Issue number 136 November 1990

NO SANCTIONS! BREAK THE BLOCKADE!

workers power

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

PERMANENT REVOLUTION 90

A WEEKEND OF DISCUSSION AND DEBATE ORGANISED BY WORKERS POWER

From Cold War to Gulf War

IMPERIALISM AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

See page 15 for details

Price 30p/10p strikers Solidarity price £1

THATCHER, BUSH . . .

OUT OF THE GULF!



EVERY DAY brings the moment closer when George Bush will have enough troops and hardware in the Middle East to launch an all out war. When that moment comes Bush will be faced with a dilemma.

If he attacks Iraq he risks blowing apart the unstable diplomatic alliance that has allowed the US to deploy one third of its armed forces in the Gulf.

After all, France and the USSR are eagerly searching out "peaceful" alternatives to solve the crisis. He also risks mass unrest at home if US transport planes have to deliver the estimated 20,000 body bags the first week of fighting will need.

But if he doesn't attack, once Saddam and the rest of the world know he can, he risks the diplomatic alliance falling apart. Time and Iraq's diplomatic corps have already prised open cracks in the wall Bush has built around Iraq.

Despite the massive gamble a war involves, despite the risk that Bush will lose the peace even if he beats Iraq in war, the logic of the situation makes war more and more likely.

Bush has deployed 250,000 US soldiers and is preparing to deploy 150,000 more to prove one thing; that US imperialism still rules the world militarily and politically, despite its ramshackle state finances. If he delays the knockout blow, and the alliance crumbles, he will have proved the opposite.

The USA has assembled its military might under the cover of giving sanctions time to work. Bush will be insisting that he is giving sanctions time to work as the first B52s bomb Baghdad. He will have learned that trick from Thatcher who torpedoed the Argentine battleship Belgrano even as her diplomats were negotiating a "peaceful solution" at the UN.

That is why anybody who wants to stop the war should not delude themselves that sanctions are the way to do it.

Sanctions are a form of economic war. The UN's chosen way of enforcing them has already given the green light to military action by Bush's gunboats and Thatcher's marines in the Gulf.

The way to stop war is for the workers to rise up against the imperialist presence in the Gulf.

In the war Thatcher and Bush are preparing it is workers who will die, workers who will be called on to do the killing, workers who will make the arms and sail the ships that supply them. And it is workers in Britain, France and the USA who will be regarded as traitors the moment they hesitate to cheer on the killing of their Iraqi brothers and sisters.

But unless workers oppose the imperialist intervention they will become traitors to their own class.

If British workers back the war drive they will be backing a system which is prepared to risk the lives of millions to defend oil profits, but does nothing when Israel cold bloodedly shoots down Palestinian demonstrators.

They will be backing an system which is prepared to condemn Saddam as a "war criminal" for invading Kuwait but congratulates Reagan and Bush when they invade Grenada or Panama.

We have nothing to gain from an imperialist victory; everything to gain from an imperialist defeat

They will not, as many workers wrongly think, be helping rid the world of a tyrant. For Saddam will simply be replaced by another tyrant if Bush and Thatcher win—one who will do the imperialist masters' bidding. The imperialist powers are the paymasters and arms suppliers of virtually all of the world's tyrants.

That is why we must actively oppose the war. We have to build the biggest movement possible committed to action to get the troops out. Strikes in the arms factories, boycotts of the supply ships, mutinies in the armed forces and massive demonstrations in the streets.

These are the only actions that the imperialists will listen to. They will certainly be able to ignore pious appeals for peace and even courageous individual protests like that of US Marine Jefferey Patterson, who sat down on the tarmac and refused to be loaded on his plane for the desert.

And if war breaks out? Most workers in Britain will side with Thatcher and Bush, convinced that the imperialist armies are putting right an injustice to Kuwait and the hostages.

When the fighting stops and a respectable period elapses TV documentaries and politicians' memoirs will reveal the bestial injustices imperialism committed to defend nothing but their own supremacy and their oil profits.

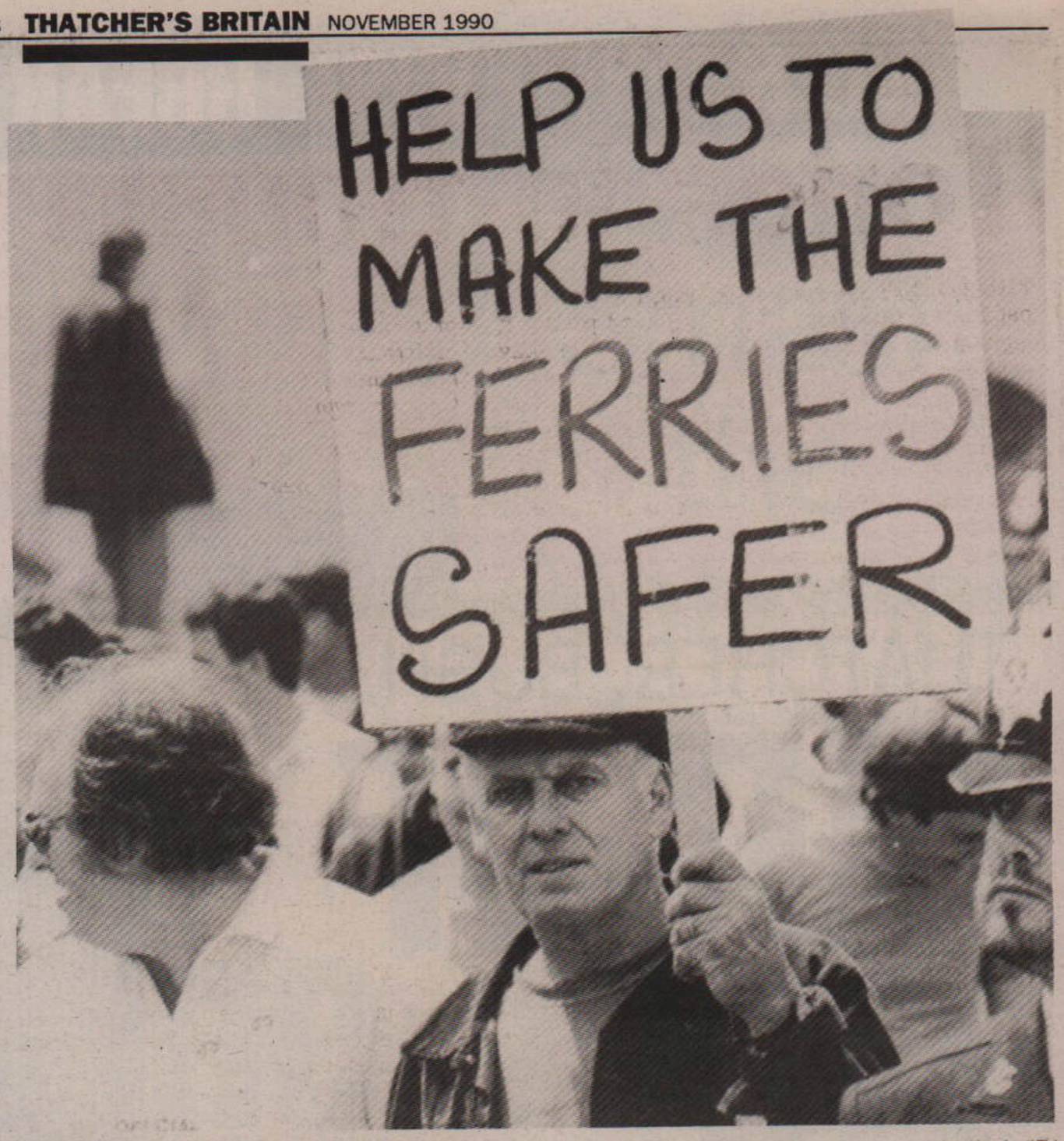
That is why every true socialist and internationalist in the British working class must do more than simply oppose the war drive and demand troop withdrawal. They must commit themselves to standing with Iraq against imperialism, despite the reactionary Saddam regime.

We have nothing to gain from an imperialist victory; everything to gain from an imperialist defeat. A victory for the US forces will say to revolutionary movements all over the world that the US is prepared to stop at nothing to maintain the capitalist order. A defeat for Bush will rock that order to its foundations.■

See pages 8, 9, 10, 11 & 14

DISASTERS

Bosses to blame, workers jailed



P&O striker—sacked for wanting safety *John Harris (IFL)*

IN MARCH 1987, the Herald of Free Enterprise ferry capsized and 192 people died. It sailed from Zeebrugge harbour with its bow doors open.

Last month Justice Turner threw out charges against the three company directors and the ship's captain on the grounds that it could not be proved that they knew, or were reckless as to the possibility, that the ship was likely to sail with its bow doors open. Turner also said that there was no such thing as aggregate responsibility in English law—a company cannot be guilty because of an accumulation of careless acts.

Yet evidence was put to the court that P&O ferries sailed with bow doors open seven times before Zeebrugge. A P&O captain had written to the company before the disaster begging it to put indicator lights on every bridge to show whether the bow doors were open.

An enquiry in 1987 reported that the company was "from top to bottom infected with the disease of sloppiness". Numerous warnings were given of the risks involved in the Ro-Ro ferry design: from Swedish experts in 1970, the French Merchant Marine Society in 1976 and from Lloyds in 1982. P&O were well aware of the possibility of such a disaster, but chose to place the pursuit of profit above the safety of passengers and crew.

The P&O bosses walked free from the Old Bailey because the judicial system, part of the machinery of the capitalist state, once again looked after its own. The same rules do not apply to workers.

Train driver Robert Morgan was scapegoated and given an 18 month sentence for the Purley train crash. The crash would never have happened if British Rail had installed a "fail safe mechanism", in use across Europe, which stops trains automatically when they pass red signals. According to BR's own figures, in the first six months of this year there were 412 incidents recorded of trains passing red signals. BR will not install the "fail safe" system because of the cost.

Another rail worker, Frances Foster, a guard in Leeds, is to be charged with manslaughter after an 85 year old woman was killed when she was trapped in sliding doors on a train. The train itself was made on the cheap and repeatedly taken out of service because of design faults. As a result of the accident, the "door close" indicator light has been taken off the train because it has been shown to be unsafe.

The victimisations of Morgan and Foster to cover for the cost-cutting of the bosses are direct attacks on the interests of every worker. As concern for safety goes to the wall, the bosses want to get away with murder and leave us to pay the price.

The union leaders are showing a typical unwillingness to take the bosses on over the issue of safety and the victimisations of their members. Despite ASLEF general secretary, Derek Fullick, describing Morgan's sentence as "class justice" and stating that "the real criminals are in Downing Street and the Department of Transport", the union has taken no action to get him freed.

Fullick's hopes are pinned on an appeal through the courts, partly as a means of heading off any unofficial action.

From the struggles for health and safety in the workplaces to the battle to expose the root cause of disasters like the sinking of the Herald or the King Cross fire, the union bureaucrats have nothing to offer beyond rhetoric.

Railworkers, and all victims of the bosses' attempts to blame us for their disregard of safety, should follow the example of the rank and file based Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) set up after the Piper Alpha oil rig explosion.

The OILC staged strikes against the oil bosses and put the safety needs of oil workers above the health of the oil companies' profit ledgers.

Likewise railworkers in ASLEF and the Rail, Marine and Transport (RMT) must agitate now for strike action to free Robert Morgan. We already pay with our health for the bosses' drive for profit.

Now they want to jail us too!

Stop deportations!

IMMIGRATION CONTROLS are racist through and through. They legitimise the discrimination and violence which black people suffer in everyday life.

The bosses' propaganda for immigration controls is used to blame blacks for unemployment, bad housing etc and divert workers' anger away from the real cause—capitalism itself. When necessary the racist laws are used to justify deportations of black people, no matter how inhuman the consequences, as a number of recent cases demonstrate.

Sonia Malhi has lived in Britain since 1983 and got married in 1986. Her marriage broke down because of her husband's violence. The Home Office is seeking to deport her despite the fact that her home is in Britain and she has no living relatives in India.

Dharmotutwee Surju married her husband, Harry, a British citizen, in April this year in Mauritius. Before coming to Britain they were interviewed by the British High Commission in Mauritius but no decision on Surju's status was made. Her passport was stamped "Entry Clearance for UK Applied For", and as Mauritians require no visa to enter the UK they flew back to the UK.

At Heathrow Airport, Surju was refused leave to enter the country, but allowed in on a temporary admission. The Home Secretary has since refused the original application made in Mauritius. She is now pregnant, in very poor health and has the threat of deportation hanging over her.

In October, the House of Lords rejected Julius Alexander's appeal against deportation. Julius was a cook at the Polytechnic of North London, having come to Britain from St Vincent in 1984 and started a family in this country.

In each of these cases the harsh racist reality of Britain's immigration laws stands exposed. We should aim to mobilise the black community and the labour movement against every existing and threatened instance of state racism. Winning workers to take action against deportations, such as those we have listed, and the many others that regularly occur, can help stamp out racism and the divisions within the working class it causes.■

Surju Family Defence Campaign
Sonia Malhi Defence Campaign
c/o 101 Villa Road, Handsworth
Birmingham 19

Julius Alexander
c/o BM WAR, London WC1N 3XX

BACTON FOUR

Victory!

THE TRIAL of the Kurdish workers known as the "Bacton Four" ended last month in a small but significant victory for all immigrant workers in Britain.

After thirteen days of testimony and legal argument a jury at Snaresbrook Crown Court took little more than an hour to acquit the four Kurdish men on all charges. If convicted the four would have faced the prospect of deportation back to Turkey and with it the threat of detention and torture by the Ozal regime.

The men were all involved in a dispute for union recognition with the Bacton textile firm, a ruthless sweatshop operator in the London borough of Hackney. They were arrested by the Metropolitan Police's Territorial Support Group on 26 Febuary, 1990. The arrests followed an attack by police on a picket of the Bacton factory and triggered a night-long demonstration by more than 250 Turkish and Kurdish workers outside the police station where the four were held.

This was before the bosses' media had discovered that the Kurds were an oppressed people. Public outcry was limited to the left.

Solicitors representing the four men are now drafting suits against the police on grounds of assault, malicious wounding and wrongful arrest. The small but determined campaign waged on behalf of the Bacton Four should encourage other immigrant workers, faced with state harassment and exploited by cut-throat bosses, to carry on the fight to live and work in Britain with decent pay, conditions and strong union organisation.

Trotskyist International

Issue 5 out now!

Includes: "From Cold War to new imperialist order"; Action programme for Germany; The Butchenko affair; The Gulf crisis; Archive: Rudolf Klement on war. ***Price £2.50 (inc p&p)***

EDITORIAL

Tories in trouble

THE TORIES are rattled. Joining the ERM, dispatching a task force to the Gulf and promising more money for education and child benefits have not lifted Thatcher's standing in the polls. Labour's ten point lead is holding firm. And in the Eastbourne by-election, one of the safest Tory seats, the Liberals romped to victory.

Of course, Thatcher has been in trouble before. In 1981 she was rated the most unpopular prime minister since 1945 with support of only 20% in the polls. She faced threats of a "bare knuckled fight" from the CBI over interest rates. Unemployment was soaring, real wages were down 10% and there was a 4% fall in GDP.

Are today's Tory woes another blip, a case of mid-term blues that they can overcome once an election is really on the agenda? The bosses' press is not as certain about this as the Central Office propaganda merchants. After Eastbourne the *Financial Times* commented:

"Mrs Margaret Thatcher's government is in worse trouble than at any time since she became prime minister in 1979."

The reason for this dire state is not the inept election campaign as some Thatcher apologists have claimed. One senior Tory ex-Minister rejected such an excuse and argued:

"The fact is that the government is unpopular because of high interest rates, mortgages and inflation."

Add to this list the poll tax, the ravaging of the education system and the NHS and he is not far wrong!

After the 1981 crisis the Tories pulled back with the aid of the Falklands factor. Their unpopularity in 1985/86 was turned around through the Lawson boom and his tax cuts. Today it will be far more difficult for them to engineer a similar turn around in their fortunes and win their fourth election victory.

There are serious divisions in the Tory Party itself which they have not been able to hide in the traditional Tory fashion. The "No Turning Back" faction wants to pursue further privatisations, more attacks on education through vouchers and more means tested benefits. They are intransigent opponents of monetary union in Europe.

Ranged against them are the "consolidators", backed by many of the bosses, who favour a minimum amount of rational state directed financial assistance to education, transport, communications and training. They are far less hostile to Europe and they are worried about Thatcher's authoritarian image.

Naturally Britain's bosses have not had a collective change of heart and decided to dump the Tories. But they are increasingly worried about Thatcher's ability to manage their economy. They would prefer a "consolidator" at the helm.

But Thatcher's concession to them through joining the ERM did not indicate a real change of direction. She is a bitter opponent to real European integration and always has been. When she stridently promises that joining the ERM does not mean she will tolerate a single European currency she is giving vent to her real thoughts.

Such outbursts make the bosses jittery as well as a fair number of backbench "B'stards" in marginal seats. Many are convinced that Thatcher is becoming an electoral liability. Their problem is that last spring they missed their best chance to get rid of her. When the anti-Poll Tax action was at its height, when there were repeated rebellions from Tory back benchers and Lords, when the signs of the recession became unmistakable there was a real possibility that Thatcher would get a late night visit from the party elders and be handed a resignation letter.

This would have given the party time to prepare for the next election under the stewardship of a new leader who would be more acceptable to the more pro-Europe sections of the ruling class. But the visit never took place. And now the Tories shrink away from challenging their leader as Britain embarks on a major military adventure in the Gulf.

