with these losers.

Trade union density in Britain is now lower than in Belgium, Scandinavia, Australia or New Zealand. However these figures must be seen in perspective. The 1970s was a period of unprecedented growth in trade union membership in Britain. It grew uninterruptedly from 1968 to 1979. In fact today's figures show trade union density, not at an all time low, but back to the 1968 level.

An important feature of the growth of trade unionism in the 1970s was the extension of shop steward organisation to new sectors. In the first half of the 1980s this process continued among certain sections of the workforce. Overall between 1980 and 1984 the number of shop stewards grew by 6% at a time when the unions' numerical strength was in decline.

The 1986 *Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* showed that the number of stewards had grown by 31% in the public sector, by 18% in private services while falling by 27% in manufacturing. This reflects very real changes in the structure of British industry but also the continued resilience of shop steward based organisation.

## Traditional

In the manufacturing sector there has not been any significant erosion of traditional collective bargaining. A recent CBI survey found no significant changes in the number of workers and workplaces covered by collective bargaining. In 1979, 71% of workplaces and 89% of workers were covered. In 1986 the figures stood at 70% of workplaces and 87% of workers.

What has significantly changed, however, is the number of these collective bargaining agreements that function at a national level. In 1979, 42% of manufacturing workplaces had their wage levels set wholly or partly by national agreements. By 1986 that figure had dropped to 24%. The bosses are taking their cue from the government to scrap national bargaining and introduce regional and plant by plant flexibility.

What is undeniable is that the scale of industrial combativity of those in work has declined considerably. A combination of major defeats inflicted on organised labour and the last years of relative expansion in the economy has ensured that this has been the case.

## Defeat

The first years of Thatcher's rule saw more than 11 million strike days in 1980, over 5 million in 1982 and a massive 27 million in 1984—the year of the miners' strike. The defeat inflicted on the miners proved to be a watershed. In 1986 there were less than 2 million days lost in strikes—the lowest since 1963.

Since that time the number of strike days has remained around that level. The *Employment Gazette* over the last three months has been consistently recording strike day figures of 2.1 to 2.2 million for the previous twelve months. In general there is a tendency for this year's strike figures to be down on last year's and for those figures to be extremely low compared with the average for the last ten years.

However, it is important not to draw one sided conclusions from statistical evidence of declining union militancy in the workplaces. If we look at the figures for the last ten months, February stands out as a month of dramatically increased strike activity across the whole working class.

In the metal, engineering and vehicles section the strike figures for February were the highest for any month in the 1980s. In the mines the monthly figures recorded were the highest since the miners' strike. It was a month in which there was not only a range of disputes and evidence of combativity, but also one where the Ford workers won major concessions from their bosses which other employers are still having to pay for.

The overall downward trend should not blind us, then, to the very real outbursts of class resistance to the bosses. The disputes in the NHS, the Post Office's flare-up in September, spontaneous walk outs over the GCHQ sackings all bear testimony to the very real anger and hostility that exists.

Nor should the statistics blind us to the fact that it is still in the key centres of manufacturing that the major resistance has been fought. In the twelve months to June over a third of recorded stoppages were in the car industry and the mines.

## Assessing

Across the board there has been a tendency for strike figures to increase after a very real lull in April and May. In April there were only 10,000 recorded strike days in metal, engineering and vehicles after the 380,000 high in February. By June the total was 229,000.

Another factor must be taken into account in assessing the mood of militancy amongst unionised workers. It is true that the successive defeats inflicted on traditionally well organised workers like the printers and miners have served to lower many workers' confidence. This is all the more so given that the union officials consciously attempt to hold up the miners, the seafarers and the printers as examples of how workers cannot fight the Tories and win.

But it must also be remembered that over the last years many workers have seen their wages increase without having to struggle hard to win them. Many orgainsed workers have managed to take their cut from the expansion of the economy over the last period.




*In her third term Thatcher is pressing on with a series working class. In these two articles we look at what s movement is in to resist. **Dave Hughes** and **Colin Ll** leadership in the unions and the Labour Party is the k and revolutionaries today.*

# THE STATE OF THE M

**IN THE last forty-five years there have been only two types of political and economic situation when the ruling class has been obliged to utilise a Labour government.**

**At the end of the war, and again at the height of the working class offensive of the early 1970s, the bosses used Labour to head off and contain mass mobilisations of workers.**

**In the mid-1960s a different situation existed. The jaded Tory government was incapable of spearheading the modernisation programme capitalism required. Labour, under the leadership of Wilson, willingly put itself forward to do the job through the structural reforms of a "technological revolution".**

**Neither of these situations exist today. The Thatcher decade has witnessd the defeat of section after section of workers as the Tories carried through a massive re-structuring of the economy at the workers' expense.**

**The employers have no need for a Labour alternative to Thatcher. This is the root of the crisis of direction gripping every layer of the Labour Party.**

**Why is the ruling class so wary of Labour, a party that has steered capitalism through so many stormy periods? The answer was illustrated at Blackpool, to the delight of the Tory media, in the clash between Ron Todd and the Kinnockite leadership. Labour is not just a ruling class party—it is also a party created, financed and influenced by the trade union bureaucracy.**

**In the early 1980s a disconcerted union bureaucracy temporarily broke with the PLP leadership and opened the door to a policy and constitutional reform offensive by the Bennite left.**

**The Bennites were not successful. But the turmoil that existed, mainly as a result of the union leaders exacting revenge on Callaghan for his snub to them during the last phase of the wage cutting "social contract", convinced the bosses that the unions hold on Labour had to be decisively weakened.**

**They know that they might need Labour as a credible alternative to Thatcher at some point. They want to ensure that such an alternative is a reliable capitalist party.**

**One possibility, opened up by the defection of leading right-wingers to form the SDP, was the re-creation of the Labour Party without a direct link to its mass working class base. An alternative route to the same destination is that charted by Kinnock and his trade union backers. It consists of the voluntary weakening of the bureaucrats' grip on Labour and a political conversion to the "realities" of British capitalism after nine years of restructuring by Thatcher.**

**Just how far along this road Kinnock has gone was displayed at Blackpool. Kinnock and Hattersley scored a 10 to 1 victory over the left in the leadership elections. They passed seven policy review documents, with near unanimous support from the union bureaucrats, signing away any commitment to renationalisation, to scrapping the anti-union laws, to full employment or to restoring local government services and democracy.**

**The conference rubber-stamped constitutional changes which give more power to the Labour leadership, whilst allowing them to appeal over the heads of active members and union leaders alike to a passive, "paper" membership.**

**Given these victories for Kinnock, what was the significance of the row between him and Ron Todd, and the two policy defeats—on unilateralism and Employment Training (ET)—inflicted by the soft-left union bureaucrats?**

**Much more than any determination to fight, these defeats for Kinnock revealed the limits of the union bureaucracy's flexibility. Kinnock and Gould may wish to abandon the rhetoric of class, but the class struggle—even in the attenuated form of wage bargaining and recognition agreements—is the meat and drink of the union bureaucrats. They live at the interface between workers and employers. And they lead workers' organisations which even now retain enough democracy to deliver setbacks to their best laid bureaucratic and class collaborationist plans.**

**Todd's public split with Kinnock set many hearts beating in the Labour left. It raised the possibility of the break up of the centre-right coalition that keeps Kinnock in power. It revealed the reluctance with which Bickerstaffe, Gill, Dubbins and co preside over the sloughing off of Labour's trade union and working class image. But the results of the leadership elections and the policy review votes reveal they have no alternative. Only the speed is unacceptable to the left union leaders not the direction of travel.**

## The Labour Party

**What are the chances of success for Kinnock's strategy? The single perspective of the Labour leaders, outlined by Hattersley even before the 1987 election, is of an economic crisis which demands economic measures so severely at odds with the Thatcherite programme that the employers are forced to look beyond the ranks of the Tory Party.**

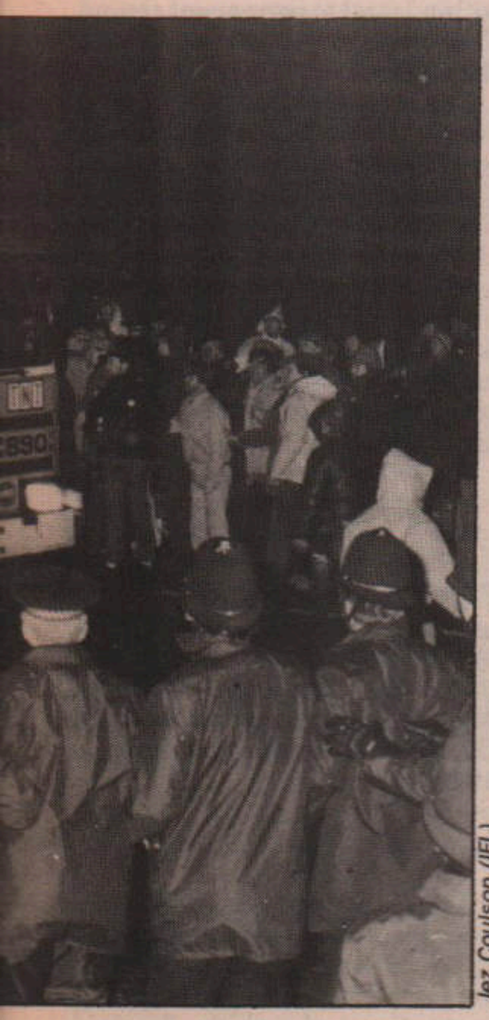
**This scenario leaves out the fact that, having inflicted defeats on the working class, Thatcher has even greater scope to make workers pay for a recesssion than she did between 1979 and 1982.**

**The return of slump economist Alan Walters, the hue and cry against inflation, the strident and jingoistic proclaimations against a united Europe and a renewed armoury of repressive measures all signal Thatcher's willingness to subject the British economy and the working class to yet another period of "restructuring" should either the world or the British economy go into recession.**

**The TGWU leadership the most powerful in the Labour Party, entered the Blackpool conference after a year of such "setbacks". Its recommendation to settle with Ford in February led to a massive and partially successful strike. Its NEC elections saw a key Kinnockite unseated by a Dagenham strike leader and a soft-left majority installed.**

**Under this pressure on the one hand, and the increasingly open attempts by the EETPU/AEU/Labour right campaign to install a more loyal leader in the TGWU, Todd was forced to break with Kinnock, not on minor questions, but on two key planks of any modern capitalist programme for Britain: nuclear weapons and compulsory cheap labour schemes.**

**Only a working class strong**



Jez Coulson (IFL)

*of vicious attacks on the ort of condition the labour d argue that the crisis of y problem facing militants*

# OVEMENT

Since 1982 average earnings have been rising faster than inflation. In July, with inflation hovering around 5%, average earnings were recorded rising by 9%. They have been rising slightly higher in productive industries than the service sector, that is for those workers most likely to be unionised and covered by collective bargaining agreements. In their pursuit of markets and profits, manufacturing employers have often been prepared to make wage concessions rather than risk disrupting production.

In manufacturing, wages are not only rising faster than inflation, they are rising faster than increases in productivity. In the year to May, wages and salaries per unit of output in manufacturing industry increased by 2.5%. This is a price the employers are prepared to pay in current conditions of expanding production.

Any sign of the economic bubble bursting and the employers would have to clamp down harder on the wages front. They want the government to set the pace by holding the line on public sector wage levels in this negotiating round.

### Gains

But at present we should not be blind to the reality of gains that many workers have secured also accounting for the low level of recorded strike militancy. A disproportionately high number of strikes at present are precisely over questions of conditions of work, over disciplinary codes and management procedures rather than pure wage issues. This is noticably the case, for example, in the Post Office over the last year.

If a wages offensive is launched by the bosses there is every reason to expect fight-backs to take place. Car workers have had an annual increase in wages of 14.1%, engineering workers of over 8%. These workers cannot afford to see these increases taken away from them.

In such struggles, and in others that are and will continue to take place over jobs and conditions, a new layer of rank and file militants will be constructed. If such militants are to thwart the bosses' offensive they will need to organise against the backsliders in their own ranks. Principally, this means organising to fight the trade union bureaucracy.

