Issue number 138 January 1991

workers power

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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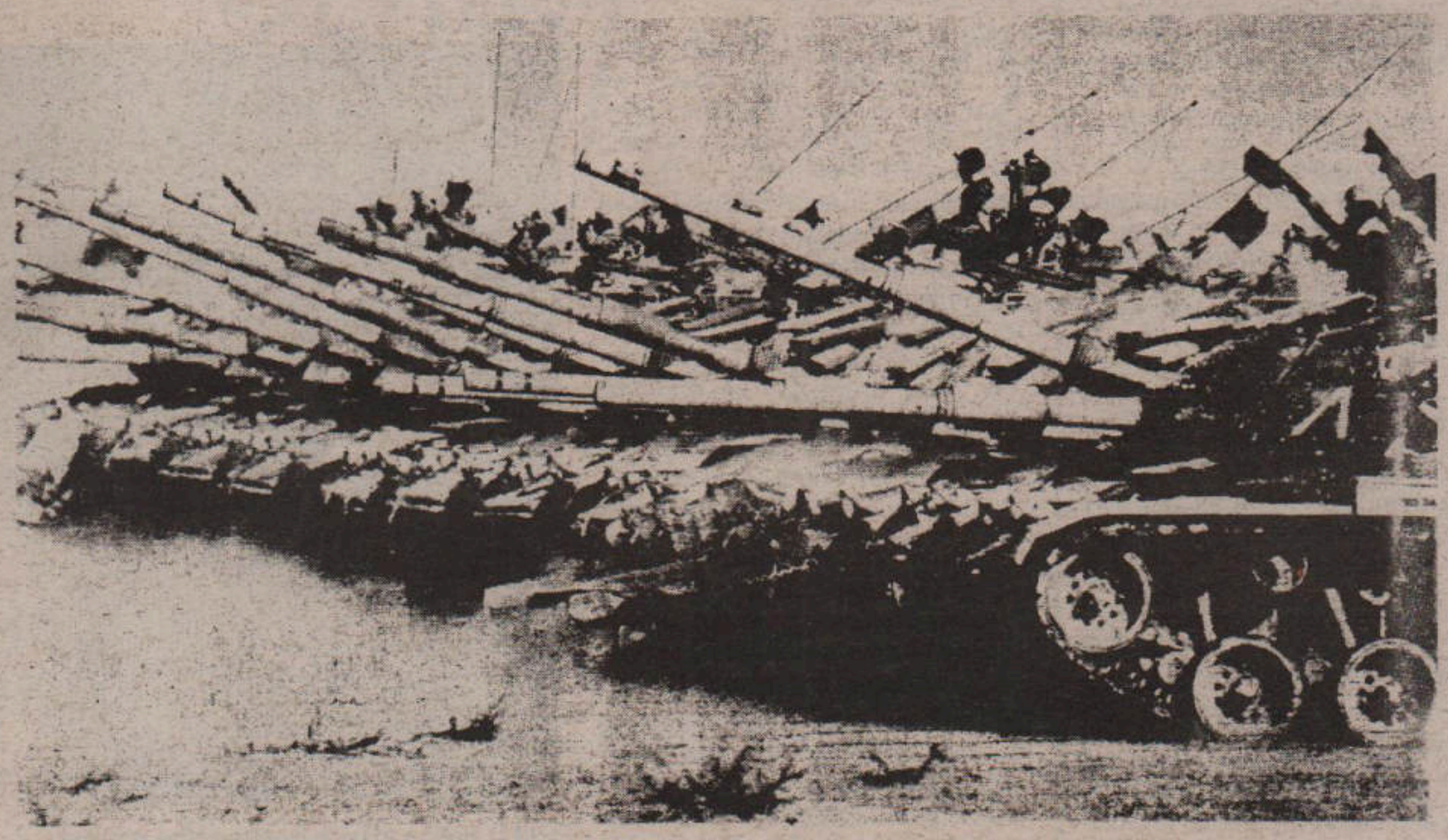
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HANDS OFF IRAQ!

TROOPS OUT NOW!

THE SCENE is set for war. Over a quarter of a million US troops, backed by 35,000 British soldiers are in place. They are equipped with the most modern techniques of mass destruction including nuclear weapons. The countdown for what could be the bloodiest conflict the world has seen since 1945 has begun.



Bush boasts that war would only last a matter of days but military experts believe that hostilities could continue for at least 6 months. One commented: "this will be a World War One situation fought with World War Three technology."

Scientists have warned that a fire in the Kuwaiti oil wells could burn for at least a year. The ecological consequences would be catastrophic.

The scale of the butchery will be immense. Health authorities in Britain have been told to increase blood supplies from donors by 50%, and to make space for 5,000 wounded in the first few days of war.

But the first casualty, as always in war, will be the truth. News of mass slaughter and US-British defeats will undermine support for the war. Newspaper chiefs have already told the military that they can have free rein to censor the papers, keeping pictures and reports of British losses out of sight and, they hope, out of mind.

If the government was prepared to issue a D-notice (media censorship) over a stolen military laptop computer then think what lengths they will go to in order to stop really bad news getting out.

On 15 January, war with Iraq will have the full backing of the United Nations. No one should be fooled into thinking that any of the much-vaunted negotiations represent a softening of the US position. The USA and Britain have made it clear that their war aims are non-negotiable. As one White House official put it: "The stick is that we invade. The carrot is that we won't use the stick."

Despite the growth of the anti-war movement across the Atlantic, despite the feeling of the majority here that all peaceful methods should be first exhausted, there can be no doubt that the overwhelming immediate feeling amongst all sections of society in the USA and Britain will be to support the war once it gets started.