For Thatcher to win the next election she needs to win back not just the support of the bosses, but of a significant part of the electorate who have presently deserted her.

Does the Gulf conflict offer the possibility of a second "Falklands Factor"? The initial indications of the polls so far, and the by-election, would suggest not . The hostage situation has not helped as the government comes across as doing nothing whilst individuals like Heath can get results. Of course fortunes could change with a shooting war. A speedy victory for the imperialists, with minimum casualties and the ousting of Saddam Hussein, could enhance the standing of the government. Events, however, are unlikely to unfold according to such a favourable scenario for Thatcher.

Even a Gulf victory will not have the same effect as theMalvinas triumph. This was sold to the British working class as a war to rescue part of Britain itself. Nobody is claiming that Kuwait is British. What's more Thatcher's armed forces are playing only a supporting role in the drama. It will be George Bush who will be able to bask in limelight if war defeats Saddam. Worse, for Thatcher, if there is a prolonged and bloody war which leads to a deep world recession her popularity will continue to plummet.

The main hope for the Tories is that they can save their skins by pulling the economy round sufficiently to enable them to bribe enough better off workers and middle class voters with tax cuts or increased living standards through much lower interest rates. Their chances do not look good. Even the Chancellor was forced to admit that the economy might just be in a recession.

The contraction of the economy looks set to continue at least until next spring. The ERM may have some effect on interest rates and therefore lower mortgages, but this will go alongside rising unemployment and lower wages for some sections of the working class. It seems unlikely that the Tories can buy their way out of trouble.

Tory woes are good news for workers. Celebrations, though, are not yet in order. Eastbourne was showed the depth of feeling there is against the Tories, but if a swing to the Liberals on that scale were repeated in an election it would damage Labour's victory chances.

Worse, Labour itself is offering the working class very little in the way of reforms but offering the bosses quite a lot in the way of preserving the gains they have made under Thatcher. Labour's programme is a pale pink version of the consolidators' plans.■

Published every month by the Workers Power Group:
BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN 0263 – 1121
Printed by Jang International, 57 Lant St, London SE1 1QN

Derek Hatton: no whitewash, no witch-hunt!

For a workers' inquiry!

DEREK HATTON was one of 22 people arrested after the Merseyside Fraud Squad launched "Operation Cheetah" to investigate Liverpool City Council's finances. Former councillors and local businessmen are being accused of extensive corruption involving land sales and building contracts during the second half of the 1980s.

The arrests and raids followed a campaign by the *Sunday Times*, a Murdoch paper, to prove that the Liverpool ruling Labour Group, and behind them *Militant*, were lining their own pockets during the City's budget conflicts with Thatcher. Their campaign bears all the hallmarks of Maxwell's earlier attacks on Arthur Scargill for alleged financial irregularities.

In particular the two page special on the police action in the *Sunday Times* (28/10/90) made clear what it thought the issue was really about:

"The possibility that Militant has this source of funding [money from shady deals] is the most disturbing aspect of the whole story."

Amazing! The paper alleges that councillors and businessmen have made millions of pounds out of the supposed deals. Yet this is not the "disturbing" aspect. *Militant*'s connection is. A good portion of the article is about *Militant*, not the fraud investigation.

It asks where *Militant* gets its money from, how it paid for its headquarters, how it pays for its full time paper sellers. It is laced with all the usual trigger words to get people suspicious of the left—"secretive", "underworld", "infiltration".

When Murdoch decides to open the ledger books of his empire to workers' inspection his papers might have room to talk. Until then the bosses' media has no business prying into the affairs of labour movement organisations.

Clearly the main purpose of the whole exercise is to witch-hunt the left. It is to bury the positive legacy of Liverpool's budget struggles—the City's willingness to fight Thatcher—under a slag heap of corruption allegations. As with the attempts to smear Arthur Scargill the press will attempt to discredit the left in the eyes of workers and get them to break with the militant policies their leaders, however temporarily, fought for.

We do not know the truth of the allegations being made against the ex-councillors and their business partners. We certainly aren't prepared to whitewash. Derek Hatton is no longer any friend of the working class. The sight of him coining it in through TV appearances and giving "advice" to Wimpey while thousands of workers live on the breadline is sickening.

But, the bosses' state and the press are not qualifiedeither to investigate the affair or to judge. There are powerful indications that they have timed this whole affair, in collusion with right-wing Labour councillors, in order to divert attention away from the City council's new budget of massive cuts and redundancies. The coincidence is too striking to ignore.

The answer, therefore, is a workers' enquiry into the allegations. Under the auspices of the local trade unions a panel of rank and file delegates, elected from a range of workplaces and representative of the whole Liverpool working class community, including the black community, must be convened to determine the truth of this affair. Whether Hatton and co are guilty or innocent, this is the only way and to stop the affair from being used as a weapon against the left.■

Dessie Ellis

IRISH REPUBLICAN prisoner Dessie Ellis, held in Portlaoise prison pending extradition to Britain on conspiracy charges, is in the third week of a hunger strike.

Ellis has been refusing food since 10 October. At the start he said:

"I am going on hunger strike, to the death if necessary, to prevent my extradition to Britain".

Owen Carron, formerly Bobby Sand's election agent and recent extradition victor, stated:

"More and more people must act now and act quickly, for soon it may be too late - too late for Dessie Ellis, too late perhaps for others who may follow".

Ellis was serving an eight year sentence in southern Ireland for explosives offences, and was recharged 24 hours before his expected release, on extradition warrants issued in London. The conspiracy charges relate to a 34-month period during which he was either in custody, or reporting to Irish police three times a week as part of his bail conditions.

Conspiracy charges are almost impossible to disprove. As a known republican he has no chance of justice in a British court. Brent NALGO has already called on the Irish government to refuse to extradite Dessie Ellis. Other workers should follow their lead and give active support to the campaign.

The Irish liberation struggle is a direct challenge to the British state. It is in the interests of British workers to fight against every manifestation of British oppression, from plastic bullets to shoot-to-kill, as a means of forging a working class movement against imperialism.

Winning labour movement commitment to the campaign against the extradition and criminalisation of Dessie Ellis is an excellent place to start.■

POLL TAX

Federation must change course

Second All Britain Anti Poll Tax Federation National Conference
Apollo Theatre, Manchester
Sunday 25 November 1990: 12 noon.
At Conference:
Vote for the 3D slate: Danny Burns, Jane Connor, Ian Greaves and Nick Moss

ON 25 NOVEMBER the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation will be holding its second national conference in Manchester. After a year of campaigning the conference should be the place where a balance sheet is drawn up, where a full account is given by the leadership of the initiatives it has taken against the Poll Tax and where activists can set down a strategy for the struggles ahead.

If the leadership of the Federation gets its way none of this will happen. Only 2,000 delegates will be allowed to attend on a first come, first serve basis. No resolutions will be taken from the conference floor, only amendments to the Federation's self-congratulatory national committee statement.

3D, a democratic opposition group within the Federation's ranks, is standing four candidates against the leadership in the conference elections. We spoke to Nick Moss, a Tooting Anti-Poll Tax Union activist, and part of the 3D slate, to find out why.

WP: **Why are you standing against *Militant* supporters for the Federation leadership at this conference?**
NM: *Militant*'s strategy was always based on the principle that "non-payment can win". It was a limited strategy of mass civil disobedience. The last year has proved it to be a disastrous strategy. All round the country there are strikes breaking out against cuts in jobs and services as a result of the tax. But the *Militant*'s strategy cannot relate the anti-Poll Tax fight to such struggles. It relegates the importance of industrial action in the fight. Yet these local struggles give us the opportunity to make the links and build a movement committed to striking against the tax itself.

Not only that, but the *Militant* leaders have done some disgraceful things over the year. When the police attacked the Trafalgar Square demo on 31 March, Steve Nally offered to "name names" of those who fought back. That demo was attacked because Thatcher and the bosses can't afford to lose this fight and will use whatever force is necessary to drive us off the streets.

WP: **What are the key elements of your platform?**
NM: We are for a Federation leadership which is accountable to and recallable by the body of activists who make up the campaign. We are determined to fight for an orientation to the workplaces, to win workers to non-implementation of the tax, to opposition to cuts in jobs and services, to strike action against wage arrestment and the generalisation of strike action against the tax itself.

We believe court action should be met by mass demos and occupations, that mass opposition and workers' defence organisations based on the estates, are key to seeing off the bailiffs. The campaign can't substitute itself for the involvement of massive numbers of working class people acting in their own defence. The key to all this is an orientation to the trade union movement which doesn't figure in the Federation's strategy at present.

WP: ***Militant* has been the main leadership in the Fed since the beginning. Workers Power even critically voted for them at the last conference. What has changed since?**
NM: Militant offers nothing new. It's stuck in a rut. Initially 3D had no different strategy to Militant on the main issues. But 3D's current platform reflects an awareness of the need to relate to the trade unions and fight for strike action. They also believe in democracy within the Federation. *Militant* supporters have operated as an undemocratic clique to such an extent that the three non-*Militant* officials elected last year have resigned in protest. In addition 3D has taken a clear stand in defence of those arrested in Trafalgar Square, whilst *Militant* condemned them for fighting back.

WP: **Do you think the leadership will seek to stifle opposition at the Conference?**
NM: Yes. They've only allowed for 2,000 delegates. It's a form of political vetting. All delegates should turn up and demand admission to their own conference. It's my personal opinion that if *Militant* supporters bureaucratically carve out all opposition once inside, delegates should refuse to accept the discipline of the chair until we get guarantees of a democratic conference and debate.

WP: **What is your view of recent *Militant*-inspired activity such as the "People's March"?**
NM: The "People's March" all but demobilised the whole movement. It was presented to us as an ultimatum: "Support this or else."; 75 people marching through Britain does nothing to stop cuts or deter bailiffs. None of the initiatives launched by the movement have come from the Fed. The Trafalgar Square demo on 20 October, the Brockwell rally and the Brixton prison picket were all won against their objections.

WP: **You have been involved in the struggle in Wandsworth, a Tory borough with a low poll tax. What are the lessons for other ATPUs?**
NM: In Wandsworth, with Tooting APTU, we made sure that the campaign was a democratic and active one. There were a lot of left groups active—everyone was represented on our platforms. That's a precondition for real fighting unity. We went on the offensive against the Tories.

We mobilized 250 people on an estate to defend a local non-payer. We tried to occupy the bailiffs' offices. We took the argument that the £148 poll tax was a con into the labour movement from the start. The work we did locally proved to people that you could take on the Tories, and laid the ground politically for the 3,000 strong demos against cuts you see now.

WP: **What must emerge from the conference?**
NM: If we don't get a leadership that will fight for our interests the way the Tories fight for theirs, the movement could be smashed. If Militant keep their hold, a lot of APTUs will split away. We need to preserve unity, but on a fighting programme.■

Police rampage

ON SATURDAY 20 October 4,000 demonstrators from the anti-Poll Tax demo marched on Brixton Prison. It was a display of solidarity with those imprisoned for defending themselves against the police attack on the 31 March in Trafalgar Square.

Despite arrangements with the police by the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign (TSDC) for a ninety minute protest the police, backed up by riot squads, made their move on the demo after only half an hour. They carried out what Dave Morris, TSDC co-ordinator, described as "a pre-planned attack in order to discredit the anti-Poll Tax movement." As in March they launched a police riot.

Most of the 128 people arrested were charged under the Public Order Act, but two were charged with rioting, which carries a maximum life sentence. Not only were the police after revenge for Trafalgar Square, they were out to complete the work of Operation Carnaby.

This was the mop up operation after 31 March that saw homes raided, demonstrators fitted up and trial by newspaper. At Brixton one



demonstrator was followed onto a bus by a plain clothes cop and arrested. Dave Morris is absolutely right to describe the police attack as "pre-planned". Prison officers and their families living in the compound at Brixton were cleared out on Friday. Buses, bedecked with anti-Poll Tax stickers were parked nearby. They just happened to be full of plain clothes police officers.

At Horseferry Magistrates' Court a decision was made to leave Monday clear for the anticipated victims of the police action. When they steamed in the police had singled out TSDC stewards, seizing their megaphones and truncheoning them to the ground.

As in March, the police were responding to militant opposition to Thatcher's policies. They have been trained and equipped during the last ten years to do her bidding against the working class. Any socialist worth their salt can see this, and 20 October was further proof. Yet Labour continues to attack the demonstrators not the uniformed thugs. Worse, the Militant leadership still try to blame "a minority" of demonstrators and drone on and on about their own peace loving credentials.

In the 26 October edition of Militant the TSDC is accused of providing the "police an opportunity to isolate a small section and in effect play into the hands of our opponents who want a ban". It also denounced youth who wore scarves and picked up bricks to defend themselves against the riot squads as "nothing to do with the anti-Poll Tax movement and seemed to be doing a good job for the government." Neil Kinnock said the same about miners who defended themselves like this at Orgreave.

Militant's cowardice has to be fought. This doesn't just involve heckling Sheridan and Nally. It involves struggling to build genuine, well disciplined workers' defence squads. Only such squads can meet and match the violence of the police. They can ensure that the police goal of banning future Poll Tax protests is successfully resisted. What is more they can be developed into far more effective means of defending the estates from bailiffs than Militant's narrowly based bailiff-busting teams.■

MINERS

Go for strike action!

AT ITS special conference in October the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) agreed to call a ballot for an overtime ban over pay. The ballot has been set for 15 and 16 November. A big "Yes" vote is crucial.

The NUM is demanding a £50 per week rise. In the aftermath of the great strike the bosses launched a vicious productivity drive. Thousands were sacked, NUM pay bargaining rights were suspended and deals were imposed on the union to cut the wages of the workforce.

Today there are 55,000 NUM members (there are about another 6,000 miners in the scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers, the UDM), as compared with 170,000 in 1983. They are being bled dry. For less money in real terms, a workforce cut by two thirds is producing as much coal as before the strike. This not only means that the work gets much harder, it also means real hardship for mining families and a decline in safety standards.

Winning the overtime ban vote will be difficult. Not only are NUM members worried about the UDM dagger at their throat, they also have the right wing inside their own union set against any confrontation with British Coal. In Scotland, Wales and the Midlands, the officials had hoped to get rid of Scargill through the Maxwell-inspired witch hunt.

Now that has failed miserably, their strategy will be to thwart his proposals for action. They will not campaign in their areas for a "Yes" vote or offer any alternative to the threats from management that are now coming thick and fast. A newsletter from the management is being sent to miners' homes. Employee Relations director Kevan Hunt has threatened to stop the check off of union dues if action is taken. The right wing officials are doing nothing to counter this.

But there is an even bigger problem. An overtime ban, on its own, will not budge the bosses. As a tactic it is traditionally used to deplete stocks prior to a strike, but high productivity means a ban will take a long time to bite and there is, as yet, nobody talking about strike action. Last but not least the right wing officials can sabotage an effective ban. In 1987 they did this to great effect producing a situation in some areas where productivity actually went up.

This is why militant miners need to campaign for a "Yes" vote with a clear perspective for strike action in the short term—well before spring—and with rank and file control of the terms of the ban to make sure it hits stocks. To do this will require militants going well beyond what Scargill himself is prepared to argue for, and it will require rank and file organisation to ensure that it is carried through on a national basis.

Miners are still suffering the consequences of the 1984/85 defeat. One of those consequences might be privatisation and a further butchering of the industry. At a time when an oil crisis is once again a real possibility, when the Tories are in serious trouble, and when wide sections of the working class are pushing for decent pay deals, a vigorous campaign to take on British Coal could win. It could put an end to the legacy of defeat that followed the great strike and rekindle the spirit of militancy that launched that strike.

- Vote Yes to the Ban!
- Campaign for Strike Action!

PAY

No holding back!

YOU CAN tell it's autumn. The leaves are falling, and the bosses want our wages to do the same. The propaganda machine is all set to churn out the old favourites—wages are fuelling inflation, we must all tighten our belts in a crisis and, particularly popular with the Tories, one man's wage rise is another man's job loss.

We should treat these cliches like fallen leaves—brush them away and burn them.

Far from wages fuelling the current high inflation they are, for the first time in eight years, falling in real terms. The CBI reports that basic rates are moving down and earnings increases are averaging 10.3%, compared with 10.9% inflation. Even the *The Economist* was forced to concede:

"Britain's present surge in inflation has been driven not by wages but by the Lawson boom and the housing credit bubble."

Even the deals that are currently being negotiated at, or above, the inflation rate are not all they seem. At Jaguar, Rover, Ford and Vauxhall—the supposedly pace setting car giants—productivity strings, changes in work practices and in shift patterns have all meant that workers have been doing more work. The bosses are getting far more production for the same real wages they were paying two years ago. This trend is now manifesting itself in a range of other industries.

Yet Chancellor Major and Thatcher are taking every opportunity to lecture workers about the need for pay restraint. They are opposed to a formal incomes policy and hope that a combination of high interest rates and rising unemployment will combine to push wages down even further. But the signs are that they will go for an unofficial incomes policy in the public sector, pegging rises to 7%.

Any trade union leader with half a brain should recognise that the bosses are vulnerable on pay. With inflation outstripping pay, with the bosses still facing severe shortages in skilled labour, with the Tories more unpopular than they have ever been, a pay campaign could send the Tories reeling. It could revitalise the attractiveness of the unions to thousands, even millions of currently unorganised workers.



TUC: out of hibernation to sell the Tories a pay package?

Schemes

Instead the trade union leadership are busy cooking up schemes to help the Tories solve the "pay problem". Their proposals to the National Economic Development Council promise a responsible attitude to pay claims in return for consultations on investment, training and general living standards. Influential union leaders like the GMB's John Edmonds goes as far as proposing a Japanese style centralised and synchronised bargaining structure—an incomes policy by another name.