The response of the trade union leaders to the Tory offensive has been one of humiliating retreat and capitulation. They offered the flag of surrender but neither Thatcher nor the bosses would deign to accept it.

### Isolation

They left the steelworkers, the miners, the printers and the seafarers to isolation and defeat at the hands of the Tories. And despite all their cringing they got no gratitude from the government.

With declining membership rolls and less partners for negotiation and collaboration the trade union bureaucracy is experiencing a deep identity crisis after heady days in the corridors of power in the 1970s. And they cannot console themselves with the prospect of a Labour Government coming to power and restoring their prestige.

Their major concern has been to devise means whereby they can shore up the flow of revenue that guarantees their salaries. First and foremost in their plans have been attempts to streamline and merge their apparatuses.

### Unseemly

Secondly, the rival general union bureaucracies have set off on an increasingly unseemly race to secure franchises from the bosses for green field sites. And in each case this has meant competition between the bureaucracies as to who can promise the worst terms for a workforce that does not even exist when the deals are being struck.

The EETPU is doubtless ahead by a length. But the GMB, TGWU and AEU are all jostling for second place, or even trying to overtake the openly scab union.

Little wonder that the central TUC sees less and less of a role for itself except as an arbitrator in recruitment battles between ever larger competing general unions. And little wonder that the government sees fit to ignore its opinions, however New Realist they may be.

The crisis of British trade unionism is at its sharpest at the top. That is where the will to resist the Tories and the bosses is weakest. Their minds are on other things. Below, the bedrock organisations remain intact.

### Victories

Some partial victories have been won—at Fords, Vickers and elsewhere. These show the potential strength of a mobilised rank and file. But there remains a real crisis of leadership at this level of the movement too. The general mood is one of retreat and no militants are organised to stop this retreat.

Resolving the crisis of leadership at a rank and file level is inextricably tied to building a new leadership for the labour movement. Only a new revolutionary leadership can organise to turn the tide on the Tories and the bosses. If it is not built then the bosses will push ahead with deunionisation and the further demoralisation of the unionised workforce.

**There is no time to lose if we are to stop them.**

**enough to resist another round of closures, redundancies and service cuts could make the bosses reach for Kinnock. But it is precisely the independent mobilisation of workers that Kinnock and the TUC have been working to undermine since the miners' strike.**

**If the prospects for Kinnock's project are bad, what of the "soft" and "hard" wings of the Labour left?**

**At Blackpool the victories for the soft-left on unilateralism and ET were delivered by a section of the bureaucracy signalling its grudging collaboration with the rest of Kinnock's programme.**

**In the PLP and Labour councils there exists a whole layer of former lefts, forced into "realignment" with Kinnock after the miners' strike. This layer, extends from Campaign Group members like Clare Short who refused to support Benn, right into the Kinnockite camp of Harman, Ruddock and Robin Cook.**

**Their stance was summed up by Ken Livingstone who said "Kinnock has a mandate to win the next election". The clear implication is that the price of another defeat will be an end to the centre-left coalition that gave him that mandate.**

**Meanwhile it is in the very same soft-left circles that popular-frontism—"all party opposition"—is most fashionable. Reared in popular-frontist bodies like Anti-Apartheid, CND, Amnesty International and the "Save the GLC" campaign many of the soft left politicians have a natural affinity for cross-class politics. Ex-Tribunite Ben Pimlott recently announced the launch of a "rank and file" co-ordinating body between Labour, the SLD and the SDP.**

**As for the Bennite left itself, it is now more marginalised than ever. The scale of its defeat in 1988 was the bitter fruit of its refusal to fight to the finish against the right in the early 1980s and its refusal to challenge Kinnock for leadership when he was betraying the miners strike.**

**Faced with isolation the Bennites are consoling themselves with the role of custodians of Labour's "socialist principles". This wing of the left is now seeking sanctuary in the interminable discussions of big ideas at the regular national and regional "socialist conferences".**

**Reformism is at an impasse. Capitalism is not deep enough in crisis for the bosses to need Kinnock; the working class is not combative enough to propel Livingstone or Benn into the limelight. As Labour Party activists retreat to the quiet of single issue politics, or to the solitude of personal life, the working class itself is faced with a class wide offensive.**

**The perspectives for reformism are bleak. But there would be cause for despair only if the Tories abolished the class struggle. They haven't, and they never will. In the face of the new offensive, sections of workers will fight back.**

**Winning battles will be hard, harder than in the 1970s. But in those battles new militants, new class fighters, new haters of Thatcher and of capitalism, will emerge. Reformism offers them defeat and despair. Revolutionary Marxism offers them a strategy for victory over the bosses.**

**The task today is to intervene in the crisis of reformism and in the class battles ahead, to rally such fighters to Marxist strategy, to forge with them the only credible alternative to Thatcher and Kinnock—a new revolutionary combat party.■**

# IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM



## The Plan and the Market

**THE MARKET is back in vogue again for labourism and Stalinism alike. The new chief of ideology in Gorbachev's Politburo said recently that the law of supply and demand is "an essential condition for the management of the economy". Closer to home Neil Kinnock lectured delegates to the Labour Party conference that "there is only one economy in Britain, a market economy . . . it will be the one we have to deal with when we are elected. And we have got to make it work better than the Tories make it work".**

**Of course, the architects of "perestroika" and "new realism" do not approve of the operation of a totally free market. The kind that so ruthlessly puts profits before all else that workers lives are sacrificed, whether spectacularly on oil rigs or every day on building sites throughout the country.**

**No, our recent converts want to marry the market with social justice.**

**Kinnock wants "competitiveness and individualism" without the "grub of greed". Gorbachev hopes the economic efficiency of the market can overcome the stagnation of bureaucratic planning in the USSR. In short, they want to regulate the market and put it to work for the good of the majority.**

**Marxists reject this view not out of attachment to some piece of outdated dogma but because a hundred and fifty years of history prove it cannot work.**

**In the first place a long history of state intervention in the capitalist West has proven unable to abolish the business cycle with its periodic overproduction, recession, bankruptcies and mass unemployment. This is because production for the market is production for unknown people in unknown quantities.**

### Expanding

**In the upward phase of a cycle firms over invest to take advantage of expanding demand and this leads to overproduction. If prices or purchasing power fall then large quantities of commodities cannot be sold at the average rate of profit which is the whole purpose of production under capitalism. Consequently, bankruptcies, unemployment and attacks on wages are structural and recurrent features.**

**Of course, governments have often tried to mitigate the effects. But this is nearly always after the crisis has occured. At best this damage limitation postpones or redirects the crisis to another point in the system.**

**The Labour leadership have a basic belief that a certain amount of state provision is necessary for the poor and elderly but that the market is in general an efficent provider of consumers needs.**

**This is simply untenable. Marxists argue that a workers' state should set aside enough resources to provide a basic level of adequate food, housing, leisure, health and educational facilities. In the past this was even accepted by many non-Marxist socialists. If this was done then this would account for the vast bulk of present consumer spending, possibly 90%. Would this reduce the consumer's choice?**

**Under capitalism consumer choice is often a fiction. Ordinarily the profit motive for production restricts choice. We only have to consider the example of *News on Sunday* where hundreds of thousands of people in Britain were denied the choice of a leftish newspaper because it could not attract advertising revenue.**

**Meanwhile, the newspaper industry is a good example of how the operation of the market automatically and inexorably leads to the disapearance of small enterprises and the concentration of production in a few hands which reduces real choice.**

**Nor does the market use resources rationally. Companies waste enormous resources on persuading us to buy something and even to dispose of a perfectly good item in the name of fashion. If these resources were redirected they could be used for the social good and real consumer choice could be tested out without the pressure of the profit motive.**

**Many workers are, of course, cynical as a result of the experience of bureaucratic planning in the USSR and Eastern Europe.**

### Experience

**The early experience of the degenerate workers' states indicates that even the bureaucracy can achieve impressive results by allocating resources in the heavy industrial sector. But when it comes to consumer goods the absolute disregard of the wishes of the people, together with the chronic lack of investment in transportation and distribution has inevitably produced shortages and poor quality goods.**

**Genuine planning requires that the plan is controlled by the toilers themselves. At the very top it is only necessary that social resources are allocated in proportions to the basic subsectors of the economy. The detailed allocation of resources and the quantities to be produced can then be decided lower down in the system. Planning also requires that education and communication systems are put at the disposal of the whole people and in turn implies shorter working hours in order to make everyone an informed participant at least at some level.**

**In the USSR the introduction of the market will enrich the few and expand choice for a small minority without doubt; but as the history of capitalism shows the condition for this is the creation of a mass of more impoverished workers and regulation of the system through mass unemployment and inflation. Yugoslavia's experiment is living proof of this.**

**In the capitalist west real planning requires the overthrow of the state that enforces and protects the market, the companies and their profits. It requires the establishment of direct workers' management within the framework of a workers' state in which the means of production are nationalised.**

**You cannot plan what remains outside your grasp. The elimination of capitalist private property in the means of production will not produce a realm of plenty for all overnight. First of all scarcity and want will have to be eliminated through a massive expansion of the quality and quantity of production. But only the democratically controlled centralised allocation of resources on a world scale will achieve this.**

**"Market socialism" is the fantasy of those blinded by the temporary success of Thatcherism to the chaos, waste and human misery of capitalism.■**

# The longest war

# TIME TO GO CONFERENCE

OVER THE last few months Ireland has hardly been out of the news. Yet we have heard barely a murmur from the much vaunted "Time To Go Campaign" (TTG) and the "Charter For Withdrawal".

TTG is the latest in "designer" style campaigns on withdrawal from Ireland. It was launched on 29 June by one hundred "notables" including figures from the political, arts and academic worlds. TTG claims that it wants "to develop the debate about how British withdrawal is to be accomplished".

In the context of the new measure aimed to prevent the voice of Sinn Fein being heard, breaking the effect of state censorship is essential. But a campaign that fails to respond to events which demand comment is not worth a great deal. Over the last months a series of operations by the IRA in Britain, Ireland and Europe as well as the SAS assassinations in Gibraltar and Ireland have raised the public's awareness of the war.

What have the TTG campaign had to say? Martin Collins, a prominent supporter of the Charter in the editorial to the October edition of *Labour and Ireland* reports how "Condemnations have rained down like confetti, but where are the positive proposals on how to end the *violence?*" (our emphasis)

### Proposals

We read on to find out what proposals TTG is putting forward. We are informed that "The withdrawal movement is about more than gestures. It is about the search for a solution". But while this search goes on key events have gone uncommented upon, at a time when they have been front page news for months!

The reason for this silence lies within the Charter itself. It is a document that has been carefully crafted to say all things to all people, while skillfully avoiding the key issues of British responsibility for the war in Ireland.

It talks of "wasted years" and "the drain of resources". We are even told that "Britain's presence is part of the problem" and "the major obstacle to negotiating a peaceful settlement". It states how "successive British policies have all failed" and that TTG's starting point is that "there will never be peace while Britain remains in Ireland".

What all these fine words do not state is that the aim of "British policies" is not to bring about a peaceful settlement but to smash the IRA and the nationalist opposition to the sectarian partitioned state. It refuses to put responsibility for the "almost 3,000 dead" squarely with the British government. It fails to clearly state that Britain has no progressive role to play in Ireland.

The Charter bases its whole appeal on "opinion polls" which for more than ten years "have shown that a majority of people in this country favour withdrawal" without even once challenging the fact that most of this sentiment is chauvinistic, based on "get our boys back, leave the Irish to kill themselves".

As such it accommodates to the pro-imperialist sentiments present within the British working class. It fails to challenge even the basic assumptions of British workers that somehow it is Britain's task to find a solution to Ireland's problems.

That is why after twenty years the key task still remains the fight to build a solidarity movement within the British working class based on the demands "Troops Out Now" and "Self Determination for the Irish People as a Whole". To those who say we are sectarian or utopian we answer no on both counts.

"Troops Out Now" and "Self Determination for the Irish People as a Whole" is not Workers Power's complete programme on Ireland. It merely states the minimal basis for principled Irish solidarity work. "Troops Out" embodies a clear statement that Britain is the source of the problem and therefore cannot be part of the solution.