The Tories, of course, will treat this like all of the other trade union schemes presented at the NEDC—it will ignore it. But it bodes ill for workers if Labour gets into power.

Their policies are full of appeals to a Japanese style "consensus" system of industrial relations. In the name of "social partnership" Labour could establish a framework for attacking our wages at the bosses' bidding.

To avoid this it is vital that workers put forward claims for pay rises , decided by the members themselves, aimed at ending low pay. They should be in excess of the inflation rate and that are protected from inflation by a sliding scale of increases—1% for every 1% rise in a cost of living index determined by workers' price watch committees. This control over price monitoring is vital given the the Tories are already talking about excluding the Poll Tax and mortgage costs from the official inflation figures.

Across industry, and especially in the public sector, we must organise to fight for these demands through militant strike action, controlled by the rank and file. The bureaucrats decided a long time ago that they would control their members' militancy by channelling disputes into long drawn out public relations campaigns.

Their determination to limit protest to such useless methods will be immeasurably strengthened as the prospects for an election loom.

Their own collection of cliches will be cast around the unions—don't rock the boat, wait for Labour to win, strikes will get us a bad name. Ignore these pleas. Our pay is under attack.

We cannot afford to wait. No holding back for Labour—get stuck into the Tories and the bosses!

TELECOM Sell out!

THE LEADERS of the National Communications Workers (NCU), which represents clerical and engineering workers in British Telecom (BT) have accepted a 10% pay offer from the bosses.

The deal is a complete betrayal of their members' interests. It includes a set of strings that will allow the widespread introduction of shift work for engineers and direct entry into the most skilled grade. While a consultative ballot of the engineers had rejected the package, a big majority of clerical workers voted to accept. Union and BT propaganda played an important part in winning the clerical majority for the deal.

Engineers won a 37è hour week, with a day off every two or three weeks in 1978. Work outside normal hours has been done on an overtime basis with few workers on 24 hour rotas. The new shift working agreement is a direct threat to those gains.

The engineers had told their leaders to go for 13% with no strings. They now have a deal that saves BT a fortune in out-of-hours cover, and a pay cut in real terms, given inflation. Worse, the split in the vote between the clerical workers and engineers will worsen divisions at a membership level. The clerical workers, who faced relatively minor strings, were used by the Executive to get away with the sell-out.

Now they have agreed a "co-operation clause" which allows for a recurrence of the same sort of deal next year. In addition the clause commits the NCU to open up discussions on all aspects of attendance patterns, including the 37 hour week.

This whole deal is a defeat with consequences for the future. Project Sovereign is underway in BT. It is designed to reorganise the company in preparation for its further break up, when the remaining shares held by the government are sold off. Five thousand managers are being sacked and large surpluses of engineers are emerging, especially in London and the South East.

A big crunch is coming. Local and national agreements are endangered. The NCU itself is trying to foist a new layer of bureaucratic representatives on the members, over the heads of the branches, in preparation for the new BT structure. And now the pay dealthat has exacerbated divisions between two sections of the workforce—clerical and engineers.

In the face of this the union's "Broad Left" has collapsed. The NCU right wing pay officier, Pat Lee, is telling the members that:

"the best interests of all of the union's members is best served by acceptance of the offer."

Rank and file NCU members should have no truck with this. They need to prepare for the battles ahead by defending all gains won by strike action, irrespective of the terms of the 1990 deal. They must organise an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement to combat the sell out merchants. And they must organise joint rank and file committees of all BT workers to prevent bitter divisions emerging between clerical and engineering workers.■

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ECONOMY

Exchange Rate Speculation

BRITAIN'S ENTRY into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) has done little to halt speculation. Will the government be able to lower interest rates further? Will the ERM force Britain's bosses to stand firm against the pay demands of the unions? Does entry signal a significant turn by the Tory government towards a more positive stance on European integration and federalism?

To answer these questions we need to remind ourselves what the ERM represents and why the Tories —despite the fact that none of the necessary stated preconditions for entry were achieved—took the plunge.

The ERM is a system by which the exchange rates of most European Commuity (EC) currencies are pegged to each other. In reality most of them are pegged to the German D-Mark (DM). As the currency of the strongest economy it is the most stable.

Currencies are allowed to move within a small range only; if buying and selling of the various currencies threatens to budge any currency out of the agreed band then the central banks intervene to buy or sell and thereby keep it in that range.

Control

But why should any government or industry find it attractive to tie their currencies in this way and give up a certain amount of their control? Providing the level of the exchange rate is considered right most manufacturing bosses that import or export at all gain the benefit of exchange rate stability.

Consider the case of a textile company in Scotland that exports most of its knitwear. At this moment it will be planning its autumn 1991 sales and marketing drive. If it knows what the exchange rate of the pound is going to be then it is in a far better position to plan its order books, production targets and estimate its costs. It also encourages greater investment since it can feel confident that the situation will be similar over a fairly long period.

That is why the CBI have urged entry for a long time. Lawson wanted to go in over a year ago and resigned as Chancellor because Thatcher vetoed it. For her, the advantages of entry were outweighed by the fact that it was the first step on a slippery slope that led inexorably to currency unity and political integration; give Brussels and inch, she reasoned, and they would take a mile eventually.

Thatcher's objections were finally overcome by the deteriorating British economic situation. Purely domestic controls failed to keep inflation in check and allow for interest rates to come down.

On inflation the Tories hope that they can get it down quicker if they force Britain's bosses to resist wage demands and keep settlements well below the retail price index. By being inside ERM Thatcher is saying to the CBI: "If you award pay increases that cannot be offset by productivity rises then you cannot expect to remain competitve abroad despite rising wage costs. you can no longer bank on a fall in the value of sterling to make exports cheaper to buy abroad."

As for interest rates, the desire to start getting these down (and therefore mortgages) well before an election helped to persuade Thatcher that the government could not afford to wait any longer before going into ERM. This was because the only way Major could cut interests rates was by entering ERM. To do so outside of ERM would have caused a slide of confidence in the financial markets; a belief that Britain was not concerned with getting inflation down. This would have caused a bout of selling of sterling, so pushing its value down. Being in the ERM restricts the fall in sterling.

Events since entry into ERM are not encouraging for the government. After an initial bout of enthusiasm for sterling the markets have pushed the exchange rate down towards the bottom of its range. This restricts the ability of the Tories to lower interest rates again in the near future. If they were to there is a danger that Major would have to devalue the pound and readjust the level at which it is pegged to the D-mark. For this to happen not long after entry would be a big political blow to the Tory government.

The Tories' hope that the bosses will stand firm on pay in the short term are suspect on three counts. First, many awards in this pay round indicate that the bosses would prefer to concede settlements around the inflation rate if they can get further productivity deals attached to them (eg BT).

Secondly, unit labour costs may be rising faster in Britain than elsewhere in Europe but they are starting from a lower base; so wages as a proportion of total costs are not yet necessarily higher than in other European countries. The British bosses may not yet have to attack wages in order to compete in Europe.

Finally Thatcher and the Tories have failed to address the problem of the shortage of skilled workers. This puts upward pressure on pay as firms bid up wages to try and secure the necessary skills. In turn, this sets the going rate for semi-skilled and unskilled workers and feeds through the system.

Major

For these reasons we are not likely to see major wages struggles in industry in the current pay round. But as the disciplining effects of ERM on costs bite and as unemployment edges up, relieves shortages and puts downward pressure on wage increases, we are more likely to see pay become an issue of struggle next year.

The weeks since going into ERM have also exposed the limits of the agreement within the Cabinet about Britain's role in Europe. Thatcher's deputy Howe has made clear that ERM is a pledge to the EC of further measures of integration.

Thatcher on the other hand blew her top in Rome when the other elever EC heads of state announced a plan to start full monetary union i 1994.

So the bosses - who are desperately searching for a coherent policy on Europe have every reason to be sceptical about the Tory Party's enthusiasm for 1992, the single market and beyond.

They have every reason to be cynical about the short-term electoral opportunism that finally moved Thatcher to action.■

Tories target education

*Tory education "reforms" have made education a big vote loser for Thatcher. **Jack Lewis** surveys the damage.*

THE CURRENT Tory split over education brings into sharp focus the debate between the "radical" right and the "consolidators" in Thatcher's government.

The Tory onslaught against the state education system began in earnest with the Education Reform Act of 1987. But as the effects of the Act begin to ravage working class children's education, there is a growing outcry from parents and teachers alike. Despite Tory attempts to pin the blame on "trendy" teachers, polls show that over 60% of parents blame the government for the poor standard of education.

As a result Education Secretary John MacGregor persuaded Thatcher to throw more money at the crumbling and badly equipped state schools. The last few months have seen one after another of the Tories' educational "reforms" trimmed to appease angry teachers, parents and school governors.

But the situation is bad enough already without any further Tory reforms!

- Local Management of Schools (LMS) puts control of spending in the hands of the heads and governors. They are having to reject "expensive" (read experienced) teachers and employ "cheap" (inexperienced) ones.They are free to spend money on "prestige projects" to attract more pupils instead of financing basic needs and extra help for those who need it.
- The new National Curriculum has placed a massive burden of paperwork onto teachers. They are spending less and less time teaching, more and more time "implementing" the National Curriculum.
- The compulsory testing of children at seven—the new "seven plus"—is proving a nightmare to introduce. The trial runs of the "Standard Assessment Tests" broke down in chaos. So MacGregor has whittled them to a bare minimum. The broad curriculum, which in English includes speaking and listening, and in Maths includes "understanding concepts", has been narrowed down for testing purposes to a Victorian style "3Rs".
- Based on these tests, children will be labelled a success or failure at seven. Pressure to avoid failure will be immense, on schools as well as children. From the moment they start school children's education will be aimed at passing the test. But schools where more children fail will not be given any more money or resources. Across the country, education chiefs are having to cut teachers jobs and the "extra" special needs and language suppport jobs are the first to go.

If all this sounds bad it is just tinkering compared with what the Tories want to do in a fourth term of office. Thatcher revived the idea of education "vouchers" at the Tory conference. "Vouchers", the Tories say, would allow parents to choose the best education for their child. But no parent wants a bad education. Given the chance everybody would choose the best school available.

There are two ways for the Tories to "solve" this problem: fees or selection procedures. The Tory radicals have plans for both. They plan to massively expand the private education sector and create "new grammar schools" by bribing schools to "opt out" of the state sector. Once "independent", the schools could select pupils on the basis of test results, or could charge fees, or both.

Then your "voucher" could get your child into the best possible school—as long as they are good at passing tests, or you can pay!

At present the "consolidators" know that there is no chance of pressing ahead with this scheme and winning the election. They are pretending to be sympathetic to headteachers, exhausted by the implementation of the "reforms" so far. But a fourth Tory term will abolish the difference between MacGregor and Thatcher. Free comprehensive schooling, one of the last remaining working class gains of the post war period, will be number one on the Tory hit list.■



Are reading standards falling?

Julie Tate looks at the truth behind the headlines.

"WHAT, ON a common sense view, could possibly be political about teaching young children to read?". With these words educational psychologist Martin Turner fired the opening shots in the current debate about declining standards of education.

Turner is the spokesman for 13 anonymous educational psychologists who in June claimed to have found, during the last five years, a 50% rise in the number of seven year olds with poor reading ability.

Turn to the introduction of Turner's pamphlet, Sponsored Reading Failure, and his question, about why the reading issue is political, is answered. Here Stuart Sexton, of the Thatcherite Centre for Policy Studies, suggests:

"... the sooner all state schools are freed from political and bureaucratic control, made to be responsive to the demands of parents, free to be responsive to the demands of parents, free to operate as the best in the independent sector, reading standards would greatly improve."

Turner, Sexton and every other reactionary education pundit have blamed the supposed fall in ability on "trendy" teaching methods, introduced as a result of the supposed excesses of the "permissive society" in the 1960s and 70s. Their campaign against these methods is totally bound up with the Tories' attack on the state education system.

"Choice" is the watchword behind which the Tories want to dismantle the state education system. They have so far failed to stampede parents into voting for their children's schools to leave the state sector. The "opting out" scheme has attracted only 50 schools so far.

Most workers prefer the devil they know to the devil their own parents knew and hated.

So the next phase of the Tory onslaught involves persuading parents that there is something drastically wrong with the education system. After eleven years in office the Tories have got to dodge any accusations that their policies are at fault. So, they are turning their fire on the "loony left", chased from the council chambers only to re-emerge lurking in our children's classrooms.

Tory Education Minister John MacGregor summed up his case when he told School Examiners:

"The issue is about teaching methods, not resources".

If children's reading standards are falling then it is a major concern for working class parents. Reading is the basis of all other learning. The fact that any teenager leaves school functionally illiterate today should be a major scandal, whether the numbers are rising or falling.

But there is no hard proof that levels of ability are falling, let alone that this is linked to the introduction of "trendy" teaching methods.

To measure long term changes in reading ability psychologists have to use tests going back to the 1940s and 50s. Kids used to a daily diet of Ninja Turtles and computer hacking have to read aloud test passages about "the milkman's horse", "the woodman" and "the Swiss puppet"!

Added to this there is no single test in use across the country. Psychologists and teachers have over 300 to choose from.

Furthermore, the results Turner based his claims on are not available to public interpretation so they cannot be challenged by statistics' experts or rival psychologists.

Nevertheless, this autumn the press has carried a string of stories about local education authorities whose tests have borne out Turner's findings. Wiltshire reported a 45% rise in children in need of extra help, Derbyshire a 50% rise.

Suppose there is a marked fall in children's reading ability. What could explain it? Turner's pamphlet claims that it happened because of the introduction of a new teaching method called "real books".

Today three methods of teaching reading are in use:

- phonics is the traditional method of learning what each letter sounds like then piecing together the words;
- "look-and-say" stresses recognition of whole words; reading schemes associated with the method often have a whole range of different books reinforcing a few words in a child's reading vocabulary;
- "real books" is a relatively recent approach originating in the USA. It stresses a child's need to be surrounded by a wide variety of books which they can choose from, stimulating their language and leading, so its proponents say, to the child picking up reading skills.

It is the "real books" and "look and say" methods which are under attack by the far right as utopian and "trendy left".

In the first place educationalists acknowledge that the vast majority of schools use a variety of all three methods. A 1987 survey showed that only 3% of primary schools followed the "real books" philosophy of having no formal reading scheme.

Secondly, even if there was a direct correllation between "real books" and declining scores - which has never been proved - this could just as easily mean the tests weren't adequate to measure the skills acquired rather than a fall in overall reading ability.

Finally, there are dozens of other reasons why reading scores could be falling, every one of them ruled out for political reasons by the Tory ministers and their think tanks.

Child poverty has grown massively in the last decade. The number of people living on less than half the average income doubled between 1979 and 1987, dragging an extra 1.47 million children into poverty.

Roger Brooks of Dudley's Learning Support Service said:

"There's a very high correlation between performance and poverty: you can usually predict a school's overall results by looking at the number of children on free school meals".

One Surrey chemistry lecturer even claims that lead levels in children's blood are reflected directly in low reading ability!

But by far the most obvious contributing factor to any proven fall in reading ability is the Tory onslaught on education funding and on teachers' workloads.

Successive cutbacks in education as a proportion of government spending have been followed by the squeeze due to Poll Tax and capping. In Hammersmith, for example, Poll Tax capping has lopped 10% off every school budget to buy books and increased official class sizes from 19.9 to 21.

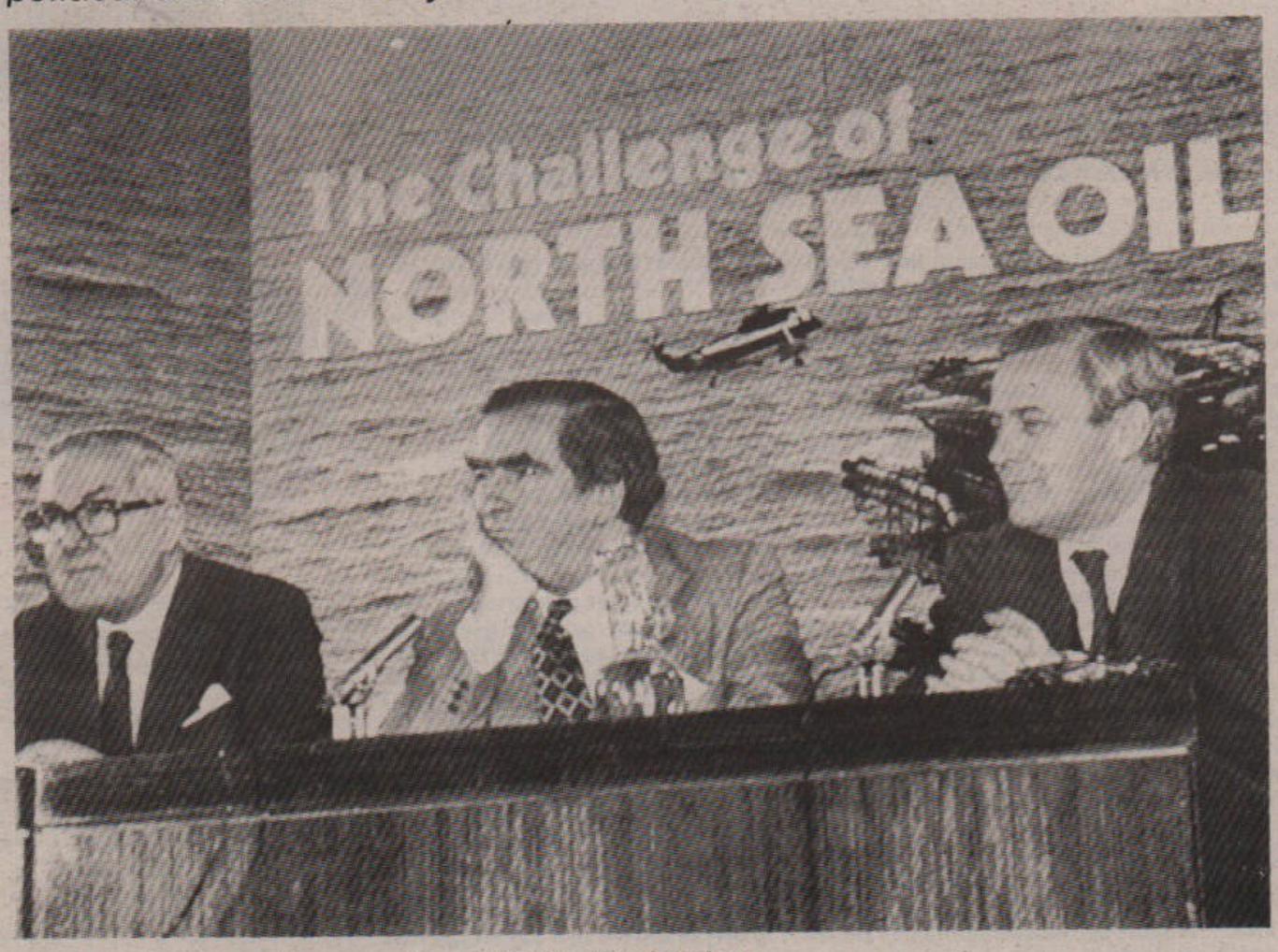
When Derbyshire education chiefs reported on the decline in reading skills, they targeted the Tories' introduction of the National Curriculum with the extra workload this has meant for teachers, as one of the reasons teachers spend less time reading with each child.

Socialist teachers, parents and children should not blindly defend the "progressive" methods against Tory attack. After all, there have been spectacular failures and crank remedies in education originating from both left and right.

And "real books", for example, expressly requires "a loving adult to encourage and help the child" as well as a "wide variety of bright and interesting books". Most teachers know that for many children the "nuclear" family and capitalist education system can provide neither.

But we should resist the Tory plot to undermine state education behind the smokescreen of the "non-political" reading debate.■

In 1981 Tony Benn and Denis Healey battled for Labour's Deputy leadership. ***Mark Harrison*** *compares the latest volume of Benn's political diaries to Healey's recent memoirs.*



Callaghan, Healey and Benn in unity—against the working class

"Inseparable — like Torvill and Dean"

DENIS HEALEY claims, in the introduction to his book, to be "a socialist who believes the Labour Party offers the best hope for Britain's future."

It is a bold claim in the climate of today's Labour Party. The very word "socialist" is now carefully avoided by Kinnock's public relations machine. In fact Healey's memoirs are a near six hundred page refutation of his socialist credentials.

Benn's assessment of Healey comes closer to the truth. At a Cabinet meeting during the 1979 strike wave against the Labour government's incomes policy, Healey hinted that Labour should deprive strikers of social security benefits. Benn noted that, "Denis sounded just like Mrs Thatcher—which of course he is."

Value

The value of Healey's memoirs and Benn's diaries, however, goes far beyond explaining the two men's disagreements while they served in Labour Cabinets together, interesting as their conflicts over particular issues were. It lies in the authors' unwitting exposure of the contradictions and limitations of political reformism.

Denis Healey entered politics while he was getting his double first at Oxford. In the Labour Party he was never on the left wing despite having originally been an active member of the Communist Party (CP). His enthusiasm for Stalinism during his youth was prompted by its right wing policies.

When he signed up the CP was pushing its "popular front" line and engineering joint campaigns with dissident Tories and Liberals. Only when the Stalinists initially opposed the war, during the Stalin-Hitler pact, did Healey break with them and sign up for military service.

After the war Healey put himself at the service of the Labour Party, first as International Secretary, then, in 1952, as an MP and subsequently as Defence Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Wilson and Callaghan governments of the 1960s and 1970s. In each of these capacities Healey worked tirelessly to serve the bourgeoisie.

Contempt

These memoirs reveal his contempt for the Labour Party as an organisation. In contrast to Benn, Healey had little time for the constituencies, committees and conferences of the Labour Party and wider labour movement. He quotes the words of Sydney Webb approvingly:

"The constituency parties are frequently unrepresentative groups of nonentities dominated by fanatics and cranks, and extremists."

When his constituency party asked him how he had voted on the Labour leadership's withdrawal of the whip from Nye Bevan he told them "that they had no right to ask". The members who work to get people like Healey elected, who shell out money to keep the party going, should not, in his view, be given any real say over policy since they are "rarely typical of Labour voters" and are "often ignorant of the issues and personalities on which they must decide".

For Healey being a politician means being free from any party control, other than at the level of a Cabinet stuffed with fellow right wingers. It means ignoring the opinion of party activists, and of rank and file workers in general. Above all it means hobnobbing at every opportunity with the highest ranks of the ruling class.

His book is a proud declaration of his role as a world imperialist statesman. He has served on the IMF, the European Advisory Board of Nissan, on countless top level Anglo-American and European security commissions. His joy at describing his summit meetings with world leaders, with top bankers, industrialists, generals and secret service officials contrasts sharply with his dismissive attitude to meetings with Labour Party members.

Healey drops famous names like confetti, drools over his old friends in the CIA, the Federal Bank and in the upper echelons of academia. Yet workers are always figures of fun. And the trade unions, which he holds fully responsible for leading to Labour's election defeat in 1979, are treated to the verbal thuggery for which he is renowned.

This reflects the reality of Healey's reformist politics. He is not a socialist in any sense of the word. He is a bourgeois politician determined to manage the British economy on behalf of the capitalist class.

Model

His goal is unambiguously stated when he quotes a study of Japanese capitalism, his model for Britain, which concluded, "we had better learn to live with organised capitalism". For form's sake Healey adds, "I had come to similar conclusions, although I preferred the phrase 'market socialism' ".

His commitment to "organised capitalism" led him as Defence Secretary under Wilson to commit conventional forces to action and deploy nuclear missiles in the interests of defending British imperialism. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he did a deal with the IMF that involved not only wage restraint but massive cuts in public spending.

It led him to fight a ruthless battle against Tony Benn in the early 1980s to preserve the Labour Party as a stable instrument of capitalist rule. His success has ensured the restoration of the Labour Party as a credible electoral alternative to the Tories in the eyes of the bosses. It has not advanced the struggle for socialism one millimetre. Reformism never will.

The time of my Life
by Denis Healey
Penguin, £6-99, pb, 607pp

Conflicts of Interest: Diaries 1977-80
by Tony Benn
Hutchinson, £20, 675pp

And to remove all doubts about this Healey reveals that his alleged promise "to squeeze the rich until the pips squeak" was an invention of the press. He never said it, and would never dream of saying it. It would upset too many of his dearest friends.

Benn's diaries too are a guide to his politics. Benn is also a reformist, albeit of a more left-wing variety than Healey.

Where Healey relishes his direct line to the ruling class Benn is full of suspicion about "the establishment". While he was in the Cabinet he was convinced the secret service was monitoring him. He even ponders the possibility that they were going to kill him!

Unlike Healey, his passion for the Labour Party's organisational machinery is clear. His world is the constituency, the National Executive, the Home Policy Committee and the Conference. Dinners and think tanks with the bourgeoisie are far less to his taste.

This volume of the diaries deals with the final years of the Labour government. This was the time of the Lib-Lab Pact, of pay restraint under the guise of the Social Contract and of the so called "Winter of Discontent" (the 1978/79 strike wave) which ended with Thatcher's victory at the polls. Throughout these stormy years Benn was the Secretary of State for Energy and a member of Callaghan's Cabinet.

Quite how anti-working class this government was is revealed by entries during the winter of discontent. Thatcher went into the election after the strikes with the rallying cry of curbing "union power". A typical speech might run something like this:

"The key to all this is trade union power . . . We must redress the balance of power. It is cheaper to strike in Britain than it is in other countries because we give strikers unemployment pay and social benefits."

But these words were uttered by Jim Callaghan and Denis Healey in a Cabinet meeting five months before the 1979 election.

Disgust

The diaries reveal Benn's growing disgust at such attitudes. The real problem is that he had no alternative to them. He refused to resign from the Cabinet, refused to vote against the government in Parliament and abided by the principle of collective responsibility which forbids Cabinet ministers dissenting from agreed decisions.

All of this flowed from Benn's reformist belief that, despite the bad things it was doing, his loyalty was to the Labour government not the working class. As he records, when Callaghan had hinted at sacking him:

". . . if I left the Cabinet I would be voting for it in the House, and if Labour were defeated in the House I would be trying to get a Callaghan government re-elected."

Such loyalty had practical consequences. Benn's own Department was drawn into the pay battles when the Tanker drivers imposed a overtime ban and voted to strike. Benn is clear that he was prepared to use troops to break the strike.

An exchange with Moss Evans, the leader of the TGWU, puts this beyond doubt:

" 'Of course,' said Moss, 'we don't want the troops used.' 'Neither do we,' I told him, 'but if I need to use them I will have to declare a state of emergency.' "

Benn goes on to record his preparations for the deployment of troops against strikers, salving his left wing conscience merely by trying to delay their eventual use and consult the TGWU leaders. He realises what he is doing but reformist logic allows him no escape:

"There is part of me that tells me that I am being sucked into this terrible military operation. I know I have to protect emergency supplies, but there is no doubt I am compromised up to the hilt by remaining in this awful government."

Remain

Yet remain in it he did. All the time he justified this by claiming he was a "modest beacon", "an irritant", a voice of powerless opposition. And underlying his thinking was that Labour was the only vehicle for his own version of "organised capitalism".

He wanted, and later struggled for, a more democratic version of the Labour Party. But its goals were to remain managing British capitalism through tripartite planning agreements, through government stakes in major enterprises and through statutory controls on imports and on the movement of capital.

This "fairer" capitalism will, for Benn, be guarded against "German arrogance", EEC dictatorship and all other foreign devils, by that great illusion of the Labour left the "sovereign Parliament". And Benn's fundamental loyalty to the reformist party before the working class has been revealed during every election period, when he and the left MPs make a public truce with the Healeys and the Kinnocks in the cause of a Labour victory.

Tragedy

In his memoirs Healey recalls a meeting during Benn's Chesterfield by-election campaign in 1984. He admits: "I was at a loss how I could praise him". In the end he joked:

"And as for Tony, he and I for many years have been inseparable—like Torvill and Dean."

Dead right Denis. Despite their personal enmity, despite their range of differences and despite their contrasting lives as politicians, they are inseparable. The left wing of reformism reminds the Labour Party of the plight of the working class within capitalism. The right wing reminds the Party that without the approval of capitalism its quest for power is doomed and without power it cannot help the workers.

The tragedy is that, through it all, it is the right wing warriors like Healey who retain a clear purpose and determination whilst the Labour left inevitably falls prey to compromise and self delusion.

The reformist party, where the Benns run round rallying the troops whilst the Healeys consort with the international bankers, is a bourgeois workers party, a vehicle designed to deliver up the working class as easy prey for the bosses.

These books need to be used to hammer home the consequences of this collaboration to the millions of workers who look to today's Labour Party for salvation from Thatcher.■

THE GULF CRISIS

Iraq: s semi-c

Saddam Hussein is a right wing dictator with ambitions to make Iraq a regional military power. But does that make Iraq imperialist? ***Paul Morris*** *outlines below the development of imperialism's system of exploitation while* ***Keith Harvey*** *explains why Iraq is still a semi-colonial country.*

AT THE start of this century the world was divided between oppressed and oppressor states. On the one side lay a handful of big imperialist powers. On the other side lay the colonies, forcibly seized by the imperialists during the preceding centuries and subject to direct rule and shameless plunder.

States such as Britain and France had developed huge industrial and banking sectors. In their quest for profits and raw materials they were impelled to strike out abroad into relatively underdeveloped capitalist and semi-feudal parts of the globe. By force of arms, by a policy of divide and rule, the governments of these rich nations divided up most of the world between them, securing stable and protected markets for goods and capital investments and a source of cheap labour.

The imperialists introduced capitalist relations of production into the colonial world, but in an uneven and distorted way.

The club of great powers had developed a variety of enterprises embracing everything from light to heavy industry, from consumer goods to machine goods. But the oppressed countries had their industrial development subordinated to the needs and rhythms of the imperialist countries within a growing world economy and international division of labour.

Any indigenous small capitalism was destroyed, as in India, by cheap imports. Often countries with a particularly valuable raw material (oil, coffee, rubber etc) would be deliberately confined to producing this and at best a few related industries.

Moreover the profits accrued from its extraction or production would mainly benefit the imperialist companies and only secondarily a small layer of the local ruling class.

There is a noticeable hierarchy of imperialist and imperialised countries. Over the last 100 years the league table of imperialist powers has changed markedly.

Founder members such as Britain have seen themselves drop from the top of the table to half-way down the first division, while others like Japan have shot up from a lowly position. Others like Germany have gone from top to bottom and back again.

Share

But whether we are dealing with the USA, Denmark, Japan or South Africa, despite all their many differences they share the fundamental features of imperialist powers: they are world leaders in important sectors of industry or finance; the export of capital predominates over the export of commodities; on balance their bosses extract a considerable surplus from the Third World through the operation of their multinational companies and through loans—and these outweigh their liabilities.

Today, as in 1916 when Lenin wrote his study of "Imperialism", we can still speak of the imperialist powers as centres of monopoly finance capital; robber states vying with each other for advantage in the exploitation of the non-imperialist world.

The oppressed nations too have varied in their pace and level of development. But in addition to this, since the Second World War, they have undergone a fundamental change in their relationship with the imperialist powers.

Britain and France fought World War Two to defend their old colonial empires; Germany and Japan to carve out new ones. But the USA fought and won the war in order to abolish the old order of protected colonial empires. It established military and political supremacy and, on the basis of this, a world market for its goods. It forced its allies and enemies alike to divest themselves of most of their colonial posessions. From Africa and the Middle East to South East Asia an era of "independence" dawned for the former colonies.

Did this mean they had escaped subjugation to imperialism? No. The system of colonial exploitation was replaced by a system of semi-colonies.

There had always been countries which escaped direct colonisation by imperialism, mainly due to the balance of forces between imperialist powers competing to dominate a region. China, Argentina and Iran were cited by Lenin as examples of "semi-colonies": "politically and formally independent but in fact . . . enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence".

Lenin viewed these as "transitional" forms, which would inevitably be colonised as inter-imperialist rivalry intensified. In fact several of the semi-colonial countries did come under more direct imperialist domination during the inter-war years.

But the post war order erected by US imperialism required that the semi-colonial exception became the norm. Imperialist finance capital was able to control the independent Third World countries, assisted by what Lenin called "its friend diplomacy"; the constant implied threat of imperialist intervention and the covert operations of the imperialist military and intelligence forces.

Claim

Few who claim to be Leninists would today deny that such backwaters of poverty and underdevelopment as Bangladesh or Bolivia constitute classic semi-colonies in the Leninist sense. But it is the emergence of developed and industrialised semi-colonies like Argentina or Iraq, and their resultant military ambitions and adventures, which has led many to call into question the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations.

Socialist Organiser (SO) for example repeatedly talks about "sub imperialisms". *The Leninist* claims Iraq is no longer a "neo-colony" but a "proto imperialism". For such groups the emergence of this new type of capitalist state calls into question the whole analysis of the structure of imperialist exploitation outlined by Lenin. It also eradicates the need for revolutionaries to support such countries in military conflicts with imperialism. Today *The Leninist* argues for "defeat on both sides" in the Gulf conflict. *Socialist Organiser* does not defend Iraq because of its position within the imperialist system but because of the threat to its "self determination".

Region

For both *SO* and *The Leninist* the ability of states like Argentina and Iraq to mount military adventures in their region against imperialism is paramount in defining them as something other than semi-colonies. *The Leninist* argues that Iraq's military adventures in the last ten years stem from a crisis of its internal economic development that has seen it transcend its former position and become a "medium developed capitalist country". Moreover:

"If the regime is to survive and not face civil war, Iraq must therefore expand: it must become imperialist. That was what the incorporation of Kuwait was all about." (5 October 1990).

For *SO* "a sub-imperialism is an aspirant regional imperialism, usually a client or semi-client of a fully developed imperialist state". It is Iraq's "regional aspirations" which mark it out as having already broken from the semi-colonial position.

The truth is otherwise. The crisis of the Iraqi state does not stem from its "proto" or "sub" imperialist ambition flowing from some internal logic of its economic development. Rather it stems directly from Iraq's failure—despite its immense oil wealth in the 1970s—to escape from the semi-colonial strictures imposed on its economy by the club of world imperialist governments, banks and multi-nationals.



Lenin - saw how imperialism oppressed "independent" Third World countries



IRAQ'S EARLY capitalist economy was dominated by the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Established in 1928 it included five of the western companies that were to become the Seven Sisters of the post-war period that between them dominated world oil production and distribution. BP and Shell controlled nearly 50% of the company between them.

The concessions to explore Iraqi territory were prised out of the pliant Iraqi royal family as the price for political independence. By the end of the 1930s the whole territory of the country was divided up into oil concessions to the big US and British companies.