"Now" is unequivocal on when the troops should go because they have no progressive role to play. Any "phased withdrawal" demand leaves Britain with the initiative, and with the ability to arrange a pull out on terms decided by Britain and the loyalists.

"Self Determination for the Irish people as a whole" states that it is they who should decide the future of the Six Counties and they alone. That represents the bottom line for consistent anti-imperialist solidarity work in Britain.

### Campaigns

The only reason they may seem sectarian or utopian demands is because the left in Britain has consistently refused to fight for them and to make such a principled campaign a reality. They choose instead campaigns with fake mass appeal or democratic pretensions such as the "International Tribunal on Britain's Presence" or the "Campaign against Plastic Bullets".

Such campaigns disappear as soon as the bombs go off or a soldier is shot. They woo public figures and so called left representatives who never take their mass following with them when they speak on Irish platforms.

The TTG Charter follows in this discredited tradition. It shamefully evades the key questions raised while sowing illusions in the possibility of building a "popular" withdrawal movement. We urge our readers to get delegated to the TTG trade union conference on 19 November and argue for the building of an anti-imperialist solidarity movement.■

# ISRAELI ELECTIONS
# Which way for Zionism

*Many progressive forces in Israel are pinning their hopes on a return of a Labour government.* ***David Green*** *argues that it is impossible to advocate a vote, however, for Shimon Peres' party.*

"ISRAEL IS the only democracy in the Middle East", or so we are told by Zionism's numerous apologists. But when this "democracy" goes to the polls on 1 November, over 1.5 million Palestinians living under its direct rule will have no right to vote. They are the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and it is the future of this occupation that has been without doubt the key issue in the election campaign.

Israeli society has been shaken by nearly a year of Palestinian revolt, now widely referred to as the *intifadah* (uprising). To the Labour Party, the oldest of the established Zionist parties and partner with the hard-line nationalist Likud in the present National Unity government, the answer is for Israel to end its period of direct rule over the occupied territories. But this does not stem from support for the right of the Palestinians to a state or indeed to any genuine form of self-determination.

### Boycott

It would be impossible to vote for Labour on the grounds that it is socialist. Founded in 1930 and in government from the establishment of Israel (1948) to 1977, the Labour Party grew up as a direct appendage of one of the principal instruments of Zionist colonial settlement, the Histadrut (General Confederation of Hebrew Labour). Its policy of *avoda ivrit* in the 1920s and '30s involved organising a boycott of Arab labour and businesses, driving native Palestinians from employment on the land and in industry, and thereby establishing the basis for a Jewish state *and a Jewish economy*.

Since the 1967 war and subsequent occupation, Arab labour from the West Bank has been increasingly integrated into the Israeli economy. Labour sense a real danger that the Jewish character of the state will be undermined by this process—this is what Labour leader Shimon Peres means when he speaks of the "demographic crisis" facing Israel. His election broadcasts show maternity wards full of Arab babies, "threatening" a future Arab majority. This racist fear leads Labour to seek Israeli disengagement from their current occupation.

In recent years Labour's chosen method of ending the occupation has been the so-called "Jordanian option", a negotiated settlement with King Hussein, whose father annexed the West Bank in 1950. Hussein's close links with US and British imperialism and his massacre of Palestinian fighters in 1970 make him an attractive proposition to Labour as a future overseer of the Palestinians.

Yet in July this year Hussein ended all Jordanian claims to the West Bank, scuppering Labour's key policy just months before the election. So Labour are now calling for a form of election on the West Bank, to enable the population to select representatives to join a negotiating team to discuss the future of the territory . . . with the Jordanian government!

Even with tacit PLO support it is impossible to give support to the project of a mini West Bank state, or vote for Labour because they could help bring such a state into existence. At best it would be a reservation of cheap labour for Israel but with the Arab states now taking over the purse strings.

It would be a slap in the face for all those Palestinians whose land in present-day Israel was stolen from them forty years ago. It would be to consign the Arab minority within Israel to permanent second class status in a state not of their choosing.

Nor does the fact that Labour has close links to Histadrut make it any form of working class organisation, like, for example, the British Labour Party or the West German SPD, thus deserving at least critical support. Whilst claiming to be a trade union, Histadrut is today one of Israel's largest employers with its own industrial conglomerate, construction monopoly and bank.

As we go to press, Labour are running neck and neck with their principal rival and coalition partner, the Likud led by Yitzak Shamir. Formed in 1973 from the old Herut and Liberal parties, Likud is an openly nationalistic and capitalist party. Its first Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, was a leader of the terrorist Irgun gang prior to 1948.

### Resentment

Likud attracts support from oriental Jews, whose concentration in lower paid employment has generated resentment towards the institutions of Labour Zionism, dominated as they are by the Ashkenazi (i.e. European and American) elite. Many oriental Jews regard the increased exploitation of Arab labour as the source of their own upward mobility, allowing their employment as foremen for example. They favour a hardline approach towards the *intifadah* and no territorial concessions. But the Likud's involvement in the National Unity government and its tentative plan for a restricted form of "autonomy" on the West Bank have caused a certain haemorrage of support from Likud towards the parties of the far right.■



Israeli soldier confronting Palestinian demonstrators

# PLO retreat imminent

**TRADITIONALLY THE Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) have never taken sides in Israeli elections. They have had good cause for this. Both Labour and Likud in power have carried out a ruthless and brutal policy of repression, symbolised by Labour Defence Minister Rabin's hardline policy in putting down the *intifadah* whilst sitting in Likud Prime Minister Yitzak Shamir's government.**

**But observers have detected a subtle shift in the PLO's attitude this year. Eager to recognise Israel's right to exist (i.e. to oppress around 750,000 Palestinians in a confessional capitalist state), the Arafat leadership are keen to avoid embarassing Labour prior to the election. The Palestine National Congress has been postponed to enable the expected declaration of a powerless Palestinian government-in-exile to take place *after* Israelis vote on 1 November. The left wing Israeli paper *Al-Hamishmar* even reports secret talks as having occurred between the PLO and Labour to arrange this.**

**Palestinian workers and peasants have nothing to gain from such a conciliationist policy. In the absence of a revolutionary working class party many Palestinian youth repelled by the PLO's accomodationist policy may now turn to the reactionary pan-Islamic organisations who promise a more determined fight against Zionism.**

**Already a growing force in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the fundamentalists—if successful in establishing an Islamic Palestinian state—would enforce the oppression of women and totally supress democratic rights of workers' organisations. To prevent this outcome, in the shock waves that will come in the wake of Israel's election, the Palestinian workers must take centre stage. With a direct class appeal to their fellow workers throughout the region and uncompromising resistance to the Israeli occupation, the Zionist monolith can be shattered.■**

# CHILE

*After Pinochet's defeat the US backed Christian Democrats are preparing a "peaceful transition" which offers nothing to the Chilean working class. **Diego Mocar** explains the background to the present crisis and points to the dangers of the popular front strategy of the Communist and Socialist Parties.*

# BEWARE POPULAR FRONT



**Chilean workers' heroism must not be squandered**

"THAT WAS nice, now the hard bit" was the response of *The Economist* to the opposition's victory over Pinochet in the October plebiscite. The "hard bit" in question for the imperialist bourgeoisie is how to ensure the removal of Pinochet's dictatorship without a mass working class explosion which would threaten the very foundations of capitalism in Chile.

The chances of imperialism achieving this are greatly increased by the strategy of the main workers' parties. The "popular front"—a strategic alliance with so-called progressive capitalists—has already shown its capacity to squander the energy of the Chilean masses. As the Pinochet regime totters this is a noose that will be pulled tighter and tighter around the neck of the Chilean working class. The whole history of the Chilean bourgeois parties which united with the left in the "No" campaign shows that they want only one strategic alliance and that is with US imperialism.

"The Command for a No Vote" which achieved the 55% "No" vote victory is a 16 party coalition which stretches from the centre-right Christian Democrats to the so-called "Marxist" Almeyda socialists—an important faction of the old Socialist Party. The command's whole campaign under the slogan "Happiness is on the way", was designed to re-assure the military and the US imperialists that the opposition to Pinochet offered no threat to the established order.

## Restore

Its spokesperson, Patricia Aylwin is president of the Chilean Christian Democracy. This was the party that actively supported the military coup against Salvador Allende's "Popular Unity" government in 1973. It only broke with the dictatorship when it became clear that Pinochet was not about to quickly restore a parliamentary regime purged of "Marxists" and "communists", that is hand over power to the Christian Democracy.

Since then, the Christian Democracy has set about trying to convince the US State Department to back them rather than Pinochet. Things looked grim in this respect in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan. For Reagan there were "friendly" authoritarian regimes like those of Pinochet and Duarte in El Salvador which could be supported and there were "unfriendly authoritarian regimes" like those of Cuba and Nicaragua which had to be overthrown.

But in the early 1980s prospects for the Christian Democracy began to look up. Pinochet's "Chicago boys", free enterprise economists, had brought Chile's economy down to its knees. In 1982 the gross domestic product fell by over 14%. Amidst a wave of bankruptcies and collapsing banks, major sections of the Chilean bourgeoisie decided the dictatorship had outlived its usefulness. The economic crisis and massive unemployment led to a growing wave of strikes and demonstrations. Between 1983 and 1986 there were a series of mass struggles and general strikes.

Under the pressure of the mass movement the Christian Democrats called for Pinochet's resignation and a Constituent Assembly. But by 1985 they were already constructing a National Accord with the right wing to guarantee a future amnesty for Pinochet's torturers.

These concessions were of no interest to Pinochet. Riding out the economic crisis and taking advantage of the opposition's wavering he waited for the workers to exhaust themselves. They were marched into a series of one day and two day strikes and demonstrations aimed only at strengthening their leaders' hands in negotiations. By the middle of 1985 with the economy recovering, Pinochet launched vicious repression against the mass movement. In August 1985, sixty demonstrators were killed and hundreds injured. The army systematically attacked street demonstrations and invaded shanty towns arresting 15,000 in April and May of 1986.

But if the mobilisations of 1983-86 had ended in defeat for the working class they had delivered a significant "victory" to the Christian Democracy. They had convinced the US administration that Pinochet was a dangerous liability. Recognising that like Somoza in Nicaragua, his intransigence united major sections of the bourgeoisie in opposition with "Marxists" and "communists", the administration set about preventing a "Nicaraguan" debacle in Chile.

By early 1985 Secretary of State George Shultz had classified Chile's regime as one of the "odd men out" in the hemisphere along with Cuba, Nicaragua and Paraguay i.e. "dictatorships" which had to be removed. In spring 1986, the pro-Pinochet US ambassador was replaced by Harry G. Barnes who rapidly made clear to Pinochet the administration's new commitment to "democratic transition". Of course, this transition process had to exclude the "Marxist" and "communist" left. The Christian Democrats quickly danced to the State Department's tune, breaking its alliance with the left and trying to revive the exclusively bourgeois-led Accord.

In September 1986 the Manuel Rodrigues Patriotic Front (FPMR) launched its failed attempt to assassinate Pinochet, an event which was used as an excuse by the regime to launch ferocious repression against all sections of the left and mass movement. The Christian Democrats had proved their reliability by permanently splitting the opposition and isolating the CP and its supporters on the left like the MIR.

## Outraged

While the CP struggled with its internal divisions the Christian Democracy launched itself early on into the plebiscite campaign, relying on the State Department and the US embassy to ensure something of a fair ballot. Pinochet was outraged as the US government carefully circumvented a voter registration system designed to prevent registration by the mass of potential voters. Seeing over $2.2 million being funnelled from US institutions to the bourgeois opposition to ensure "registration and education", Pinochet spluttered in his New Year address to the nation:

"The foreign aggressor who, as an act of revenge or misinformation, is trying hard to aid those who are committing treason against the fatherland".

But it was a strange "treasonous" opposition which celebrated the victory. A few months before the plebiscite, the Christian Democrats had succeeded in splitting the United Left, the successor to the MDP. Almeyda's Socialist Party, a radical party faction and the Christian Left joined the "Vote No" command. In May they issued a joint communique on economic and social measures to be adopted by a future "democratic government". This emphasised in true popular front fashion, that while none of the parties had renounced their "historic projects" they had agreed to "postpone them". Of course, the historic projects being postponed were those which would have offered any lasting benefits to workers. The agreement did however declare,

"We will guarantee private property and will give full backing to all activities or initiatives aimed at increasing investment, productivity and the competitiveness of Chilean exports".

According to the popular front strategy, the working class sacrifices both its "historic project" and immediate interests to the good of removing Pinochet. But without a revolutionary mass movement led by the working class, real democracy cannot be achieved. He had no intention of allowing them a democratic government, whether promising to guarantee private property or not. The 1980 constitution allows Pinochet to stay in power until March 1990. He will then remain as commander in chief for another eight years. He will then become a senator for life. He will be part of the third of the Senate, appointed by the National Security Council, a body dominated by the military. The new civilian president will have no powers to remove any of the heads of the armed forces. To change the constitution requires a two thirds majority of both houses, a virtual impossibility given the built in military appointees.

Did the "Vote No" command use the massive defeat for Pinochet to mobilise the masses against the regime and the rigged constitution? Did it take advantage of the open divisions within the armed forces to launch a general strike with the object of winning over the rank and file soldiers? Of course it did not. As the *Guardian's* Santiago correspondent reported,

"Throughout the night [of the plebiscite] Mr Aylwin and other opposition leaders from centre right to Marxist left called on their supporters not to take to the streets."

The *Independent's* correspondent reported that the "No Command spent most of Thursday trying to defuse huge spontaneous demonstrations". Their "moderation" was rewarded within days by Pinochet's declaration that he was staying and defending his constitution.

## Appeased

The "Vote No" Command, now called the Concertation for Democracy, is currently looking for a consensus candidate to stand for president in the 1989 election. At the same time, they are having discussions with the military about amending the constitution—so far with little success. The model for "transition" favoured by the bosses is that of Spain after Franco. The "Concertation" and the US State Department obviously hope to find a Chilean Adolpho Suarez—the life long Franco supporter who became prime minister on Franco's death. Suarez appeased the military by leaving many of Franco's officers in place and, with the aid of the Spanish Communist Party, demobilised a massive strike wave which threatened the very basis of Spanish capitalism.

The task of the Chilean workers is to prevent a re-run of the Spanish "transition". They must begin by preventing their parties and leaders from endorsing the "consensus" candidate of the US and Chilean bosses.

They must begin the fight now for democratic elections to a constituent assembly. To win that fight they must not only break the alliance with the ruling class parties, but adopt the methods of mass working class action. The general strike, organised by workers' councils in the cities, shanty towns and countryside, defended by workers' militias: these are the only methods that can force the overthrow of Pinochet and his replacement with real democracy.

But alongside the struggle for a constituent assembly, the workers must be mobilised now around a programme which meets their burning economic and social needs.■

**THE STANDARD bearer of the popular front strategy has been the Chilean Communist Party (CP). It has maintained this line throughout several twists and turns in the 1980s.**

**The CP had historically been one of the most slavish followers of the "parliamentary road" and peaceful methods of struggle. They stood on the right of Allende's Popular Unity Government denouncing the more militant rank and file of Allende's Socialist Party as "ultra left" and attempting, unsucessfully, to draw the Christian Democracy into the popular front.**

**In the early 1980s, under the impact of the Nicaraguan revolution and the struggle in El Salvador, the CP adopted a new position. It started talking of the right of people to rebellion, of "many faceted" struggles involving both peaceful and armed actions, of "popular risings" in the urban centres paralysing the country and destroying the regime. By 1983 the FPMR had appeared and was launching a series of armed actions against the military and spectacular sabotage of electricity installations.**

**The CP never abandoned its popular frontist perspective; the overthrown dictatorship was going to be replaced by a "democratic government" involving the "progressive" bourgeois sectors. But its calls to rebellion and armed struggle against the armed forces gained it much support especially amongst militant youth in the shanty towns.**

**1986 saw a sharp internal struggle against this line. By the middle of that year, the Popular Democratic Movement (MDP), which included the CP, the Almeyda socialists and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR—a Castroite organisation), had already accepted the idea of a transitional "emergency" government which would be presided over by a military figure. In August, General Secretary of the Party, Luis Corvalan, had called for a "dialogue with the armed forces" in the Chilean magazine *Ipsi*. This was followed in 1987 by the split with the majority of the FPMR when the party tried to rein in the military action.**

**Nevertheless, the line was not changed overnight. Indeed it would have been impossible to do so without causing a deep internal crisis. For more than half a decade the party had recruited and grown, especially in the shanty towns, on the basis of its militancy and opposition to the regime. This explains the delay in the CP participating in the "Vote No" campaign, a decision it finally took only in June. It also explains the call by Volodia Teitelboim, a CP leader, for a "a popular democratic uprising" to defend the "No Vote" when he returned from exile. But it was a position greeted with horror by the Vote No command and rapidly disowned by the CP.■**

# the MRCI

## NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

*GRUPPE ARBEITERMACHT*

### New pamphlet

IN THE Federal Republic of Germany the Gruppe Arbeitermacht have just published the second in their new series of regular pamphlets which focus on key issues facing the German working class. The main article in this issue analyses the implications of a new bill which proposes to restructure the Federal postal service. *Workers Power* readers would recognise the approach: divide up the existing corporation into three independent components—post, banking and telecommunications—and require each to achieve profitability. These are quite clearly the preparations for breaking up and privatising parts of the service or, as the pamphlet puts it, "privatising the profits, socialising the losses".■

Available from: Postlagerkarte 039964B
2800 Bremen 1.

*POUVOIR OUVRIER*

### The French strikes

DURING THE October strikes in France (see article opposite) Pouvoir Ouvrier intervened in the public sector demonstrations. In a leaflet distributed to public sector workers and to nurses, PO argued for an all out strike in the whole of the public sector. "The aim of the bosses", it argued, "is to divide and rule. The union bureaucrats are playing the same game, through a series of separate days of action with no perspective of victory. We must fight to place the unions at the service of the workers. To do this, everyone should have their union card; remember the union is strength!"

The leaflet went on to argue for mass meetings throughout the public sector and for recallable strike committees to be set up and centralised through a national co-ordination across the public sector. It pointed out that "the bosses and the government are trying to encourage sectionalism, 'everyone for themselves'. In making concessions to the nurses they will talk about the special nature of health workers... Faced with these manoeuvres we must say we are all special cases."

None of the major organisations on the centrist left in France were able to offer any coherent strategy to take the strike forward and generalise them into a struggle to smash the "socialist" government's austerity policies. In a leaflet put out on the 20 October demonstration the French section of the USFI, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire made no mention of the divisive role of the trade union leaders nor did it recognise the need for an all out strike!

The press of the Lambertist PCI and Lutte Ouvriere who even failed to appear on the 20 October demonstration, similarly failed to provide any next steps for the struggle, contenting themselves with general calls to "fight on" against austerity. The same is true of the much smaller Socialisme Internationale (sister organisation of the SWP(GB)) which is still recovering from a recent split. "Follow the nurses' example" says their journal, which goes on to muse "...perhaps the whole of the public sector will be able to profit from the moment by being able to win pay increases which the government has refused to pay for so long". "Perhaps" they will! But "perhaps" revolutionaries should fight for such a perspective.■

*PODER OBRERO*

### Peruvian general strike

PODER OBRERO reports that the general strike called by the CGTP (General Workers' Federation) on October 13 against the APRA government's austerity measures severely disrupted the country. Alan Garcia's government introduced a so called "anti-inflation package" in early September which doubled prices and devalued the national currency by almost half. The strike suffered severe repression. More than 10,000 police patrolling with machine guns and in armoured cars flooded the capital Lima. Police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse strikers in the central square. Students yelled "killers, cowards" as police tore down a banner protesting against the killing of a student on the eve of the stoppage.

President Garcia, a man given to regular bouts of long winded oratory from the balcony of the Presidential Palace seems to have been struck dumb by events. On the same day as the strike, amidst rumours of a military coup and the "retirement" of a leading general, President Garcia made his first public appearance for 33 days. He broke his unusual silence to make a few insignificant announcements, said "thank you" and returned to the Palace refusing to answer questions from the press!■

THIS MONTH we are launching a £3,000 fund drive to finance the MRCI's work over the next six months leading up to a congress of the MRCI. The expense in bringing together delegates from at least three continents will be large. Please give generously. We have received £200 already from a supporter in Geneva. Make cheques payable to:

**Trotskyist International, c/o Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX, England**

**The Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International**

**The MRCI**
Arbeiterstandpunkt (Austria)
Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany)
Irish Workers Group
Pouvoir Ouvrier (France)
Workers Power Group (Britain)

**Fraternal groups:**
Poder Obrero (Peru)
Guia Obrera (Bolivia)
These groups are in the process of discussions with the MRCI with the aim of becoming affiliated sections.

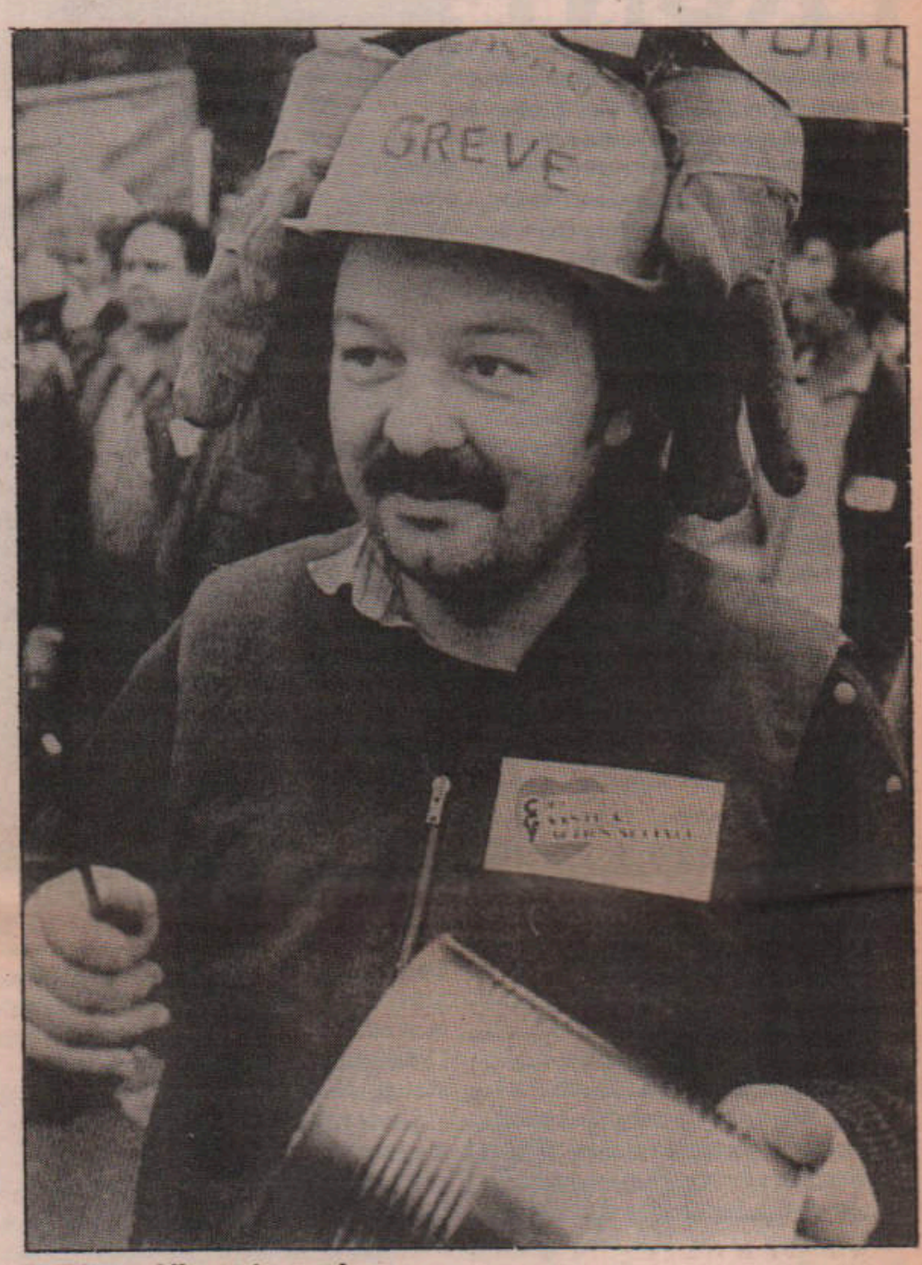
# Strike wave rocks France

*Nurses in France went on strike for three weeks, proving the ability of "caring" workers to take industrial action. Their strike was also, as* ***Emile Gallet*** *explains, part of an explosion of militancy throughout France's public sector.*

THE HONEYMOON is over. Five months after the re-election of "socialist" President Mitterrand, France has been rocked by a wave of protests over wages and conditions, particularly in the public sector where real wages have decreased by 10% since 1981.