There was supposed to be provision for Iraqi nationals to buy into the IPC but this was effectively blocked. During the whole period of the rule of the IPC over Iraq the multi-nationals controlled the evolution and development of the country in its interests. They restricted the amount of revenue that was deducted from the oil profits of the IPC. Up to 1952 the government gained only $1.75 per tonne sold before negotiating increases of first $5.50 a tonne and then 50% of all profits.

Revenue

Whilst this improved the hand of the Iraqi government the IPC still held most of the cards. The most obvious and lasting control over the exploitation of oil came in the form of the declaration of profits on which government revenue was based. The IPC had it in its power to sell the oil to its "customers" abroad (in reality another branch of the same network) at a superficially low price, often below the prevailing world market price. This ensured the official profits which Iraq took a share of, were low. Profits would be added back on after the refining and retailing stages to reflect costs of production.

Up to this stage it is clear that despite its independence Iraq was a classic semi-colony. All the major decisions about its economy were under the control of the major benefactors of that economy; the imperialist oil companies.

Compared to the pre-war situation when oil output from Iraq was small, the booming 1950s demanded more and more. This

To launch a thorough development of Iraq victory over Kuwait, of debt, of oil depe broken. That is why Iraq ou

put revenues at the state's disposal for some measure of industrial development, raising the possibility of a gradual diversification of the Iraqi economy and the promise of an eventual break with its semi-colonial condition.

When Colonel Quasim led a bourgeois nationalist revolution against the royal family in 1958 he declared:

"We are fighting for the industrialisation of our republic and the ending of our dependence on the sale of crude oil."

But the class structure of Iraqi society—one nurtured and protected by imperialism—stood in the way. The overwhelming bulk

still a colony

of the profits from oil that stayed in Iraq went directly to the tribal landlords and was invested in trade and land rather than industry. The small amount of manufacturing was confined to food, drink and textiles, purely for the home market. The most significant change to the economic structure of Iraq in the 1960s was felt in agrarian relations, with land reform going some way to creating better conditions for capital accumulation and breaking the hold of feudal classes.

Boom

In the 1960s, as global oil production increased in line with the long boom the IPC kept the production of oil from the Iraqi fields well below potential capacity, preferring to maximise output elsewhere. Iraq's income was dependent on increasing the volume of production but this was outside of its control. This is a perfect illustration of the way in which the semi-colonial system of exploitation works; Iraq's overall pace and direction of economic development was kept within the limits and at a tempo of imperialism's choosing.

Matters changed considerably after the bourgeois nationalist Ba'athist revolution finally triumphed in 1968. But how much? Between 1972 and 1975 the Iraqi government nationalised the holdings of the IPC entirely, after negotiating compensation. These years coincided with the first oil price rises of OPEC. Taken together this improved the financial situation of the Iraq government at a stroke. Oil revenue in 1972 was about $1 billion. On the eve of war with Iran in 1980 it was to register $26billion a year and rising. But how were these revenues used?

Manufacturing certainly increased during the 1970s; it grew at about 11% per annum although the huge explosion in oil revenues meant that, as a proportion of national income, manufacturing stayed the same or declined. Investments in industry, controlled by the state banking sector, did allow for the development of a new layer of the Iraqi capitalist class—primarily one involved in contracting for services in trade and construction.

It was the state itself which undertook the largest volume of investments; in heavy industry and high technology. Between 1969 and 1979 there was an 80% increase in state owned industrial establishments. But the pattern of these investments only underscored Iraq's dependence upon oil and imperialism.

Many who reject the notion of Iraq as a semi-colony place great emphasis upon the creation of an Iraqi economy that is highly statified, highly monopolised—controlled and owned by an Iraqi ruling class.

There are two points to be made about this. First, the tendency towards state ownership and monopolisation of the economy is not itself evidence that Iraq is imperialist or even "proto-imperialist". Wherever capitalism lays down its roots the tendency for the centralisation and concentration of capital occurs. In semi-colonies many states inheriting a weak or non-existent bourgeoisie have to resort to the use of the state as a forcing house for the accumulation of capital. In itself it is evidence of the weakness so typical of semi-colonial countries.

Secondly, the existence of an economy relatively free of penetration by imperialist multi-national capital does not prove that its economy has broken free of semi-colonial subordination. There are many ways in which imperialist capital can subordinate the development of a nominally independent economy to its own designs.

In the 1970s, far from breaking free of its dependence upon oil as a result of acquiring great financial wealth, we can see that Iraq increased its dependence on this one commodity with dramatic consequences.

Over half of the investments in this decade went into oil exploration or increasing productivity in the oil industry. Other investments went into the associated industries of chemicals and petrochemicals. Most of these depend upon exporting their products in order to be viable but their costs of production are reckoned to be at least 50% to 75% higher than those produced in the west. Consequently these industries, far from making an export surplus, are *subsidised* by the oil revenues.

Nor did Iraq make much progress with refining its own crude oil which would have considerably increased the value of its exports. By 1988 of the 2.8 million barrels a day (b/d) of crude oil that Iraq extracts from the ground only 400,000 b/d are refined inside the country—a figure barely above what is consumed in Iraq itself.

It is also in the nature of oil industries that they do not lead to a related development in infrastructure: transport, communications etc. All one needs is developed ports and pipeline facilities. But these in themselves do not aid the rounded development of other industries. It was only in the plans drawn up for the 1980s that a modern motorway and railway system were envisaged; plans that were aborted by the Gulf war.

Overwhelming reliance upon one commodity, even one as profitable as oil has been to Iraq, always carries the danger of major problems if the price does not hold up. From a 1981 high of $36.90 a barrel the price of oil plummeted in 1986 to around $14 before recovering to around $18. Iraq could not compensate for this halving of the price because it had failed to develop a broader economic base.

Narrow

The industrial development that did take place, narrow as it was, was cripplingly dependent upon imperialist multi-national companies. After 1973 Iraq imported $2 billion worth of capital goods which amounted to more than twice the value of Iraq's entire manufacturing sector. Consultant and service fees paid to imperialist companies are more than twice the value of Iraq's non-oil exports and ten times more than is spent on local research and development.

Over half of investments went on "turnkey projects", that is, huge heavy industrial complexes which depend upon foreign companies for the initial investigation, design, procurement, installation and servicing. On 28 February this year the latest turnkey plant in Basra was opened after completion by Snamprojetti of Italy. Foreign specialist labour is used preventing Iraqi workers and managers from acquiring skills jealously guarded by the imperialists.

Of course it is true to point out that all economies today are interdependent upon one another. But here we are talking about a situation in which the majority of investments in the industrial spheres of the economy are dependent upon imperialist capital. This means a considerable amount of the surplus finds its way back to the multi-national companies and guarantees that the main levers of control of Iraq's economy lie out of the hands of the Iraqi bourgeoisie itself.

The economic consequences of the Gulf war with Iran after 1980 were disastrous. Not only were industrial development plans abandoned and large swathes of existing manufacturing destroyed by Iran but Iraq was transformed from a country with considerable foreign currency reserves and negligible debt into one, at the end of the decade, with $30 billion worth of debt and a mere $1 billion of reserves. This needs servicing and thereby entails more of the wealth generated within Iraq being siphoned off abroad, restricting the development of the economy within strict limits. In order to reconstruct its economy since the end of the war Iraq has had to reverse its post-1975 policy of not allowing non-Iraqi capital to explore and develop the oil fields. In February this year Iraq invited foreign capital to help explore a new field with a potential of 200,000 b/d.

On the eve of the invasion of Kuwait, then, Iraq was as far as ever from breaking its chains of semi-colonial subservience to imperialism.

It has no significant capital investments abroad that could betoken its proto-imperialist nature. It has failed to diversify its industrial base and is possessed of a commodity which accounts for nine-tenths of all its foreign earnings, three-quarters of its GDP, yet whose real value today, barrel for barrel, is less than it was in 1970/71.

It is these economic facts and the social crisis they have generated that lie behind the present military adventurism of the Iraqi ruling elite. There is nothing proto-imperialist about Iraq's economy driving it to conquer the small countries of the Middle East. The traditional role of conquest for imperialist powers is to carve out protected markets for its capital and goods. Iraq's goal in annexing Kuwait is a million miles removed from this. It is first and foremost to prevent Kuwait depressing the price of oil.

Of course those like *Socialist Organiser* who see military aggression as simple proof that a state is imperialist will not be satisfied by, or even bothered about, an analysis of Iraq's economy and its place in the world system of imperialism. But for anyone interested in understanding Iraq from the point of view of Marxism, understanding its economy is vital.

Even if Iraq is, as *The Leninist* claims, led by "an organisation of the bourgeoisie committed to making Iraq a great regional power by developing capitalism in the style of Bismarckian Germany" an understanding of its semi-colonial economic position shows why this will remain a utopia for the Ba'athists.

Unlike 19th century Germany Iraq exists in a world already divided between big imperialists. Whatever the grotesque parasitism, nepotism and economic blunderings of the Ba'athist regime that have aggravated the condition, the fact remains that Iraq began its path to independent development too late, long after the world had been carved up by the big powers, long after they had loaded the dice in their favour.

Chains

To launch a thoroughgoing and balanced industrialisation and development of Iraq would require not just a temporary military victory over Kuwait, Israel or the USA. It would require the chains of debt, of oil dependence and of imperialist diplomacy to be broken.

That is why no section of the Iraqi bourgeoisie can lead Iraq out of semi-colonial subservience. Fundamentally its class interests lie with the imperialist system, despite its anti-imperialist rhetoric. It is incapable of achieving the stage of "medium capitalist development", sub imperialism, or proto-imperialism which SO, *The Leninist* and others claim it has achieved under the Iraqi bourgeoisie.

The basic tenets of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution apply to Iraq today just as they applied to the "classic" colonial and semi-colonial revolutions of the 1920s and 30s.

Only the working class and poor peasants, whose interests are implacably opposed to imperialism, can lead Iraq out of semi-colonial servitude. To do that they will have to defeat not only the imperialists but Saddam himself. The anti-imperialist revolution in Iraq, as in the rest of the Third World, will triumph as a workers' revolution or not at all.■

hgoing and balanced industrialisation and would require not just a temporary military srael or the USA. It would require the chains ndence and of imperialist diplomacy to be no section of the Iraqi bourgeoisie can lead of semi-colonial subservience.



THE LONGEST WAR

The rights and wrongs of "human bombs"

ON 25 OCTOBER the IRA launched three bomb attacks which led to the deaths of six soldiers at border checkpoints. In all three attacks, civilians, whose families had been held hostage, were used as "human bombs".

In two of the attacks, the IRA are believed to have strapped their victim to the driving seat of a van packed with explosives. In one of the attacks the victim died. In a statement issued shortly afterwards, the IRA justified their action by saying that their civilian victims has been construction workers for the security forces, and so were legitimate targets.

The Provisionals represent the leadership of a mass resistance by the Northern anti-unionist population against British Imperialism. This has been well demonstrated by the repeated re-election of Gerry Adams as West Belfast MP, and the massive turn out for funerals of Republicans murdered by the forces of the British state.

The war against British imperialism waged by the Irish resistance is a just one, a result of the denial of the right of self-determination to the Irish people by the British state.

The outcry over the civilian victims of the "human bomb" tactic stands in marked contrast to the silence when British forces kill and maim anti-unionist civilians. British soldiers who shoot and kill Republican youth have had prison sentences quashed and been welcomed back into the army with open arms.

Task

The British workers' movement should not for one second be drawn into the orgy of anti-Irish, anti-Republican hysteria stirred up by the bombing. Its first task is to renew the fight for Troops Out of Ireland so that the whole Irish people will be able to determine their own future.

Despite all this we have to reject the IRA's justification that civilian workers and contractors who service the armed forces represent the same kind of legitimate target as the Army, the UDR and RUC.

The penetration of the Army's hi-tech security measures, the demoralisation of the soldiers and the destruction of three checkpoints certainly represent blows against the imperialist presence. But the deliberate use of civilians to carry the bombs more than outweighs this.

In any war civilian by-standers will get killed. But there is a difference between this and the deliberate use of civilians as human bombs.

It is not the first time that a wing of the Republican movement has targeted sections of the working class as legitimate targets for "collaboration with British forces".

In April 1988 workers belonging to the Northern Ireland Public Service Union (NIPSA) went on strike in protest against threats by the INLA in Derry. The INLA claimed that Derry had been targeted by a "special team" of "mercenary DSS snoopers" from outside the area. At about the same time the IRA in West Tyrone announced it was stepping up the campaign against building contractors engaged in carrying out work for the British army, RUC and UDR.

What both the IRA and the INLA share (despite the IRSP/INLA's professed adherence to "Marxism-Leninism") is a conception of strategy which subordinates working class action to the military struggles of the guerilla organisations. The primacy of the military over the political remains central to the ideology of physical force Republicanism, despite its rhetorical orientation to the working masses.

Basis

Such a strategy can never be the basis for successfully challenging and smashing the rule of capitalism and imperialism over Ireland. It is a strategy which can only be counterproductive. Proof of this can be seen in the reaction to the human bombs. Charles Haughey, Prime Minister of the Irish Republic was able to claim:

"These savage murders would be condemned by the overwhelming majority of the people of the island."

He and the other shameless hypocrites in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Northern Ireland Committee have not done anything to mobilise workers to fight against British repression. Yet the fact that the Coshquin bombing gave them an opportunity to spread their poisonous propaganda has to be faced.

Defend

Such actions by the IRA and INLA, whatever their intentions, do nothing to defend the working class or advance the struggle against imperialism.

Only a strategy which puts the organisation and mobilisation of the working class—in the first place the anti-unionist and southern working class—at the very heart of its struggle can concretely address such issues as "snooper squads" in the DSS and the building of army posts in the middle of anti-unionist areas.

Only in this way can the community itself—and not the self-appointed judges of the IRA—decide who is and is not a conscious collaborator.

Only such a strategy can make it possible for workers and their trade unions to refuse to service the forces of the imperialism without loss of jobs or pay.■

Troops out of Ireland NOW!
Self Determination for the Irish people as a whole!

THE GULF CRISIS



Arab disunity

ONE OF the first casualties of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait has been the illusion of a cross class interest common to all Arabs. Despite the fervour which has greeted Saddam's action across the Middle East the writing is on the wall for the region's bourgeois nationalist rulers, writes ***Mark Abram.***

THE POTENCY of Arab nationalism has depended upon the illusion that unity across and between the score or so Arab states is realisable and meaningful; unity across classes and against the chief architect of their oppression—the coalition of imperialist countries.

Even in this latest crisis, the illusion is carefully manufactured that there exists an "Arab solution" to the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait, one that can be delivered and upheld without the need for western intervention.

Yet events since 3 August have underlined the bankrupt and completely opportunist nature of the various ruling bourgeois regimes in these countries. The crisis has demonstrated their utter incapacity to take a consistent anti-imperialist line of march.

Agreement

From the moment Egypt's President Mubarak engineered the agreement of a dozen Arab states to back US intervention against Iraq, the Arab League was a dead letter with its member states hopelessly polarised. Egypt's role came as no suprise. Mubarak agreed to send 20,000 troops to back Washington. Egypt is already, after Israel, the principal beneficiary of US aid. The reward for its participation in the Gulf war drive is the writing off of its $7 billion military debt to the United States. France, Italy and Germany have unblocked loans. Japan has advanced $300 million in immediate aid and the US has made the IMF relax its grip on repayment of Egypt's outstanding $50 billion debt.

Meanwhile, the Eygptian media round upon their Arab brothers—the Palestinians. A leading paper attacks them for their "criminal stance" in not condemning Saddam. The government is encouraged to confiscate the property of 60,000 Palestinians living in Egypt.

More of a suprise to those who believe in the steadfastness of the Arab leaders was the turnabout in the stance of Syria. The country that was once called the "beating heart of Arabism" by Nasser himself. The nation that for 40 years has berated the evil empire emanating from Washington and was the leading light in the Rejectionist Front against any reconciliation with Israel. This bourgeoisie has sold its reputation for a bigger slice of Lebanon.

In return for joining the anti-Iraq camp and sending 10,000 troops to the Saudi, Syria's leader Assad has been allowed to defeat his Christian rivals in Beirut and get taken off the "terrorist" category at the US State Department. Diplomatic ties and loans will follow.

At the same time, those Arab states in the pro-US camp have steadily raised the stakes against their brothers who have betrayed them. Saudi, the richest of them all, has already stopped oil supplies to Jordan and expelled diplomats from Yemen, Jordan and Syria. Saudi has suddenly discovered that the Jordanian port of Aqaba is really theirs.

Why have the Arab states been unable to sustain regional unity or even a united attitude of hostility to imperialist interference in their affairs? The short answer is that they are semi-colonial capitalist states, each one possessed of a ruling bourgeoisie that is tied by a thousand threads to imperialism. These rulers are allied to imperialism in opposition to their own working class and poor peasantry.

The US uses the carrot and the stick to secure its aims with these regimes. The carrot is the agricultural credits, arms, military intelligence and favourable lobbying in the relevant institutions. The stick remains barely concealed at all times in the form of covert actions, military strikes, visa and trade restrictions. And instead of fighting imperialism the Arab bourgeoisies succumb.

Possessed of a certain amount of economic power and leaning upon the USSR, some states (eg Iraq, Syria) have in the past thumbed their noses at imperialism, while brutally repressing their own workers. But with the collapse of Stalinism this prop is removed and the Arab regimes, like Syria, fall into line for a few crumbs.

So in this context how would an "Arab solution" to the Gulf crisis differ from the war aims of the US?

The US insists that absolutely no concessions can be made to Saddam. For the anti-Iraq alliance of a dozen Arab states, led by Egypt and Syria the Arab solution can only be the one drawn up in that well known Arab city—Washington. Even Jordan's proposed "Arab solution" would involve the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and a tacit recognition of a permanent US presence in the region.