The strike wave came at a particularly embarrassing moment for "socialist" Prime Minister Michel Rocard. His government—largely composed of Socialist Party (PS) members, but also including several bourgeois "centrists"—is presenting its budget proposals to parliament, where no party has an overall majority.

Responding to the strikes, some PS deputies have been trying to distance themselves from the government, suggesting that the time has come to make concessions. However the PS leadership, and Rocard in particular, remain unmoved and hope to ride out the storm.



Striking public sector worker

### Challenge

The first major challenge came from the nurses. As in Britain, French nurses have been at the bottom of the heap for decades. Underpaid and overworked, they were ready to fight. At the beginning of October, strike action spread like wildfire through the hospitals, rapidly leading to a national strike. The basic demands were for an across-the-board pay increase of £180 a month and for more jobs.

One of the notable features of the nurses' strike has been the existence of a national rank and file strike committee or "Co-ordination" as it is known. There is no equivalent of the Royal College of Nursing, and the unions—as is generally the case in France—only organise a very small minority of workers. The nurses' strike had enormous strengths: delegates and strike committees were democratically elected in mass meetings, and the delegates to the national Co-ordination were accountable to the rank and file.

However, there were also important weaknesses associated with this new and spontaneous form of organisation. The most striking problem was the absence of a real national strike. Instead, each hospital voted on its own to continue the strike—often on a day-to-day basis. This kind of strike, similar to that organised by the railway workers two years ago, lays the movement wide open to a "back to work" scare mounted by the media. Without a strong national strike, the movement remained weak, no matter how democratic it might have been at a local level.

And, inevitably that weakness led the Co-ordination to call off the strikes after three weeks, weakening the chances of generalised action througout the public sector.

The nurses had already held back from linking their movement with the rest of the public sector. In France all state employees (civil servants, electricity, rail, post, hospitals, education etc) are employed according to the same general contract. Pay and conditions for all these workers have been deteriorating ever since Mitterrand came to power in 1981. It is this possibility of a united public sector fight that has made the government so determined. They say that if they meet the nurses' claim they will have to increase pay for all public sector workers. There is a large amount of truth in this.

### Spearhead

As life got back to normal after the long summer break, a series of local disputes broke out in education, post and public transport. Workers throughout the public sector have seen the nurses' strike as the spearhead of a movement that could reverse the government's strategy of holding down wages and giving handouts to the capitalists. The situation is obviously ripe for an all-out strike throughout the public sector.

Even the unions sense this, and on 20 October they organised the first united day of action for over four years. However, the nurses' Co-ordination refused to participate, arguing that their action was separate from that of the rest of the public sector. This sectionalism, coupled with the fact that para-medical and ancillary workers were not represented in the national movement, shows that the nurses have yet to break out of the "professional" mould.

As for the rest of the public sector, it is not yet clear whether the movement will really take off. The 20 October action was only a partial success: around 40% of public sector workers took part, but the Paris march was a desultory affair, with few railway workers, who have been particularly combative in the past, attending. Further, "days of action" have a notoriously *demobilising* effect if they are not clearly oriented to more decisive and effective action.

The union leaderships have shown no sign of calling an all-out strike, but it remains possible that another initiative as bold as that of the nurses could ignite the whole of the public sector. Both the postal and transport workers are still taking sporadic action. Developing these into national strikes is the key task.

### Strategy

There are important lessons to be learned from this movement, which is far from finished. Most importantly, workers must rely on their own strength and their own organisation, but they also need to be united against the bosses, and armed with a strategy to win.

There should be no question of putting our faith in the election of a "socialist" government. A recent opinion poll showed that 59% of French bosses could see no difference between Rocard's policies and those of his right wing predecessor, Chirac. For once, the ruling class was right. Workers should draw the appropriate conclusions, in France and elsewhere.■

# YUGOSLAVIA
# The dangers of nationalism

*The crisis in the degenerated workers' state of Yugoslavia today is massive. But so are the nationalist dangers facing the working class.. **John Hunt** explains the background to the present situation.*

**A CRISIS of potentially revolutionary proportions is maturing in Yugoslavia. Its bureaucratic chiefs know they can no longer hide the scale of this crisis. They are openly at loggerheads with each other. And the workers are less and less prepared to put up with the declining living standards the regime inflicts on them.**

**What is at stake is whether the Yugoslav workers are able to organise themselves independently as a class and struggle to take power into their own hands. The reactionary alternative is for the working class, like the bureaucracy, to divide along the lines of Yugoslavia's constituent nationalities in the common ruin and break up of Yugoslavia. This is something that only imperialism can benefit from.**

**The roots of the present crisis are to be found in the Yugoslav economic order itself. From 1965 the regime has made a series of attempts to introduce the market as the decisive force in the country's economic life. Successive legislation has given banks and enterprises ever greater freedom to operate independently in the national and international markets. The Yugoslav dinar has been pegged to the major imperialist currencies. State subsidies on foodstuffs and industrial raw material prices have been phased out. This may be Gorbachev's or Thatcher's dream. But it has turned into a nightmare for Yugoslav workers.**

### *Abolished*

Economically the crisis broke in the early 1980s. It had a number of key features. Inflation was running at 14% in 1978 as subsidies and state-set prices were abolished. By 1985 it had reached 80%. Today it is standing at over 200% per annum. Real incomes fell by 30% between 1979 and 1984. Official unemployment totals reached 12% in 1981.

Market reforms had made it far easier for enterprises to borrow on the world market. Correspondingly the Yugoslav economy found itself saddled with a massive debt which, by 1982, was equivalent to one third of the nation's annual gross material product. Today the regime is desperately trying to reschedule its debt repayments. However, only one quarter of the debt is that of the Federal Government itself. One quarter of it was incurred by "independent" enterprises. Nearly one half was incurred by "self-managing" banks.

Market reforms also led to an accelerated differentiation of living standards between the more and less developed areas of Yugoslavia. The central plan played an ever diminishing role in distributing investment funds to the areas of greatest material need. Nowhere was this more starkly the case than in the autonomous region of Kosovo.

In 1945, after the seizure of power by Communist Party led partisans under Tito, a federal republic was created with eight component parts. Six distinct national republics were recognised, those of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovinia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Given the fear of the reassertion of the hegemony of Serbia (a feature of the pre-war Yugoslav monarchy), the Serbian republic was stripped of two regions that were given quasi-republican status. In the north the mixed Hungarian and Serbian area of Vojvodina was given independent regional status. So too was the predominantly Albanian Kosovo region.

As undisputed master of the Yugoslav bureaucracy, Tito was able to preside over the eight government and party units in a decidedly Bonapartist manner. However the decentralising and centrifugal pressures of the market were hitting the functioning of the economy at precisely the time when the Yugoslav bureaucracy's only designated Bonaparte died in 1980. Since that time the federal units that Tito presided over have squabbled ever more as their collective problems got worse. This bureaucratic caste, incapable of cohering itself into an all-Yugoslav ruling class, is falling apart into a series of feuding national castes. Without a Bonaparte over it the Yugoslav bureaucracy has fallen out. This situation poses great openings, yet also great dangers for the working class. The opportunity exists for it to take the road of political revolution to destroy the bureaucracy and transform Yugoslavia into a healthy workers' state. But for this perspective to be realised nationalism must be rejected.

Following the logic of a market economy the bureaucrats of the most developed areas—Slovenia and Croatia—have been demanding more resources for their more productive industries. They have fanned the flames of nationalism against the more backward areas. In the name of "democratic" decentralisation of the economy they object to any centralised direction of resources to the benefit of backward areas such as Kosovo and Macedonia.

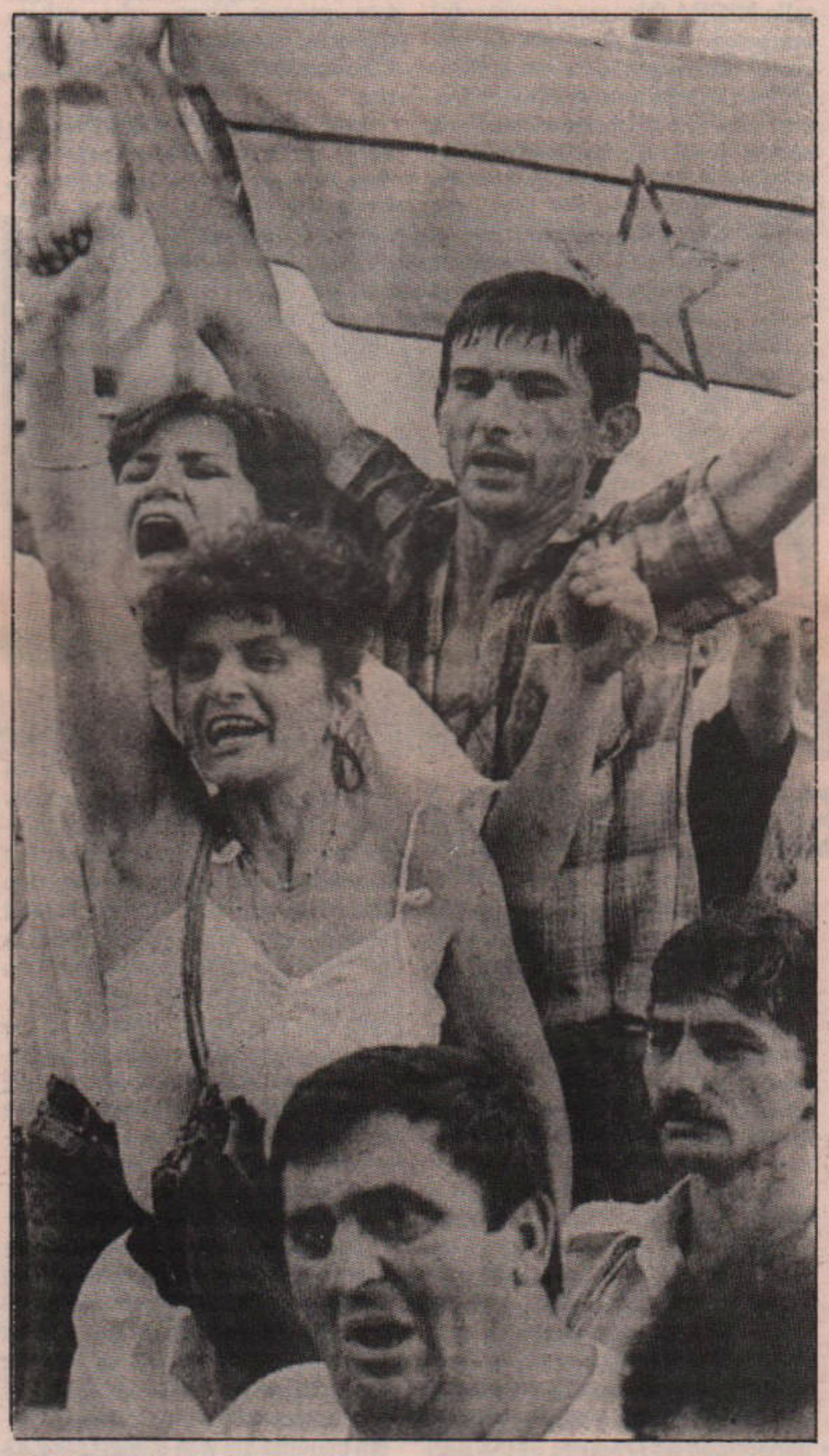
### *Ravaged*

The working masses of Yugoslavia have risen up against declining living standards in general and against market inspired regional differentiation in particular. In 1981 students from the Kosovo capital of Pristina took to the streets. Their living standards were being ravaged by a combination of market forces and anti-Albanian chauvinism. Albanians constitute 77.7% of the Kosovo population. There are 1.7 million Albanians in Yugoslavia, most of whom live in Kosovo. Yet the Albanians are denied the right to be a designated federated nation within Yugoslavia unlike the 577,000 Montenegrins who are officially presumed to be a nation.

In 1954 per capita income in Kosovo stood at 48% of the national level. By 1980 it stood at only 27.8%. Unemployment in the region stood at 27.5% compared with 12% for Yugoslavia as a whole. No wonder then that an explosion of anger against both material hardship and national and cultural oppression of a non-Slavic minority occurred.

The initial response of the regime was to send in troops and militia. Since then, however, the Serbian Communist Party has embarked on a pogromist crusade to end the partial autonomy of both Kosovo and Vojvodina. At its forefront has been Serbian party leader Slobodan Milosevic—"comrade Slobo" to his supporters.

"Comrade Slobo" has authorised a series of anti-Albanian and Greater Serbian demonstrations in Kosovo, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Macedonia. He is campaigning for Kosovo and Vojvodina to be brought back under direct Serbian control on the road to building a Greater Serbia within Yugoslavia. His politics are quasi-fascist. He is prepared to mobilise popular demonstrations around nationalist slogans and whip up pogroms against Albanian and Hungarian minorities. On the one hand his speeches reek of chauvinist memories of when the Serbs beat the Turks back in the 14th century in Kosovo. On the other, they also play on popular hostility to bureaucratic corruption and ineptitude. Milosevic is a Greater Serbian nationalist who stands for even greater freedom for market operations in Yugoslavia. An ex-banker himself, "comrade Slobo" offers only an extreme Serbian nationalist alternative to the plight of the Yugoslav working class. He uses anti-bureaucratic and nationalist demagogy to win support for this project.



Serbian chauvinists on the march

Milosevic's prestige within the Serbian section of the Yugoslav bureaucracy is due, above all, to the fact that his demagogy has the most chance of diverting the rising tide of working class anger in Yugoslavia into reactionary diversions.

### *Confrontations*

Despite the fact that strikes are illegal there have been over a thousand of them in Yugoslavia this year. More importantly those strikes have been over class issues and have led to serious confrontations with the central authorities.

In June workers from the Zmaj truck producing factory in the capital of Belgrade marched to the parliament in opposition to wage cuts. In the same month workers from the Borovo shoe plant invaded parliament in protest at a 30% wage cut. On both occasions workers raised the slogan of "Down with the red bourgeoisie."

Milosevic's limited attempts at mass mobilisation are also threatening to burst out of the strict limits he wants to set on it. In October workers in Titograd in Montenegro were reported as applauding a student who told a mass meeting: "This is not a communist bureaucracy, this is a fascist bureaucracy." Workers from the Titograd Titex clothing factory and the Boris Kidric iron works had come out on strike against a party leadership in Montenegro that is pro-Milosevic. Sent to calm 30,000 iron workers, Montenegro leader Brajovic broke into tears and handed in his resignation to the mass scorn of the workers. He declared:

"As I have to resign, I am proud to hand in my resignation before the workers of the Boris Kidric iron works."

All around him were red flags and banners proclaiming "Long live the working class". The anti-bureaucratic, political revolutionary potential of the Yugoslav working class was there for all to see.

At present the Yugoslav workers' movement is raising contradictory demands. On the one hand the Titograd workers demanded the resignation of their corrupt party leadership and immediate improvements in living standards. With the average industrial wage standing at £57 per month the latter is not surprising. Yet still these same workers were raising anti-Albanian slogans for "order" in Kosovo.

To date Milosevic's gangs have succeeded in bringing down the Vojvodina leadership. President Nandor Major resigned after 100,000 marched in Novi Sacl. Yet his path has been blocked by the Slovene and Croatian leaderships. The October Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist League sacked a key supporter of Milosevic from the Politburo. But in baulking Milosevic the Yugoslav bureaucracy as a whole has no viable or agreed road out of the crisis that it faces.

### *Advantages*

The forward march of Milosevic poses the very real prospect of the break up of Yugoslavia. It would result in a "Greater Serbia" with even more freedom to oppress its Albanian and Hungarian minorities. From the vantage point of world capitalism this has certain advantages that are not lost on its ideologues. The *Economist* last week was openly speculating about the chance that:

"The richest, most self-confident and western-minded bit (Croatia and Slovenia) would break away to form a democratic and free market economy with a population about the size of Switzerland."

Against that break-up the federal bureaucracy can only counterpose more of the same chaos and muddle, or a military takeover. Yet even here Milosevic is on safe ground given that 70% of the officer corps is Serbian.

The only alternative to disintegration, or to Serbian domination in one form or another, is for the Yugoslav workers to seize political power for themselves. They are fighting the material consequences of the effects of the market economy on the degenerate workers' state. They hate the corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy that tries to coexist with that market. It is vital that elements of that bureaucracy do not succeed in poisoning workers with divisive nationalist nonsense. If they do, it will ensure that the bureaucracy and world capitalism continue, hand in hand, to call the shots in Yugoslavia.■

# No new answers

*Twenty Years On*
Edited by Michael Farrell
(Brandon £4.95)

**BY COLIN LLOYD**

ON 5 October 1968 the RUC brutally dispersed a march in Derry called by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). It was a turning point for both the civil rights movement and the Northern Ireland state. The RUC's actions underlined the limits of the Orange state's flexibility faced with a peaceful movement to gain equal rights in voting and equal access to jobs and housing.

The next twelve months saw the mass radicalisation of youth north and south of the Irish border, the formation of Peoples Democracy, the election of Bernadette Devlin to Westminster and the transformation of the movement for civil rights into a mass uprising against the sectarian state. They culminated in the battle of the Bogside in August 1969 which brought British troops onto the streets.

### Establishment

Today many of the participants in the civil rights movement occupy top positions in the Southern Irish establishment and in the SDLP. Austin Currie who hit the headlines then by squatting in a derelict council house, represents the views of this layer when he calls NICRA "the most successful campaign there ever was in Ireland." (*Fortnight*. October 1988)

The contributors to this collection take the opposite view. Each begins from the understanding, drummed into their heads by the batons of the RUC, that the civil rights movement foundered on the irreformability of the Northern Ireland state.

This book contains accounts by nine key participants in the events of 1968. Each of the writers chronicles their experience of 5 October and its aftermath, outlining their view of the results and prospects of twenty years of the national struggle. Twenty years which have relentlessly laid bare the bankrupt strategies of every one of the contributors.

If the book has a central theme it is the disorientation and decline of Peoples' Democracy (PD) faced with "the reintroduction of the gun into Irish politics".

Eight out of the nine contributors were students who took part in the formation of PD in the days following the break up of the Derry march. They themselves fall into two groups; those who subsequently developed into centrist "Trotskyists" and those who did not.

Inez McCormack's contribution very quickly passes from the "heady days" of the late 1960s to the story of her own difficult ascent up the ladder of the NUPE bureaucracy. Of all the political strategies outlined, McCormack's is the most consciously reformist. Having seen the impossibility of reform "from below" after the loyalist backlash of the late 1960s, she has devoted her efforts as a trade unionist to the struggle for "reform from above".

Typical of the centrist strand within PD are the contributions of Geoff Bell and Michael Farrell, both of whom followed PD in its development towards the USFI in the 1970s. Together with Bernadette MacAliskey (Devlin) and Carol Coulter they were part of a nucleus of activists who came from varying political backgrounds to the left of Stalinism; the Derry Labour Party, the Healyite Young Socialists etc. This current sought to bring to the fore in NICRA agitation on social questions like housing and from the beginning they attempted to break catholic workers from "green Tories North and South".

Each of these contributors recount the way in which their attempts to draw protestant workers into these struggles, and to fight for the independent interests of the working class, floundered as the national revolutionary dimension became central after August 1969.



Bernadette McAliskey, Gerry Adams and Michael Farrell

### Reform

Essentially this layer had sought to graft a programme of social reform onto a programme of democratic reform. When the state proved irreformable, and the protest movement was superseded by the armed struggle, "socialism" was pushed into the background.

The only contributor to *Twenty Years On* who was not involved in the launch of PD is Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein MP for West Belfast. He begins with a revealing personal account of the disorientation felt by republican youth as the Stalinist leaders of official republicanism retreated from the armed defence of the ghettoes. But the final part of Adams' chapter is devoted to a systematic outline of his project for a pan-Nationalist alliance to achieve British withdrawal.

In Adams' project "The British government can play a role in persuading members of the unionist tradition that their best interests lie with the rest of the Irish people". It can be pressured into this more easily "if it can no longer count on political support from Dublin and the SDLP." Dublin's "international and diplomatic offensive" can be strengthened by "the international goodwill Ireland enjoys", i.e. the patronage of the US Democratic Party. The only force conspicuously absent from this scenario is the independently organised and mobilised working class, North and South. Just as in the purely military strategy of Adams' predecessor O'Bradaigh the masses are assigned the role of passive onlookers and beneficiaries.

### Tragedy

Michael Farrell draws the logical conclusion of the pan-Nationalist strategy: "The IRA might now contribute more to the building of that [mass] support if they put their armed struggle on hold and concentrated on using the considerable political muscle Sinn Fein has developed since 1981."

The real tragedy of 1968/69 was that there was no Trotskyist revolutionary party in place with sufficient roots in the nationalist ghettoes of the North and the working class centres of the South. Such a party would have started out from a recognition of the irreformability of the Orange state and mobilised the anti-unionist working class across the 32 counties to combine the struggle for democratic rights with the struggle against capitalism.

Such a party would have aimed to smash the Northern state and overthrow the green bourgeoisie in the South, with the methods of class struggle and workers' self defence. It could have drawn the anti-unionist masses behind its banner and prevented them falling under the influence of a resurgent republican petit bourgeois nationalism whose strategy has repeatedly proved incapable of defeating British imperialism.■

# Homosexuality on trial

*Oscar Wilde*
by Richard Ellman
(Penguin £6.99)

**BY MARK HOSKISSON**

NO ONE life better expresses the deep-seated moral hypocrisy of the Victorian age than that of Oscar Wilde. Feted by polite bourgeois society in Dublin, Oxford, London and Paris, he was later to be celebrated as one of the foremost poets of his age. Wilde's downfall following his trial and conviction for homosexuality caused his name and works to be shunned by former friends and foes alike.

Richard Ellman's impressive biography of Wilde, is now available in paperback for the first time. It allows the reader to explore the personal and social tensions which gave rise to themes recurring in Wilde's writings and in his life.

Wilde was born into a bourgeois Irish protestant family in 1854. He went on to study at Oxford and revealed the capacity to take up diverse ideologies, theories, causes and fads. Thus at Oxford Wilde experimented with both Catholicism and Freemasonry, despite their virtually exclusive character. He became a rising star in London's literary and artistic circles partly because of his genuine talent as a writer, partly because of his willingness to court notoriety by scoffing at society's moral values and codes.

The success of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and of his plays *The Importance Of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan* confounded those critics who had thought him a mere charlatan. But, his outrageous behaviour and flouting of conventional notions of the morality of art, earned him enemies within the powerful British establishment. For instance he asserts in *The Decay of Living* that: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all."

Wilde's view of art was seriously flawed. He claimed "all art is entirely useless" and even that "art never expresses anything but itself". Both his rise and his fall disprove this idealist conception of art.

Artistic works do not exist in an ethereal realm divorced from society. On the contrary they have to be understood as products of the society of their time. They are therefore subject to the pressures of society throughout their creation by the artist and consumption by the public. Thus the same Oscar Wilde who had declared during his triumphant tour of America that "the secret of life is beauty" was led through years of persecution and imprisonment to revise his view, arriving at the grim conclusion that "the secret of life is suffering".