In reality the only consistent and genuine anti-imperialist force in the Arab world consists of Arab workers and poor peasants. Only they have no interest in cementing ties with their oppressors and exploiters in the west who continue to back Israel and deny the Palestinians a homeland. But in fighting imperialism they will have to fight from the outset their own bourgeois governments.

In Saudi Arabia while the majority of workers have no rights, the ruling dynasty of 4,000 princes preside over a regime of obscene privilege and exploitation. There are no elections and no parliament so law is by royal decree. Political organisations and trade unions are banned while the press is subject to rigid censure. A decree banned strikes in 1956 after workers in Dharain struck when the King visited.

Workers in Egypt fare little better. In August 1989, 24,000 steelworkers at the Helwin steel works in Cairo struck over pay and conditions, and occupied the works. Six thousand "special intervention" police, armed with electric clubs and machine guns, broke into the steelworks and clubbed and teargassed the strikers.

Increasingly, workers in the Middle East do not share the faith of Western politicians in an "Arab solution". The massive anti-western protests held in Sudan, Tunisia and Jordan testify to that.

Voted

The Federation of Arab Transport Unions meeting in Tunis called for the lifting of the blockade imposed on the Iraqi people, and voted to boycott British and American boats and planes. Workers in the region should fight to turn such resolutions into real anti-imperialist initiatives, seizing the imperialists' factories and oil wells in the region, and those of the "national" capitalists who exploit the masses on their behalf.

The fight against imperialism must be fought as a struggle for a Socialist United States of the Middle East, to draw together the working class and poor peasants of the region in separate states or autonomous regions for every nationality.■

PALESTINE

Caught in the crossfire

Since the Gulf crisis began the media has portrayed the PLO leaders as "supporting Saddam's seizure of Kuwait". In fact the PLO is balancing between the mass of Palestinians who enthusiastically support any Arab state that stands up to the imperialists and Arafat's Saudi paymasters. ***Dave Slater*** *looks at the prospects of a Palestinian settlement in the light of the changed balance of forces in the region.*

PALESTINIANS HAVE long had to endure atrocities against them. The Temple Mount massacre which left 21 dead and 150 hospitalised is only the latest in a series of Israeli crimes. It was the killing of four Palestinian workers by an Israeli tank in December 1987 that ignited the Intifada—the mass and continuous uprising of the Palestinians in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

Inspired by the mass revolt of the South African workers and youth in the mid-1980s, the Intifada has shifted the whole focus of the Palestinian struggle. It has forced the imperialist powers, though not yet their Zionist gendarmes, to seriously contemplate a "solution" to the Palestinian question.

Of course, this "solution" is not one that will enable the two and a half million strong Palestinian diaspora to return to their homeland or give them a sovereign state on its soil. It is not a solution to the problems of the Palestinian people; rather it is a solution to the problem the Palestinian people present to imperialism and its agents in the Middle East.

The Gulf crisis has made such a "solution" more and more urgent. The European and Japanese imperialists, who rely proportionately more on the conservative Arab regimes of the area to safeguard their exploitation of the oil wealth of the region, have gone the furthest in condemning Israeli atrocities and recognising the Palestinians' "right to a homeland". But the USA is still the key player. It is the main paymaster of the Zionist state—to the tune of $4 billion per annum in economic and military government aid.

Without this support Israel could not exist as a state minimally attractive to immigrants. The reason for US imperialism's staggering level of aid is the "watchdog" role Israel plays. Its armed forces have been maintained at a level greater than the combined forces of all the neighbouring states.



Wedge

The role of Israel was and is to act as an imperialist wedge driven into the divided states of the Arab world, diverting attention from the plunder of the region by Shell, Texaco, Mobil etc., and from the slavishly pro-imperialist regimes of the Arabian peninsula. US strategist Joseph Churba argued that:

"Ever since its establishment Israel has served as a "lightning rod" for the oil rich countries and pro-western regimes by diverting the attentions and energies of the Arab radicals away from them".

Israel has forced massive military expenditure on the Arab states, undermining their industrial and economic development by this diversion of resources and obliging the weak ruling classes of the Arab world to resort to Bonapartist dictatorships.

Up to 1982, US and Israeli policy were in all essentials identical. Even the Israeli blitzkrieg against Lebanon in that year, aimed at wiping out the PLO, provoked no dissent. Only the Israeli-Phalangist organised massacres at Sabra and Shatilla caused any protest. After the Israelis forced the withdrawal of most of the PLO guerrillas in September 1982, the USA tried to bring about a pro-Israeli imperialist settlement via Egypt and Jordan.

This was supposed to give the West Bank inhabitants some form of "self-government in association with Jordan". This process—the Reagan Peace Plan—was meant to exclude the PLO. It foundered on Israeli intransigence; the most that even liberal Shimon Peres would concede was 60% of the West Bank with the exclusion of East Jerusalem.

Throughout the mid-80s the PLO made one concession after another to the USA to persuade it to enter into a dialogue. It clearly accepted the mini-state solution, the almost total disarmament of such a state and its subordination to the Jordanian monarchy. The fruits of these concessions were nil or rather worse than nil.

The Palestinian movement split between the Fatah majority and the Rejectionist Front. The former fell under the domination of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iraq. The latter became a tool of Syria, Libya, and behind the scenes, the USSR. By 1987 the Palestinian liberation movement had reached a depressing all time low.

Encouraged by the PLO's decline and expected fall, the Israeli's under the Likud-Labour grand coalition pursued the policy of colonising the West Bank and Gaza. The settler population was upped to 70,000 on the West Bank plus a similar number in the mushrooming new city of East Jerusalem. 3,000 settlers were installed in the Gaza. In absolute numbers these were a small part of the total population. But they appropriated 55-60% of agricultural land on the West Bank and 90% of the water resources. The Zionist press and figures like Arik Sharon loudly canvassed the need to "transfer", ie. expel the 900,000 Palestinians from these territories.

The Intifada was in large measure a spontaneous response to the mounting pressure of the Israeli state and its paramilitary "settlers". Abroad the PLO was a farce of division and compromise. All hope that the PLO's guerrillas or the Arab states would liberate them had almost died. The miracle of the Intifada was that the youth of the camps and the towns and villages of the West Bank took up the struggles.

It was a battle of a Palestinian David against the Israeli Defence Force's Goliath. And if stones could not bring the IDF to its knees, they proved that it could not for long and certainly not for ever suppress a whole risen people. It forced Palestine onto the agenda. And it did so at an opportune moment.

A certain modification was already underway in US policy. This was provoked by the almost total collapse of Soviet independent policy in the region, part of a global surrender to the USA that Gorbachev hoped would buy him economic relief. Suddenly the rejectionist, "nationalist" regimes of the Arab world had no Soviet aid to fall back on. In addition during the 1980s the US became dependent on Gulf oil for the first time.

This brought the USA into closer dependency on Arab regimes—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf Emirates and cautiously even Iraq.

In the light of this new diversification of its economic rule in the region it looked with increasing alarm at the behaviour of its Israeli watchdog. It could no longer afford to let it slip the leash and bite friend as well as foe in the region.

The systematic colonisation and outright annexation of the occupied territories, plus the constant interference to stir the witches cauldron of the Lebanese factions alarmed the USA and led to the Baker Plan.

In 1988, fearing the destabilisation that the Intifada and the savage Israeli repression of it would bring to the Arab world, the USA espoused the notion of a disarmed, formally independent Palestinian micro-state bound by international treaties. Further, it offered negotiations with the PLO if the latter would "renounce terrorism" and formally recognise the state of Israel. This Arafat did at the Algiers meeting of the Palestinian National Council in November 1988.

The USA put some pressure on the Israeli coalition government. The Israeli Labour Party espoused the Baker-Mubarak proposals with heavy reservations including absolute refusal to negotiate directly with the PLO. The PLO agreed to elections on the West Bank to choose spokespeople "not involved in terrorism".

Again the Zionists refused, knowing PLO supporters would be elected. US hopes were dashed when Likud won over enough of the religious parties. Shamir took office promising to "liquidate the Intifada once and for all".

The Iraqi seizure of Kuwait has been seized upon by the United States and its British shield-bearer to create an expanded pro-imperialist alliance amongst the Arab states, drawing in Syria. The objectives of the USA are proclaimed to be a "new order" for the Middle East as part of the "new world order". Clearly this involves either clipping the wings or wringing the neck of Iraq. For the first time Israel is no help—indeed it would be an absolute hindrance in carrying out this task.

The USA needs Arab hopes and Arab money as a carrier for its designs on the Gulf. Any Israeli intervention would be a spark to ignite the flames of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East. Hence the United States' willingness, without denouncing the "linkage" Saddam Hussein has made with the Palestinians, to talk of a "solution" to the question following on the heels of a successful solution to the Iraq-Kuwait crisis.

In this light the massacre of the Temple Mount was clearly no accident. Sections of the Zionist right in the state apparatus and the government coalition view the USA's new order with great alarm. The USA's green light to liquidate Israel's "man" in Lebanon, General Aoun, has set alarm bells ringing.

The Zionist right, lulled by the 30 year old US-Israeli alliance into believing that the US will ultimately back anything the latter does, doubtless hope to use the cover of the Gulf crisis to create a number of irreversible settlements in the occupied territories and Jerusalem.

The US vote for the UN Security Council Resolution condemning Israel for the Temple Mount massacre is clearly a shot across their bows. But it remains a warning to the Zionists not to interfere in the USA's grand strategy, not a promise to the Arab regimes to solve the Palestinian problem.

Active

The courageous Palestinian masses—the workers who have risked and lost their jobs in strikes, the women who have played an active role in all the mass mobilisations and in organising the community for resistance, the young, some of them eight or nine years old, who have daily fought in the streets—all deserve better than the leadership of the Arab bourgeois regimes that toady to imperialism.

They deserve better than the PLO who are willing to sell their birthright for a West Bank entity that will be not so much a state as a gigantic prison camp.

The "East Bank Intifada" in Jordan last year forced the first relatively free elections, and made it the only Arab state in the region where the masses can express on the streets their real support for Saddam. These events, together with the earlier upheavals in Algeria, all testify to the electrifying example of the Palestinians mass struggle. They also indicate the direction it must take.

The Palestinians can, and must, become the vanguard of an anti-imperialist uprising—in Egypt, in Syria, in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Its targets must be the stooges of imperialism—in the first rank, Mubarrak, Assad and King Fahd.

But events will prove that other agents will also have to go, including Saddam and King Hussein of Jordan. To do this the Palestinian masses must create a new leadership for their justified national struggle—a revolutionary proletarian, internationalist one.

Such a leadership must also settle accounts with Arafat, who has compromised and betrayed more than a generation of fighters such as the youth of the Intifada in order to serve the interests of the Palestinian big bourgeoisie.■

the LRCI

NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

AUSTRIA

An apology

In the October issue of the paper we wrongly stated that the Revolutionary Communist League (RKL) in Austria had walked out of the Action Committee Against Imperialist Aggression in the Arab Region, and failed to attend a rally on 30 September. We apologise to the comrades for this error. In fact they have been working alongside the LRCI Austrian comrades in building various actions of the Committee.

POUVOIR OUVRIER, RTT

Marching against the Gulf war drive in France and the USA

October 20th witnessed a number of demonstrations around the world protesting against the US and European military build up in the Gulf. In Paris 5,000 marched where there were sizeable contingents from the PCF, the LCR, PCI and Lutte Ouvriere. Pouvoir Ouvrier, the French section of the LRCI, was also present. The comrades distributed a leaflet and sold their new journal. Pouvoir Ouvrier No 18 contains articles on the Gulf, the French National Front, and Africa among others. Copies are available from Workers Power in London for £1.

In San Francisco 1,000 took to the streets as part of a nationwide day of demonstrations. In the weeks running up to the protest comrades of the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (RTT), the fraternal group of the LRCI in the USA, had worked alongside the Freedom Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Workers League and the Workers Socialist League to build a working class anti-imperialist contingent on the San Francisco march. The RTT also put out their own leaflet which stated:

"A victory for the imperialist armies may cheapen the price of the gas in your car. But it will put your boss and the bosses' politicians in an even better position to attack you, your wages, your social services, your democratic rights. . . .

. . . We must organise now to stop the war by stopping the USA's war machine. Workers have the power to stop supplies to the Gulf task force. We have the numbers which, if mobilised on the streets, can break the blockade and establish a working class alternative to the Democrats and Republicans."

BOLIVIA

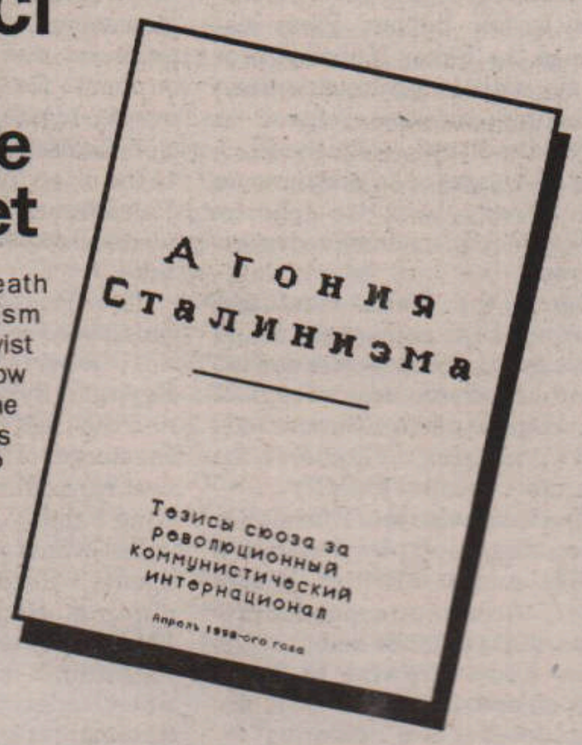
Left debates perestroika

On 25 September in the Technical University in Oruro the Bolivian fraternal group of the LRCI, Poder Obrero-OCIR, participated in a joint forum with several groups, including Guillermo Lora's POR. A well attended and successful debate was held on the theme of perestroika and the changes in eastern Europe. Since then the comrades have published the third issue of their paper, copies of which can be obtained from Workers Power for 50p.

SOVIET UNION

New LRCI Russian language pamphlet

Includes: The Death Agony of Stalinism (Published in Trotskyist International No 4). Now on sale inside the USSR. Copies available from WP price £3.



The LRCI
Arbeiter/Innenstandpunkt (Austria), Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany), Irish Workers Group, Poder Obrero (Peru), Pouvoir Ouvrier (France), Workers Power Group (Britain)
Poder Obrero-OCIR(Bolivia) is in the process of discussions with the LRCI with the aim of becoming an affiliated section. The Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (UCA) has fraternal relations with the LRCI. The Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Ost) is a sympathising section.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Cautious capitalists



Mass demonstration in Prague, November 1989

BY KEITH SANDFORD

IN ITS programme for the June elections the Civic Forum (CF) told the population of Czechoslovakia that, "economic policy should be aimed at the rapid creation of market economic conditions." But the progress of the capitalist counter-revolution has come up against governmental divisions and the inertia of the old bureaucracy.

The general strike of 17 November 1989 was the final and decisive blow against the hated Stalinist Husak regime. In its place, and on the backs of the workers' magnificent action, came the CF/Public Against Violence government. Its short term goals were to purge the state apparatus of the Stalinists and prepare the country for a return to capitalism and elections. Only with the latter has CF had any lasting success to date.

The origins of this government lie in the intellectual opposition of Charter '77, a bourgeois democratic grouping of dissidents under the old regime. The playright-president Vaclav Havel was its best known representative. One member, Peter Uhl, noted that Charter '77 was so amorphous that it was able to unite:

". . . those like me who saw the Charter as a first step in the political revolution, while others saw it as a way of disseminating the word of Christ."

This broad expanse of political views was carried over into the CF government. Comprised of 30 unelected individuals, its strength, and the key to its electoral success, lay in its base of regional committees. It enjoys its greatest strength in Prague where its committees intervene around everything from environmental issues to the concerns of army conscripts. The CF (and its Slovak counterpart, Public Against Violence) gained a majority in both parts of the country in the June elections—some 46% of the vote. The more right wing parties, such as the Christian Democrats, did badly and have disintegrated since the election.

The CF has failed to set up the structures of a "normal" bourgeois political party. Combined with the weakness of the other parties, including social democracy, this has resulted in a minor crisis of political leadership for the forces of social counter-revolution.

One thing all within CF are agreed on is the need to retreat towards capitalism. In late March the government put in place the necessary legal framework for this and outlined plans for currency convertibility, the destruction of central planning agencies and privatisation of state industries. Most recently a law was adopted guaranteeing protection to foreign investments. But the scope and tempo of these plans, as well as the different approaches to them, reveal important features of Czecholovakia that marks it out from Hungary and Poland.

The currency will not be convertible until January 1991, a full year after Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia. Whereas in mid-October Hungary put all state assets onto the open market, the CF government has only agreed to privatise small shop businesses and turn state industries into stock companies by the end of this year, as preparation for privatisation later.

At one end of the spectrum stands a group around Havel himself and Prime Minister Calfa, who are for a slow tempo of change and one that avoids the worst excesses of a Poland style Big Bang in terms of unemployment and price rises. They fear their workers won't be so quiescent. By the end of June this year only 2,701 people were drawing unemployment benefit and a mere 6,809 were actively seeking work in the Czech republic. Even the estimate for the end of 1990 suggests that no more than 30,000 may find themselves unemployed.

In addition, while the bulk of food subsidies were removed in July producing average price rises of around 17%, there has been wage compensation to cover some of it. The material basis of the slow counter-reform strategy of Havel is the state of the Czechoslovak economy that was inherited from the Stalinists. It possesses some very good sectors such as engineering. While there was a decline of about 3% in output in the first three months of this year this compares to a slump of 27% in the first four months in Poland. In fact while there has been an overall contraction, Czech industry was vibrant enough to respond well to meet a rapid 8% increase in demand for consumer goods earlier this year.

The State Planning ministries are being abolished legislatively and a central unified plan has been broken down into priority allocation of resources by the state trusts. Yet the Economist Intelligence Unit was able to comment in late July that, "industry is continuing to produce according to the requirement of a centrally planned economy."

A further factor slowing down the pace of change is the lingering strength of the Stalinists (KSC). In the elections they polled second highest, with 14% of the popular vote across both halves of the republic. They are influencing the CF by dominating many of the smaller rural CF Committees. Within the state apparatus there are many old functionaries still in place. The relative economic strength of the country, in the absence of privatisation but in the aftermath of loosening the central plan, has put considerable power in the hands of the managers of the monopoly sectors of industry.

But all this will change quickly if the right wing of the CF gets its way. Finance Minister Klaus is the main protagonist acting opposite Havel in the playright's latest real life drama of plotting the return of capitalism. Klaus favours a Polish style shock. As he stated recently:

"There is no time to privatise 5% of the state property in two, ten, fifteen years . . . We must start with the bulk of enterprises and privatise them in a few months time."

In order to realise his plans, Klaus stood for and won the post of head of CF in October. He has his sights on the post of Prime Minister, and is trying to force Calfa to resign so that he can pursue the rapid break up of state industry.

The working class has already had a taste of what it can expect from all the forces—including the KSC—who are set on taking Czechoslovakia back to the capitalist market. In late September an unpublished plan of the Energy Ministry revealed their intentions to close ten mines by next year. Half of these are targetted for the vast Ostava-Karuna complex which presently employs over 100,000 workers.

Working class resistance has been muted since the 17 November general strike. On 24 November an association of strike committees was formed which is reported to have 10,000 local cells. Its attitude to the official trade unions (URD, OOR and SOR) was summed up in the first issue of the Bulletin of the Strike Committees when it stated:

"In the decisive days of our democratic revolution the URO, OOR and SOR proved themselves to be a collective scab."

Since then, the workers have tended to merge their activities with those of the local CFs, which has dampened down antagonisms with the CF government. This is despite the fact that in June the CF outlawed political strikes.

In some places the strike committees have at least turned to trying to rebuild the trade union movement and wrench control from the old Stalinist influence.

The working class must rebuild not only its own organisations of struggle such as trade unions and strike committees; it must establish its political independence from the CF with its pro-market programme. The social crisis is maturing in Czechoslovakia, postponed but not cancelled. Once the forces of reaction find their unity and decisiveness the working class will have reason to respond quickly to the likes of Klaus:

- No to privatisation!
- No to cuts—restore subsidies and services!
- For workers' management of the central planning agencies and the factories!

GERMANY

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), successor to the old Stalinist ruling party in East Germany, is under legal attack from the ruling class of the new united Germany. ***Richard Brenner****, writing from Berlin, explains the reasons.*

Where is the PDS going?

SUPPORTERS OF the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) with illusions in the nature of capitalist democracy have had a series of rude lessons in recent weeks.

A rally called by the party in the recent local elections was disrupted by a mob of fascist skinheads while police stood idly by. And whilst the fascist NPD held a rally in Erfurt, protected by hundreds of police armed with truncheons and riot shields, the Christian Democrat mayor of Arnstadt banned a PDS meeting, claiming he feared a breach of "public order"!

But the worst was yet to come. On 18 October, barely two weeks after the formal re-unification of Germany, the Berlin police stormed the PDS headquarters in the former Karl Liebknecht house. On the pretext of investigating alleged irregularities in party funds, the police rampaged through the building, opening party files.

Showing scant regard for the much vaunted federal constitution they ignored "parliamentary privilege" by invading the offices of PDS leader Gysi, ex-leader Modrow and other MPs. A week later the police were back to arrest two officials on charges of mishandling of Party funds.

Now the party faces a further, potentially more serious, attack. The Bundesverfassungsschutz, the organisation charged with the task of "protecting the constitution", says it may investigate whether or not the PDS is an organisation hostile to the constitution. If so the PDS will be illegal under federal German law.

Why are the German bosses scared of the PDS?

The party's origins lie in the old Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Stalinist party which held complete control over the GDR state and much of social life. The SED was itself formed through the forcible fusion of the Social Democrats and the Communist Party in the Soviet occupied zone after the second world war.

Majority

The political revolutionary upheavals of 1989/90 destroyed the SED. The majority of the bureaucrats, managers and Stalinist functionaries left the party, many joining the Christian Democrats in a characteristically cynical attempt to retain their privileges and influence.

The new leadership of Gysi and Modrow changed the party's name and aimed to transform it into a social democratic organisation, accepting the free market and the reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis. The party's militia, its factory-based fighting groups and its trade union federation were unceremoniously dissolved.

Yet despite the massive exodus from the party, the PDS still claims in the region of 350,000 members. A very high proportion of these are pensioners, retaining some of the ideals that they thought the SED stood for, and nervous as to the effects of unification on their social security.

Many worker members of the party resigned as soon as the SED lost its stranglehold over society. Thousands had only ever been captive members, obliged to join in order to secure training, promotion, and to avoid victimisation.

But the party retains a mass base, and it is not solely comprised of those over 65. A recent conference called by the PDS economic commission attracted over 400, mainly workplace, delegates. PDS branches exist on working class estates throughout the GDR.

Although the party's vote has declined steeply, from an average of around 16% in the March 1990 elections to around 11% in the October Lander (regional) elections, it still receives significant support. It is seen by many workers as the only mass party in the eastern part of Germany which is capable of obstructing or at least softening the blows that are raining down on the working class to make them pay the social and economic costs of reunification.

Control

These aspirations among many of the PDS rank and file and electorate guarantee the PDS leadership serious problems in carrying through its planned transition to a social democratic party. Such a party would have to be one that the German bosses could rely upon to control working class struggles—a reformist workers' party like the German SPD or the British Labour Party.

In carrying through the reunification the bosses face PDS members retaining positions in the police and civil service. As many party members still regard themselves as communists of some sort or another, the bosses simply do not trust them.

Despite increasingly vacuous electoral slogans—"We are true to our word" and "for the weak, a stronger opposition"—the party has received extreme hostility from the West German Social Democrats (SPD) themselves. After emerging as the strongest party in Brandenburg in the local elections, but without an overall majority, the SPD made it clear that they would form a coalition with any other party, including the Christian Democrats of the CDU, but that under no circumstances would they ally themselves with the PDS.

Faced with such obstruction to unity with the social democrats

The aspirations of many of the PDS rank and file and electorate guarantee the leadership serious problems in carrying through the planned transition to a social democratic party.

and in order to maintain sufficient political identity to function even as a purely parliamentary party, the PDS has been obliged to adopt a position at least formally to the left of the SPD.

However, for the rightist leading faction of the PDS, the party's formal commitment to socialism rarely goes beyond Sunday speechifying. Thus Gysi's response to the police raid was entirely legalistic, complaining only that parliamentary immunity was violated.

His comment that the raid could promote an increasingly polarised political situation was not intended to threaten the authorities with a militant response involving the mobilisation of the party members, but to appeal to the government and the Berlin legal authorities not to take aggressive steps that might undermine social peace.

It should not be forgotten that the SED/PDS regime of Modrow and Gysi played an important role in dampening the charged political situation in the GDR between November last year and the March elections. Gysi himself spoke out in December, describing strikes as "irresponsible". As PDS representative Andre Brie pointed out in the party paper *Neues Deutschland* in August of this year,

"The historical service of the Modrow regime was that under extreme conditions it achieved the political and economic stabilisation of the GDR."

The PDS has therefore already shown itself capable of rendering a huge service to capitalism. The opportunism of the PDS leadership was further displayed in the infamous affair of the "Left List". The undemocratic federal constitution stipulates that a party must gain 5% or more of the votes cast in order to obtain seats in parliament.

As the PDS was only an Eastern party, the leadership stitched up a deal with a motley band of assorted leftists in the West German "Communist Party". The members of this new "Left List" were themselves thoroughly opportunist, dropping all criticism of the reformist programme of the PDS for the privilege of, perhaps, getting into parliament.

Among the "prominent" personalities in the List was Jakob Moneta, a member of the United Socialist Party and a supporter of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International—despite the fact that his own party refused to support the PDS/Left List in the elections!

However, the constitutional court delivered a blow to the western opportunists by declaring that for the December 1990 national elections the 5% hurdle will apply separately to the former territory of the GDR. The PDS are therefore home and dry.

The leadership immediately abandoned the "Left List" project and declared their intention of creating an all-German political party. Some of the westerners reacted with consternation, others have joined the party but have received a frosty response from rank and file PDS members who resent the replacement of their own chosen candidates with trendies and marketeers from "over there".

Support

It is certainly the case that the westerners are prone to be more blatant in their support for the market, influenced as they are by Eurocommunist and Green ideologies. Thus at a recent conference of the PDS it was western delegates who spoke most vehemently in defence of PDS right winger Klaus Steinitz when his pro-market policies came under attack from a supporter of the Trotskyist newspaper *Arbeitermacht*.

But the PDS is far from consolidated around social democratic politics. The party has been forced to grant broad democratic rights to its membership after decades of Stalinist bureaucratic centralism. Different interest groups, working groups, committees, commissions, tendencies and platforms exist within the party in a climate of constant, and often chaotic, debate. Prominent amongst them is the Communist Platform (KPF).

The KPF was formed in December and, as its name suggests, aims to reassert the supposed origins of the party in the German communist movement. It originally claimed support from 20,000 people within the party, though unofficial estimates put this far lower. Its members are among the most active within the PDS, and they have within their ranks members of local and regional leadership bodies of the party.

The KPF aims to prevent the social democratisation of the party, and states in its key document that it rejects Stalinism, and is willing to consider in a critical light the contribution to communist theory of oppositionists such as Bukharin and Trotsky.

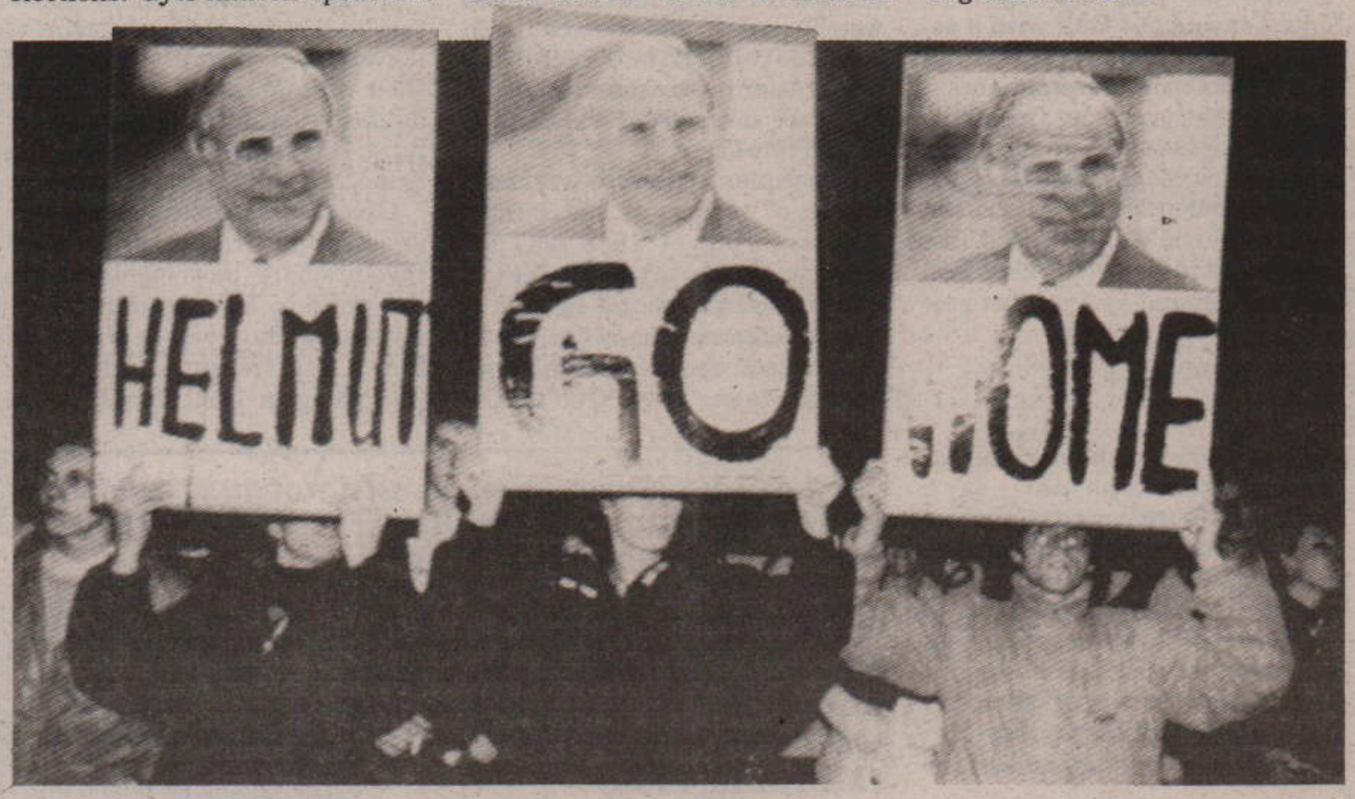
The KPF is keen to preserve internal democracy in the party, and its principled defence of a group called the "Radical Left", which the leadership sought to suppress, was influential in forcing the leadership to back down. However, the KPF has not yet developed a coherent programmatic alternative to the PDS leadership, and has even gone so far as to deny that it intends to fight for the "communistisation" (sic) of the party.

Debate

Supporters of the German paper *Arbeitermacht (Ost)* have not stood aside from the intense process of debate taking place inside the PDS, but have intervened strenuously in this milieu, advancing a revolutionary programme of action against the bosses' attacks as a way of crystallising the aspirations of the PDS rank and file against the bourgeois politics of its leadership.

Within the KPF, as amongst party members generally, the proposals of Trotskyists have met with considerable interest and have already received support from members within the party. As the Trotskyists point out, it would be a tragedy if, in abandoning Stalinism, the PDS leadership is allowed to consolidate the party around the equally reactionary programme of social democracy.

It remains to be seen whether the party can now generate a powerful revolutionary opposition capable of launching a consistent fight for the genuinely communist leadership that the German working class needs.■



East German workers protest against unification earlier this year

Militant and the Gulf

*A debate has broken out amongst Militant supporters over their position on the Gulf crisis. The paper's Editor, Peter Taaffe, has devoted a full page in two issues to answering "readers' questions". **Colin Lloyd** explains what lies behind Militant's difficulties.*

Ghosts of the Malvinas

SEVERAL READERS have written to *Militant* complaining that they cannot convince workmates of the need to pull British forces out of the Gulf. They say that *Militant* should be arguing for a "socialist task force", and "workers' sanctions" against Iraq.

It is clear that these are not just arguments raised spontaneously by reformist workers. The doubts expressed in the paper reflect the unease of *Militant* supporters about how the positions on the Gulf conflict square with the arguments that they used against the revolutionary left during the Malvinas war.

No matter how heavily Taaffe stresses the differences between the Falklands and the Gulf, the debate poses *Militant* supporters with a real problem: either the paper was wrong during the Malvinas war or it is wrong now.

Taaffe's basic argument is that the Malvinas war was an inter-imperialist war, a war between a major and a minor imperialism, whereas the Gulf war is not. Having said this he does not bother to prove it. Yet both today and during the Malvinas war the whole character of the conflict, and the Marxist attitude to it, hinges on the social and economic character of the conflicting states.

Semi-colony

As we show on pages 8/9 of this paper, Iraq today is a developed semi-colony. Every one of the criteria which show it to be a semi-colony also shows that Argentina is, and was in 1982, also a semi-colony. But Taaffe not only wrongly labels Argentina as imperialist; he also fails to inform *Militant's* readers that Saddam's Iraq is a semi-colony.

This is very convenient. Taaffe is prepared to tell readers the Marxist position on inter-imperialist wars—defeat on both sides. But he is not yet prepared to reveal that for revolutionary Marxists, whatever the reactionary character of the government of Iraq and whatever its reactionary aims in annexing Kuwait, the fact that Iraq is a semi-colony can lead to only one conclusion in a war against US/British imperialism.

Like Lenin and Trotsky in a similar situation we will have to side with Iraq against "our own" soldiers; not "defeat on both sides" but "Victory to Iraq" will be our guiding slogan in the war.

Taaffe glosses over these major questions of programme and principle in his replies to readers' objections. Instead he tries to justify *Militant's* differing positions on the Malvinas and the Gulf with a series of arguments which do not bear a moment's examination.

John Smithee wrote from Wisbech complaining that:

"My discussions at work tell me that the demand for withdrawal will gain little support. Just like the Falklands war workers will see this demand as a pacifist gesture".

Pious

Characterising the demand for "imperialist troops out" as a "pacifist gesture" was exactly how *Militant* reacted to the Labour left's call for "fleet back to base" in 1982. At that time *Militant* argued:

"Marxists have to explain that the wringing of hands and pious declamations of 'bring back the fleet' cannot change anything".