### Evidence

In 1895 Wilde was brought to trial for his homosexuality. He had a well-publicised affair with Lord Alfred Douglas. After Wilde unsuccessfully tried to bring a libel suit against Douglas' father, the Marquis of Queensberry, Queensberry with the backing of the police hit back. Evidence against Wilde from male prostitutes was amassed and he was convicted and sentenced to two years hard labour.

Ellman quotes the judge's speech sentencing Wilde. It reveals the vicious hatred capitalist society feels for homosexuality, for a sexuality that challenges its filthy and stultifying moral norms: "It is no use for me to address you. People who can do these things must be dead to all shame, and one cannot hope to produce any effect upon them. It is the worst case I have ever tried . . . And that you, Wilde, have been the centre of a circle of extensive corruption of the most hideous kind among young men, it is equally impossible to doubt."

### Violence

Sex between two men was the horror of horrors. In the same period the brutal capitalist society inflicted misery and poverty on millions of workers. London's young women were forced, in their droves, into prostitution merely to survive. British imperialism was slaughtering its subject peoples in an orgy of violence. Yet Wilde because he had engaged in the mere act of sex with other men, was held to be evil incarnate. What sickening hypocrisy.

And that hypocrisy has not disappeared to this day. Section 28 could very easily be used against Wilde's literary legacy, against public libraries that contain Ellman's biography of Wilde, since, after all, its sympathy with its subject could easily be construed as "promoting homosexuality".

We recommend people to buy and read this book. In it they will find much to learn from. They will also find Wilde's own verdict on his homosexuality:

"It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'love that dare not speak its name', and on account of it, I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine . . . it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it . . . The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it."■

# Prison and haven

***Distant Voices, Still Lives***
**Directed by Terence Davies**

**BY MARK ABRAM**

**NOSTALGIA IS often a safe bet at the box office. Done well, it can be entertaining. But it remains a plea for the values of a (usually) imaginary yesteryear.**

**Nostalgia is absent from *Distant Voices, Still Lives*. Its focus is a working class family in the Liverpool of the 1940s and 1950s. The time and place is only important to the film's strength in that it is when and where Terence Davies grew up.**

**His grasp of period detail is totally assured. He captures it beautifully in shades that somehow mix sepia with those early colour photos of the late 1950s. He also intuitively understands Liverpool humour, a mixture of flint sharp wit and self-depreciation. Whether at the wedding reception, sitting at home listening to the pools results or in the ubiquitous pub, the humour is an essential ingredient of the film. Like the dozens of songs sung by the actors and actresses themselves, the humour binds family and friends together, relieves the gloom and pain of the rest of their lives.**

**But the film is not essentially about Liverpool or the 1940s and 1950s. It is about the reality of the working class family seen from the inside. Davies portrays the family as both a haven and a prison and we understand nothing about the family unless we see both sides. We fail to grasp its durability, how it both scars us and strengthens us. Every scene brings home this contradiction and as a result nostalgia gives way to a study in humanity.**

**The tyrannical father dominates the first half of the film even when he is not on screen. He shapes the emotional landscape on which the whole family lives. He beats his wife and daughter, yet we sympathise with him also as someone emotionally stunted, expressing his love through anger and most at ease with displaying affection when with animals. He too is prisoner of the family.**

**But there is more of the prison than haven in Davies' family and even after his death he continues to shape them. His wife, released from the sharp end of her oppression seems to lack a focus to her life; she is mere observer to her children's lives. One daughter scorns his memory, another weeps for an irreplaceable part of her life. Each one is fated to reproduce the family relations that shaped them. Marriage brings no escape just a change of scenery. The family with its oppressiveness laced with compassion and humour continues.**

**It is a film of rare quality and understanding. Go and see it.■**

# Homophobic "Trotskyism"

Dear Comrades,

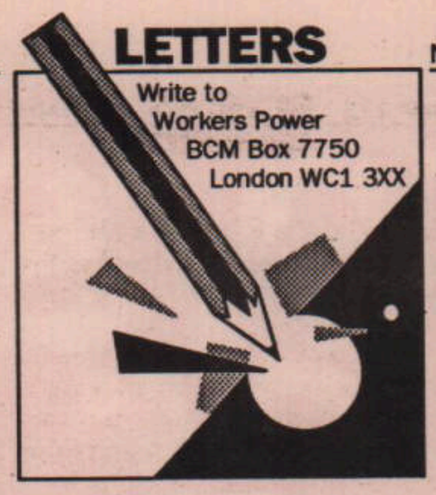
For quite some time now organisations and individuals belonging to the "left" claim they have enriched the revolutionary programme by having introduced the demand of homosexual "liberation". No explanation has been given why such demands should become part of the democratic programme of the working class when even Engels and Lenin called homosexuality a perversion (*Origins of the Family*: Engels says that homosexuality was the ancient Greeks' punishment for the oppression they imposed upon women. Lenin: in a talk with Clara Zetkin 1920).

The working class will never gather itself in an organisation that announces that the "happy future" of mankind will be the generalisation of sexual perversions. Not because the workers constitute a class of "ignorant beasts" or "uncultured primitives" as the petit bourgeoisie likes, self-flatteringly, to think of it, but because this kind of behaviour is in contrast with the working class, with its class nature, because the working class is an extremely social class. It detests all sorts of anti-social behaviour.

One should never argue that problems such as prostitution and homosexuality can be solved by the means of police clubs. But it would be at least strange for people calling themselves communists to accept the "modern" theories of the anarchists and contemporary petit bourgeois currents that these are "democratic rights" along with the "democratic right" of . . . theft!

People who are unable to respect the laws of nature—including their own—are much more unable to respect the laws of society. Not just of capitalist society, but of anyone.

The proletariat defends several social groups that will disappear in socialism, for example, small proprietors. Yet it does not defend the right to small ownership. It defends prostitutes and homosexuals from any unacceptable discrimination and oppression in an analogous way. But the proletariat does not become the defender of prostitution nor of homosexuality. It fights for their disappearance/extinction and for the extinction of any such fruit of the bourgeois brothel. And they will certainly become extinct, along with the overthrow of the state of the monopolies and the restoration of the social




relations which correspond to the human nature—the restoration of communism on the basis of the achievements of modern technology and the sciences.

Fraternally
V N Gelis
N London reader

*We reply*

*Comrade Gelis bases his whole arguement on the belief that homosexuality is "unnatural" and therefore alien to the working class. He takes his ideas not from Marxism but from the propagandists of the bourgeoisie. The family is portrayed by the ruling class as eternal and therefore "natural". This includes the idea of heterosexual procreation, within marriage, as the only natural form of sex.*

*The wide diversity of moral codes in sexual matters throughout history shows how useless the term "natural" is as any sort of guide. Attitudes towards sexual behaviour change as a society changes. Moral codes for regulating sexuality are determined by the needs of the particular society. For capitalism the stigmatisation of homosexuality is determined by its need to defend a bourgeois family ideal as the institution which produces, raises and to an important degree regulates the next generation of workers. Sexual relations between people of the same sex are a threat to the strict demarcation of gender and the sexual division of labour upon which the family is based.*

*Communists do not accept the term "natural" as being a useful description of any aspect of human society. Is it "natural" to live in houses, travel by plane or even wear clothes? The very features that make human beings distinct from other animals include the ability to utilise nature and shape it for our own needs. Human sexuality has never been restricted to procreation, it includes recreation as a major element. Contraceptive methods make non-procreative sex the norm for heterosexuals, and homosexuality is another form of sex for pleasure.*

*Homosexuality is stigmatised by the bosses as a perversion. When we defend the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men we are refusing to allow the bourgeoisie to impose its reactionary moral code on the working class. We are not advocating the "generalisation of sexual perversions", but arguing for people to be allowed to determine their own sexuality. Lesbian and gay liberation means just that—to be free from the repressive strictures of ruling class morality.*

*Legal, moral and religous codes enforce the oppression of lesbians and gay men. The working class is the revolutionary class which is, as Lenin described, the tribune of all the oppressed and exploited.*

*A revolutionary organisation which does not include in its programme the prospect of liberation of all the socially oppressed will not attract the wide support of the working class.*

*We understand that the views of comrade Gelis are not those of the Internationalist Faction, of which he is a member. We hope that his organisation debates his homophobic ideas with him. Such backward ideas were the norm in the WRP of Gerry Healy, from which the IF came. The old WRP clearly accepted bourgeois morality and all its hypocrisy. But real revolutionaries will fight these ideas in every organisation of the working class.*

# Royal soap opera

**Dear comrades,**

**In your review of Tom Nairn's book on the monarchy (*Workers Power* 110), you emphasise the potential use that capitalism could make of the institution "in times of crisis". Surely the more dangerous role of the monarchy lies in its everyday usage as a personification of the spirit of Britain, the one ruling class image that the vast majority of the working class has no hesitation in accepting.**

**The Royal Family may exercise no constitutional authority, but its hold on the public imagination—bolstered by thousands of fawning front pages and by the ubiquitous image of the Queen (on every stamp, every bank note)—makes it the most powerful institution in the country. Thatcher can inspire only a small minority of workers to actually vote for her, but the Royals have virtually unanimous support. The Queen unites the public behind an ideal of Britain as a moderate, civilised place to live—the epitome of a country governed by consent.**

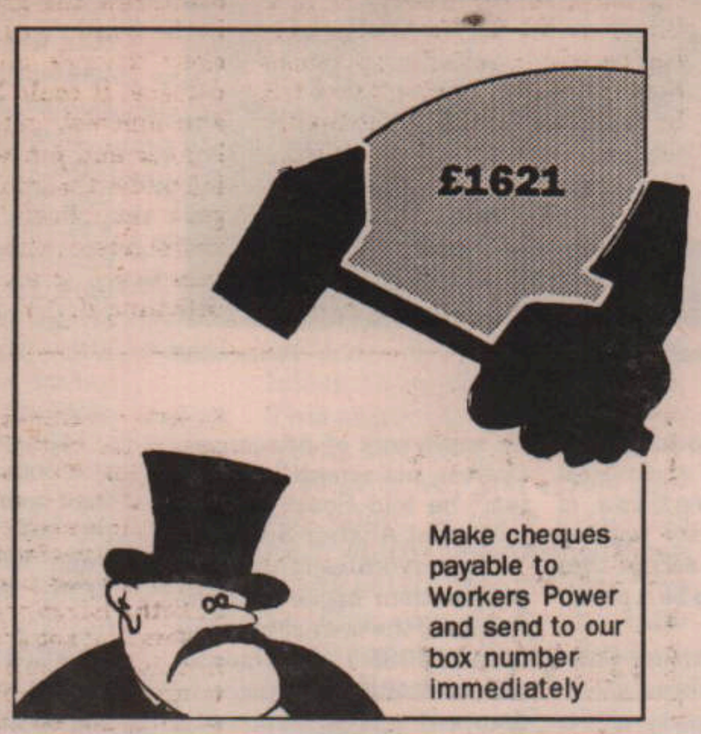
**And the monarchy is used to make acceptable the violence of capitalist repression: the military swear allegiance to the Queen—not to the people—and senior officers are rewarded for their loyalty in the New Year's Honours List; the purveyors of exploitation and manipulation are given the Queen's Award to Industry; and our courageous police officers receive the Queen's Award for Bravery. We all love our Queen, so how can we question the institutions that she commends and that operate by Royal Appointment?**

**Nairn's failure, which you correctly identify, is to think that the monarchy can somehow be abolished by means of a bourgeois revolution; the reality is that only a socialist revolution is capable of breaking the grip of the Royal soap opera on the public imagination.**

**Peace, force and joy**
**George Reynolds**

# workers power

## Fighting Fund




Make cheques payable to Workers Power and send to our box number immediately

**WITH THE expansion of our paper we are faced with new expenses. Over the next six months we will be searching for new premises. In addition we need to maintain the typesetting equipment that previous fund drives have enabled us to buy, and improve upon it. And, inevitably, with inflation creeping up the costs of printing the paper and buying the regular supply of stationery and materials needed to produce it are all rising.**

**To help finance these costs we are appealing to you, our readers. We need your money. And we need it coming in regularly if we are to increase not merely the size but also the frequency of our paper. And a paper like ours, that campaigns tirelessly against the Tories and defends the politics of revolutionary Trotskyism, is needed by class conscious workers, today more than ever.**

**We intend to have a regular six monthly target for the fund drive. When we reach it, as you can see, we all get the satisfaction of seeing a boss given a good clout. Our current six month target is £3,000. To date we have actually raised £1,621.06, with a total coming in this month alone of £714.50. Our thanks to readers in South London (£305), Cardiff (£93), Sheffield (£18), Birmingham (£35), North London (£200) and Reading (£63.50). The other £906.56 was raised over the summer.**

**So, we ask you to rush your donation to the address given on this page. Make cheques and POs payable to Workers Power and please make sure you mark on either the cheques or in an accompanying note that the money is for the paper fund drive since the MRCI has a fund drive running concurrently with this one (see page 12).**

**MANCHESTER MARTYRS MEMORIAL MARCH**
*20 November*
Assemble noon
**Longsight Market**
**Dickenson Road**
**Manchester**

**LAMBETH AGAINST THE POLL TAX**
*Lobby of Lambeth Council*
**Wednesday**
**9 November**
**6·00 p.m.**

# Meetings this month

**Birmingham:**
Public Meeting
*Britain gags Sinn Fein*
Thursday 17 November 7·30
New Imperial Hotel, Temple St

**Cardiff:**
Marxist Discussion Group
*How to fight scab unionism*
Tuesday 22 November 8·00 *

**Coventry:**
Public Meeting
*Chile after the plebiscite*
Wedday 16 November 7·30
The Elastic Inn

**Leicester:**
Public Meeting
*Eastern Europe in turmoil*
Thursday 17 November 7·30
Unemployed Workers Centre, Charles Street

**East London:**
Public Meeting
*Defeat the Poll Tax*
Monday 21 November 7·30
Manor Park Commjnity Centre, High St North, Manor Park

**South London:**
Marxist Discussion Groups
*Crisis in Yugoslavia*
Tuesday 15 November, 7·30
Landor Hotel, nr. Clapham North tube

*The CP's new British Road to Socialism—is the working class finished*
Tuesday 29 November 7·30
Landor Hotel, nr. Clapham North tube

**North London:**
Marxist Discussion Group
*Labour after Blackpool*
Wednesday 23 November 7·00 *

**Central London:**
Public Meeting
*Peru*
Friday 25 November 7·30
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, nr Holborn Tube

* See seller for venue

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workers power

British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

## INSIDE


- Nurses Pay
- Yugoslavia
- Privatising British Steel


# NO PEACE WITH APARTHEID!

SOUTHAFRICA'S local elections have solved little for P W Botha. The President was hoping that black participation in voting for town councils linked to Regional Service Councils would help to develop a layer of black politicians with popular support who would collaborate in reforming apartheid without demanding black majority rule.

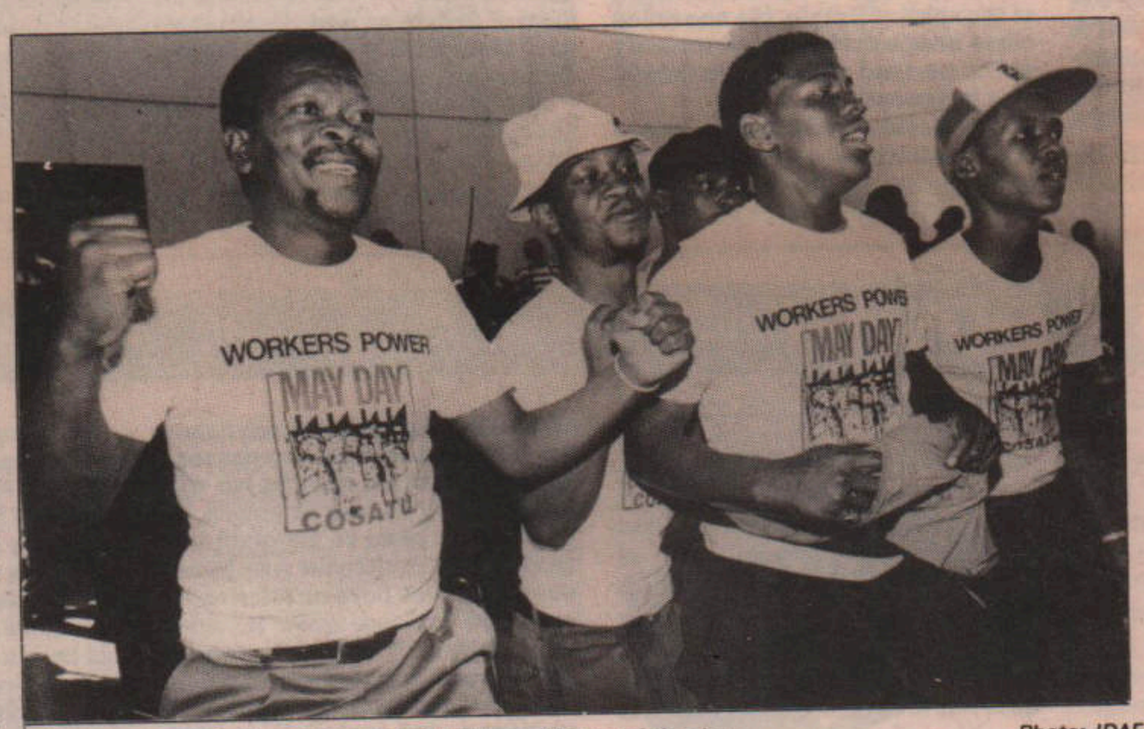
These elections were intended to deal a final blow to the local self organised committees which grew in the period of the township rebellion and in many cases are still maintaining an underground existence. The turn out of black voters—as little as 10% in the major townships—will not provide Botha with the stooges he wanted.

Amongst the white electorate the Conservative Party made advances but not in so sweeping a fashion as had been predicted. Nevertheless taken together neither sets of results will greatly aid Botha's plans for a reformed apartheid.

Time is also running out on the economic front. The relative success of repressive measures combined with continuing world imperialist economic growth allowed a temporary improvement in the South African economy through to the first part of this year. But problems are now mounting. The Pretoria government has been forced to freeze civil service wages and impose new import surcharges.

### Drain

War on the borders is a drain on the budget. Botha himself was forced to go cap in hand to senior Swiss bankers to talk about further rescheduling of the US$23 billion foreign debt. Inflation is running at 13%. Companies will be looking to preserve profit margins at the expense of workers, and this will make it difficult for them to buy industrial peace. Whatever the talk from so called progressive business of reforming away apartheid, it will be more and more forced to rely on repression.




**Johannesburg, 1 May 1988. COSATU members celebrate May Day at the University of Witwatersrand**

*Photo: IDAF*

Just at this moment the African National Congress (ANC) appears to be shifting its own strategy rightwards. It talks now of being ready to negotiate as soon as Pretoria shows a willingness to abandon apartheid, whereas previously it claimed that all there was to talk about was the transfer of power.

It has been involved in another round of talks with progressive Afrikaaners, alongside Soviet foreign relations experts. There has even been speculation about the ANC maintaining a legal arm along the lines of Sinn Fein.

The ANC has been receiving strong advice from the USSR to be more "pragmatic". In the run up to the tripartite talks in West Germany with the ANC and white progressives, Soviet academicians were spelling out the current line. "In the past" argued Boris Asoyan "it was always assumed that there would be a classical revolutionary overthrow of the white minority regime. Now we have to accept that there will have to be a political settlement".

The South African Communist Party, whose members hold a majority of the positions on the ANC's executive, has been under considerable Soviet pressure to shift its emphasis towards diplomacy and away from the armed struggle.

### Pragmatists

Although leaders like Chris Hani—of the ANC's armed wing MK—are still pursuing and even stepping up armed actions, the main control over direction lies with pragmatists like Publicity Officer Thabo Mbeki.

The Soviet experts are also urging an end to the idea that socialism can be built straight after the democratic revolution in South Africa. Talking about the problems of "plucking theories out of context", leading expert Victor Goncharov says the USSR no longer has "a textbook view of revolutionary inevitability" where South Africa is concerned. "I think it will be some sort of African socialism, not scientific socialism" he told South African journalist Alistair Sparks.

The advocates of this new pragmatism argue that the failure of the township rebellions of 1985-7, and the success of Botha's repression in dampening political activity, means that a strategy of revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid regime has been proved wrong.

In fact, a strategy for socialist revolution was never that of the ANC. It sought to make the country ungovernable and force negotiations that way. Now it is seeking them through diplomatic manoeuvre.

The policy of concessions and negotiations will prove no more successful than sporadic guerrilla actions and the adventurist attempt to pit unarmed youth against the South African Army.

The South African liberation struggle faces an acute crisis of leadership—one that can only be resolved by the creation of a revolutionary working class party able to lead the mighty forces of the black proletariat into battle to destroy apartheid and the capitalist system that gave birth to it.■

## Anti-Apartheid AGM

**THIS YEAR'S Annual General Meeting of the Anti-Apartheid Movement will be on 26 and 27 November in Sheffield.**

**It takes place in a year which has seen the Sharpeville Six condemned to death, Moses Mayekiso and the Alex Five framed by state evidence in the treason trial and the British government, through the Local Government Act's shackling of councils' anti-apartheid policies, clearly signalling its support for the Botha regime. In addition, the white supremacists are now hoping to get their national team back onto the international rugby circuit.**

**Yet the AGM agenda hardly relates to these attacks on the black masses in South Africa, or on attempts to build international solidarity. Fine sounding resolutions from the executive of the AAM calling for "peoples' sanctions" and mass solidarity (including from churches and liberal capitalists) are nothing more than empty rhetoric.**

**The burning need for solidarity activists today—if the Sharpeville Six are to be saved, if the Alex Five are to be freed, if apartheid is to be overthrown—is to build real international workers' solidarity. This means British workers building direct links with anti-apartheid trade unions in South Africa at local and national level. It means challenging British bosses over their companies' links with South Africa and organising action here to break those links.**

**There are precious few motions or amendments on the agenda calling for these policies, but *Workers Power* supporters will argue them at the meeting—if the Communist Party bureaucrats who run the AAM let us speak.**

- **Build direct trade union links!**
- **For international workers' sanctions now!**

## FIGHT GCHQ SACKINGS

**QUOTE OF the month? After the TUC had agreed to support the Council of Civil Service Unions (CCSU) one day strike call on 7 November against the sacking of 18 trade unionists at GCHQ, Norman Willis said, "In the present circumstances that cannot constitute a call for general strike action or forms of unlawful strike action."**

Of course, it's the umpteenth month in a row that Willis has *not* called a general strike, but it is one of the few times that the words have ever crossed his lips! Why? Because every trade unionist worth his or her salt knows that the attempted sacking of the 18—*because* they are trade unionists—has to be fought. Strike action is the appropriate weapon. 100,000 civil servants showed the way with an immediate walk out on 30 September. Just in case Mr Willis didn't hear, tens of thousands took unofficial action on 18 and 19 October when four sackings were announced.

However, activists on the ground are having to organise these strikes with no help from the bureaucracy. The NECs of the civil service unions are sticking to their tried and failed tactic of the one day protest strike. One CPSA branch secretary was relieved of any illusion that this time John Ellis might go further, when his full timer told him that "After 7 November, that's it".

These time servers are more interested in winning the ears of the SLD and Tory wets than the jobs and rights of members. Ellis, Christie and co are the biggest obstacle to getting the civil service wide indefinite strike we need.

Militants must seize this opportunity to force their leaders to fight for the *full* restoration of trade union rights at GCHQ. Resolutions demanding a national strike until this is won should be sent to the NECs. The original attack on GCHQ in January 1984 paved the way for the anti-union laws. If this attack is not driven back, further inroads will be made into trade unionism in the essential services.

Branches should strike on 7 November and stay out to win! Some Trades Councils—like Cardiff—have called for supportive action. All unionised work places must strike alongside the civil servants and make Willis eat his words.

All solidarity strike action will of course be "illegal". Indeed, the Civil Service strike might get the CCSU unions dragged through the courts (remember P&O vs NUS?). Should this happen an indefinite general strike to smash the anti-union laws must be fought for.■