It repeatedly stigmatised the "troops out" position as a pacifist gesture and a utopia. Of course *Militant* are correct in the sense that in the hands of the Bennite left calls to "stop war" and "bring the troops home" were a gesture, just as they are when they repeat them today. Why? Because the labour left is congenitally incapable of fighting for the kind of working class direct action which can make these demands a reality.

But that does not make the "troops out" demand itself utopian or a mere gesture. In the first place we can make demands on the Labour leaders to fight for troop withdrawal. Secondly, we can fight for it from below amongst the workers. We can fight for workers to refuse to supply the ships and aircraft needed to sustain the troop presence. We can mobilise demonstrations to turn mass opinion in the direction of "troops out". Workers Power raised that demand in 1982 as we do today, not as a pacifist gesture but backed up with calls for workers' action against the troop deployment.

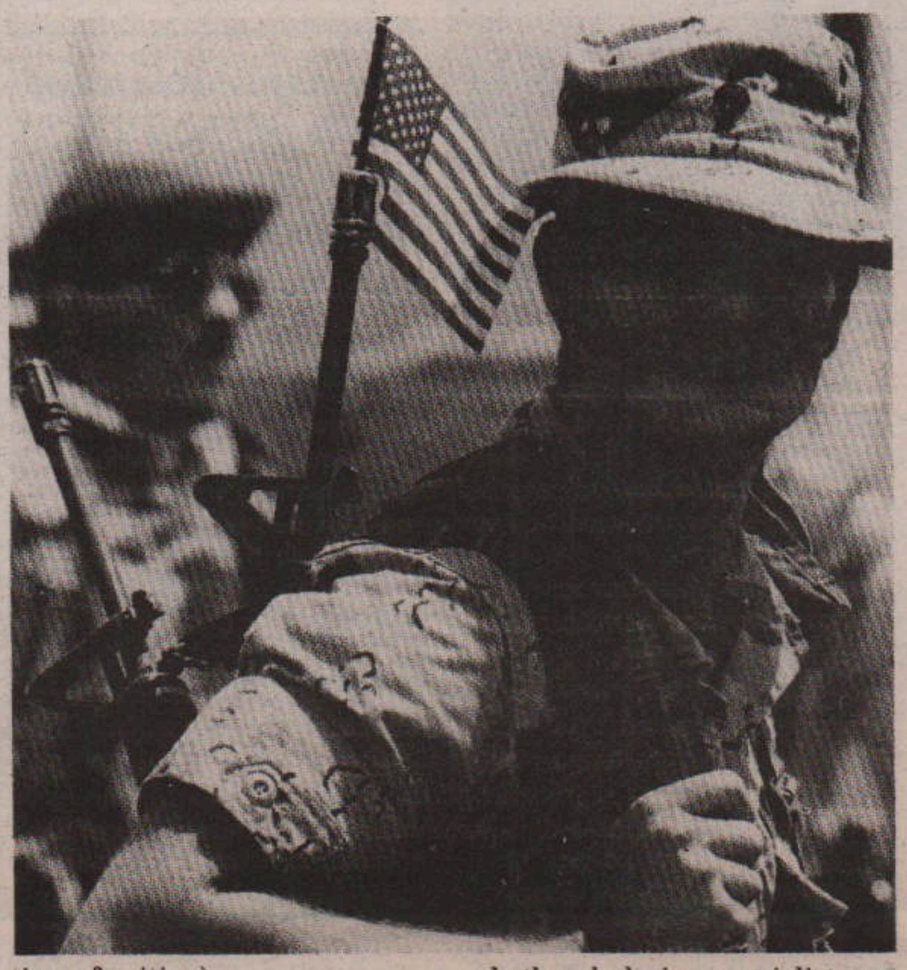
But why does *Militant* call for "troops out" in the Gulf conflict today, but did not in 1982 during the Malvinas war? Taaffe offers no explanation. He simply repeats the assertion that this was a "gesture" which "found no echo amongst working class people".

And this is the real reason for *Miltant's* different position on the Malvinas war. It has got nothing to do with the supposed qualitative difference between the economies of Iraq and Argentina and everything to do with the different perceptions by British workers of the conflicts in 1982 and 1990.

British

Unlike Saddam Hussein, General Galtieri invaded a dependency of British imperialism. Unlike the Kuwaitis, the Falklanders were British. Unlike the troop build up in the Gulf, the task force in the South Atlantic was made up exclusively of units from the British armed forces.

Consequently, the pro-war chauvinism of workers in this country in the spring of 1982 was far stronger than today. Then, the left had to test its mettle against a chauvinist propaganda barrage in a real shooting war, something we have yet to see in the Gulf (at the time of writing).



When Taaffe tells today's *Militant* readers that "sometimes it is necessary for socialists to swim against the stream where issues of principle are at stake" he is right. But when the stream was strongest *Militant* got swept along with it.

Having failed to argue for the Task Force to return to port, *Militant* paddled energetically with the chauvinist stream once the war broke out. As Taaffe explains:

"... we pointed out that Marxists are not pacifists. If necessary democratic and socialist Britain would be prepared to wage a war to overthrow the Argentine junta, not just to liberate the Falklands but to assist the Argentine workers to establish a democratic and socialist Argentina."

Instead of making their opposition to the war the main point of agitation *Militant* emphasised their willingness to support a war against the Argentine military junta—as long as Britain was democratic and socialist.

Of course, a revolutionary workers' state in Britain would assist revolutionary movements across the world by force of arms where necessary. But even in the event that a workers' state had sprung into being in 1982 it is doubtful whether declaring a socialist war against Argentina would have been a top priority!

Obscure

Militant's entire political method is to obscure the difference between a revolutionary workers state and a "democratic and socialist" Labour government. Little wonder that many workers came away with the impression that, under a socialist Labour government, *Militant* would have supported British imperialism in its war against Argentina.

Faced with the question of voting for the emergency war budget in 1982 *Militant* argued against calls on the Labour MPs to vote against the war credits. Just like the anti-Marxist right wing of the workers' movement in 1914 they argued that this would leave "workers in uniform" in the army defenceless.

At present the stream of chauvinism is running slower than in 1982. *Militant* openly rejects the call for a "socialist task force". It has no need as yet to hide its "Marxism" behind such a gross concession to imperialist war. But every one of the arguments Taaffe uses against the slogan today were applicable then.

He argues that a socialist Britain and a socialist Europe would cause "military dictatorships in the colonial world" to "collapse like a house of cards without requiring military intervention". Highly unlikely, but if it's true for Iraq, why not for Galtieri?

Taaffe says:

"It is the task of the Iraqi workers and peasants themselves to deal with the Saddam dictatorship ... Any suggestion of a task force, even with the qualification that it would be 'socialist' would be completely opposed by the masses of the Middle East. They have had enough of interventions from the west which have divided the Arab nation, super exploited its wealth ..."

Is it only the masses in the Middle East who don't like imperialism dressed up as socialism? Surely it was for the Argentine workers to bring down Galtieri, not Militant's "socialist task force". Surely the Latin American workers are sick of foreign intervention by US and British imperialism who super exploit their labour and natural wealth?

Unconcerned

In an apparent attempt to prove the difference between Iraq and Argentina, Taaffe reveals that right up to the last minute the US was unconcerned as to the fate of Kuwait and even egged Saddam on against the Kuwaitis. Has Taaffe forgotten that Lord Carrington resigned as British foreign secretary at the start of the Malvinas war because he had done virtually the same with Galtieri?

Who can blame *Militant's* readers for being confused? It is clear that those at the sharp end of having to combat workers' support in the workplace for Thatcher's stand against Saddam Hussein are asking why *Militant* cannot provide them with the same opportunist alibi as in 1982.

Today Taaffe is prepared to say clearly, "Imperialism has no right to intervene in the Middle East" and call for "Troops Out". No matter that *Militant* supporters have been in very short supply at every demonstration against the war drive and that they studiously ignore the various solidarity campaigns, this is better than in 1982.

There must be many critical thinking supporters of *Militant* who see the paper's current, more principled, stand on war as proof that the organisation makes mistakes but can correct itself. They are wrong on two counts.

Alien

First, there is no element of self correction in Taaffe's articles, only unsuccessful attempts to obscure the striking similarities between the Malvinas and the Gulf. The methodology, alien to Leninism and Trotskyism, which led *Militant* to sanction the possibility of a "socialist task force" in 1982 remains at the heart of *Militant's* politics. It is the method of centrism, of opportunism, of giving in to the prejudices of workers at the vital moment.

This brings us to the second reason not to congratulate *Militant* on its anti-imperialist stance: the war hasn't started yet. When it does, and the chauvinist tide is unleashed, it is always possible that somewhere in the small print of an editorial *Militant* may do its Marxist duty and support Iraq. Far more likely is that the "socialist warmongers" will launch themselves into the chauvinist stream again.■

***"A Labour government could not just abandon the Falklanders and let Galtieri get on with it. But it would continue the war on socialist lines."* (Militant International Review, *1982*)**

***"Any suggestion of a task force, even with the qualification that it would be 'socialist' would be completely opposed by the masses of the Middle East. They have had enough of interventions from the west which have divided the Arab nation, super exploited its wealth ..."* (Militant, *1990*)**

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 League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI 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!

IT TOOK George Bush about a month from Saddam's invasion of Kuwait to assemble 100,000 troops in Saudi Arabia; in the same period another 100,000 east German workers were assembled outside the unemployment offices as capitalism swept through their country.

The army of unemployed in east Germany and the army of imperialism in the Gulf are both potent symbols of the "new world order" that the White House is seeking to establish as the age of imperialism stretches into its second century.

Both these issues will be central themes of Workers Power's weekend of discussion and debate on 17-18 November at Kingsway College in London.

At the weekend you can come and discuss with two East Berlin workers with first hand experience of fighting the tide of capitalist restoration and unification during the last year.

There will be sessions on the Middle East exploring the decades of coups and uprisings born of a long history of colonisation and semi-colonial exploitation.

Last November Workers Power organised a weekend of political discussion just as the masses were taking to the streets of Berlin to topple the Stalinist dictatorship. One year on, the world situation has been transformed. But not to the post-Cold War era of peace and prosperity that had been promised.

Permanent Revolution 90 provides the opportunity to discuss the changes that have taken place over the year, the prospects ahead and the revolutionary action necessary to solve the crisis in the interests of the working class, not the bosses.

Join us for a weekend of discussion and debate, and help shape the new world order!

PERMANENT REVOLUTION 90

A WEEKEND OF DISCUSSION AND DEBATE ORGANISED BY WORKERS POWER



From Cold War to Gulf War

IMPERIALISM AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

17 - 18 NOVEMBER 1990

KINGSWAY PRINCETON COLLEGE, SIDMOUTH STREET, (Near Kings Cross) LONDON

Tickets: Weekend £10 (concessions £4) **Day** £6 (concessions £3)

Send cheques (payable to Workers Power) to: Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

I enclose £..... for ..... tickets at £..... each

I enclose £..... for ..... tickets at £..... each

Name .....

Address .....

Creche requirements .....

Fighting Fund

Workers Power has responded to the urgent request of our fraternal US group - the RTT - to provide funds and assistance for their present work in the Gulf anti-war movement. We have received £100 this month from a South London supporter, £100 from a Leicester reader and £20 from a Chesterfield reader which will go towards this work. Thanks. Keep it coming.



SUBSCRIBE!

Make sure you get your copy of Workers Power each month. Take out a subscription now. Other English language publications of the LRCI are available on subcription too.

I would like to subscribe to

- ☐ **Workers Power** £6 for 12 issues (UK) Europe £8·60, outside Europe £10
- ☐ **Class Struggle** £8 for 10 issues
- ☐ **Permanent Revolution** £6 for 3 issues
- ☐ **Trotskyist International** £3 for 3 issues
- ☐ **I would like to know more about the Workers Power Group and the LRCI**

Make cheques payable to Workers Power and send to:
Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1 3XX

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....**Trade union** .....

workers power

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

AS COUNCIL CUTS DEEPEN . . .

Strike against the Poll Tax!

THERE ARE still an estimated eight million people refusing to pay the Poll Tax. Even amongst those who have started paying there is a common hatred of the tax.

Council workers who face job cuts and council users who face collapsing services share a growing realisation that the effects of the tax go far beyond an unwanted extra monthly bill.

Opposition

There is massive opposition to the Poll Tax. How can we turn it into action?

For the non-payers an answer is urgent. The numbers have already fallen and the threat of court action and the bailiffs is leading many people, isolated on the estates, to give in. The All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation's strategy of clogging up the courts by stalling each case cannot work. For every handful of successes hundreds are being forced to pay. For every bailiff thwarted another one gets into a workers' house and values their possessions.

The courts cannot be "used" to beat the Poll Tax because they are not neutral bodies. Like the bailiffs themselves the courts are weapons in the hands of the bosses.

Of course it is vital to maintain the demonstrations at the courts and do what we can to organise workers' defence squads to see off the bailiffs. But on its own non-payment cannot win.

The first task is to revitalise the anti-Poll Tax movement by linking it to the struggle against council cuts in the localities. The example of Wandsworth shows this can be done. In order to keep the Poll Tax at £148 the Tory council is making savage cuts in local government. In response a demonstration of 3,000 took place bringing together council workers, users and anti-Poll Tax campaigners.

Other towns present similar opportunities. Right wing Labour councillors in Liverpool have announced that, "compulsory redundancies cannot be ruled out" and "industrial action and a head on confrontation with the unions is inevitable". In this confrontation workers must give Neil Kinnock's stooges more than they bargained for. The unions need to link up with the anti-Poll Tax unions and mount city wide action against the council.

In all such cases councils will try to set their workforces against non-payers by blaming them for the redundancies and cuts. The way to stop this is to develop joint councils of action. Strikes against cuts, built for and supported by such joint action councils, can be transformed into strikes against the Poll Tax itself.



Such action must be spread to draw in all workers. Many non-payers are beginning to face the threat of liability orders in preparation for wage arrestment so that council pickpockets can take the tax straight out of their wage packets.

Combat

To combat this we don't only need wage claims that protect us from inflation. We need a firm commitment from the workplaces, with official union backing, for strike action against wage arrestments, as well as to stop any court actions against fellow workers.

Non-payment has to be linked to the question of industrial action. If it isn't then we risk defeat. If it is then we can begin to put back on the agenda the question of launching a general strike to smash the Poll Tax itself.

On 20 October 20,000 marched in London against the tax. The Federation had done all it could to undermine the success of this march. The Militant leaders of the Fed didn't want a rerun of Trafalgar Square. Even so the numbers showed that the anger is still there. The police attack on the march showed that the state is prepared to do all it can to beat the anger out of us.

Our answer must be to turn the anger into action—in the first place industrial action. That is what every poll tax activist and every delegate to the 25 November Federation national conference must fight for.■

Now turn to page 4

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Smash the National Front!

ON SUNDAY 11 November the fascist National Front (NF) Flag group are marching in London. Our aim must be to stop them.

The fascists will be marching to the Cenotaph to lay their Remembrance Sunday wreath along with those already presented by the Queen, Parliament, the armed forces and the British Legion.

Many liberal and reformist opponents of the NF are outraged by this, but for all the wrong reasons. They see it as an affront to those who fought and died in the war against Hitler and fascism.

But the war that the NF and the bosses are commemorating was not a war against fascism. It was an imperialist bloodbath in which Britain was fighting to preserve its colonial empire, its right to subjugate millions of people throughout the world. The workers who died, many in the mistaken belief they were fighting Hitler, were sacrificed to satisfy the greed and guarantee the profits of the millionaire bosses.

We are calling on workers to mobilise to smash the NF march not to defend the Cenotaph, but because of the threat fascism poses to the working class. Fascism is a movement committed to the destruction of the labour movement. It is the final resort of the bosses when the crisis of their system becomes unmanageable by the normal methods of parliamentary rule. They will, if the crisis demands it, unleash the fascist gangs on the workers' pickets, meetings and organisations.

Task

Today the bosses do not need the fascists for this task. But they tolerate groups like the NF and the British Nationalist Party (BNP) of John Tyndall, allowing them to march, giving them police protection and turning a blind eye to their systematic attacks on black people and, increasingly, Jews. For all their claims to have fought a war against Nazism the bosses are giving legal protection to the BNP's publication of filth like Holocaust News which claims that Hitler never exterminated millions of Jews at all.

The bosses and their state will keep the fascists in reserve, in case of future need. That is why we are against any calls on the state to ban the fascists. It is why we are against waging a futile legal battle against their activities. It is why we are for working class action to physically smash them.

Support

On 11 November Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) have called a demonstration against the NF march, on the slogan "No platform for fascists". We urge every worker, every trade union and labour movement organisation and every student union to support that demonstration. If the fascist march can be stopped by thousands of workers it will set back their growth enormously. It will be a body blow to their confidence and that will be good news to the Asian families whose homes are being firebombed by NF and BNP thugs, to the Jewish community facing ever growing intimidation by fascist groups and to black people everywhere who are today on the sharp end of fascist activity.

The fascists love to demonstrate their strength by big marches. They recruit from poor and desperate whites and from outraged middle class bigots. These people feel powerless and their powerlessness leads them to racism, to hatred of the organised working class. A fascist movement on the march gives these elements a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging, a sense of power. Tyndall himself understands this when he writes:

"What is it that touches off a chord in the instincts of the people to whom we seek to appeal? It may be just a flag; it may be a marching column; it may be the sound of a drum; it may be a banner or it may be just the impression of a crowd."

On 11 November they will try to form their columns, fly their flags and bang their drums. If we can stop them it can send their potential supporters scurrying.■

All out to smash the NF
No platform for fascists!

Assemble 11 November 2.00pm
Parliament Square, London SW1
Bring union and labour movement banners
Appoint stewards for your contingents