Millions of workers will feel that war is justified to remove the dictator Saddam Hussein and to get Iraq out of Kuwait. The millionaire press and the bosses' TV have spent months telling us just that.

But the "allies" are not fighting this war for the good of the Kuwaitis or the Iraqi victims of Saddam's terror. Quite the opposite. They want to defend their control over the region's oil. The multi-national oil companies loot the resources of the Middle East, and cream off astronomical profits by exploiting foreign labour.

In the face of any threat to this Bush and Major are ready to reduce Baghdad to rubble and to send tens of thousands of working class and peasant soldiers and civilians to horrible deaths.

They say they want to free Kuwait, but are calling for the restoration of the Emir, whose rule denied the majority of workers the right to vote. They say they want to check Saddam, but they put him in place, funded and armed him, supported his war with Iran and stayed deadly quiet when he massacred the communists and the Kurds.

They say they want to stop aggression, but the USA has vetoed every UN resolution that seeks to criticise Israeli expansionism and the mass murder of Palestinians.

If the imperialists win they will carve up the region, strengthen the exploitation of the region. They may even try to install another dictator in Baghdad, but this time one who will do their bidding. An imperialist victory will compound the problems of the region, because imperialism is the problem in the region. It has looted and divided for too long.

Workers have no interest in Bush and Major's war. It is being conducted in the interests of our main enemies, against our Iraqi brothers and sisters, the overwhelming majority of whom want nothing more than an end to imperialist domination of their country.

We have every interest in seeing imperialism, not Iraq, defeated and if the war starts then this means we fight for the military victory of Iraq.

We must demand that Labour MP's break from the party's disgraceful support fo the war drive and vote agains all money and military r sources being committed t the Gulf. We need direct ac tion to hinder our real ene mies: strikes in the arm factories, the breaking of ' blockade and committee rank and file soldiers in armed forces who don't to die for the oil barons we need a movement w the working class that mobilise this action fo immediate withdrawal o US and European troop

Turn to pages 8 and 9

IN brief

George V rules England, London is the centre of world trade, the farthing has just been abolished and "quite soon" man might travel to the moon. No, it's not the setting for another BBC historical drama series. It is the picture of Britain students would get if they took seriously what is in many school library books.

A recent report by government inspectors found that average expenditure on new books was just over £2 per pupil. The Library Association recommends a minimum of £8.53 per student, and even that is only enough to buy one and a half books per year. Inspectors found that seventy per cent of school library books are obsolete.

"The Industrial Trust": it sounds respectable and it's a charity. Between 1984 and 1987 it received more than £423,000 from companies. But the Charity Commission has revealed that the bulk of this was passed straight to IRIS—the Industrial Relations Information Services. And IRIS is quite definitely not a charity. It publishes a newsletter dedicated to keeping the left out of trade union positions.

Big names in the Trust include Lord McAlpine and Lord Boyd Carpenter; major donations have come from Glaxo, Boots, BP, P&O, Hanson, Guinness and Whitbread.

These big businessmen not only get a well funded blacklisting and witch-hunting operation, but they can also claim tax relief on their donations. Obviously, for the bosses, charity begins at home.

As the decade of "greater home ownership" drew to a close the courts clocked up their biggest ever number of house repossessions. In the year from September 1989, 222,479 court cases were started against families defaulting on their mortgages. This represents a 65% jump from the previous year, when just over 74,000 were begun. Actual reposessions rose by 18% to 47,093.

Another grim statistical memorial to the Thatcher years came out last month. The Health and Safety Commission reported the highest death rate in the construction industry for 10 years. On average three workers a week were killed on the building sites last year and overall 4,199 were seriously injured.

As the construction trade plunged into recession the bosses and contractors have been cracking the whip and cutting down on the already minimal safety provisions. To enforce the safety laws the Commission has a grand total of 1,239 inspectors to cover every workplace in Britain. John Rimington, the director general of the Commission said:

"It is quite difficult to connect an executive to the blood on the floor, but we are quite prepared to take managers and executives to court".

Given the average fine for safety violations is no more than the average executive spends on opera tickets in a year, construction workers might find it more productive to start connecting the executives to the floor direct.

SM TRIAL

Fight anti-gay witch-hunt

IN DECEMBER the aptly-named Judge James Rant sentenced eight gay men to prison sentences totalling more than 25 years at the end of what the tabloids referred to as the "Old Bailey SM trial".

A further six men received suspended sentences totalling ten years, and the last was put on probation for two years.

The 15 defendants were accused of causing actual bodily harm, keeping "disorderly houses", possessing cannabis and LSD, unlawful wounding and "publishing obscene articles" by taking private videos of sex sessions.

The charges arose out of sado-masochistic (SM) sex sessions, to which the men involved freely consented.

Passing sentence, Judge Rant said:

"This is not a witch-hunt against homosexuals . . . nor is it a campaign to curtail the private sexual activities of citizens of this country."

But with the prosecution baying about "brute homosexuality in sinister circumstances" that is precisely what the trial was set up to be.

According to Rant:

"Much has been said about individual liberty and the rights people have to do what they want with their own bodies but the courts must draw the line between what is acceptable in a civilized society and what is not."

He went on to commend the cops who had "the unenviable task of unravelling this most distasteful affair".

It is no coincidence that, in the aftermath of the trial, a London bookshop is being prosecuted for stocking a book on body art and practitioners of body piercing are being threatened with court cases by the Director of Public Prosecutions. A reactionary moral witch-hunt against anyone deemed deviant by the state is underway.

All of this reveals the extent of officially sanctioned sexual repression in Britain. The fact that people willingly consent to activities that they enjoy is anathema to the guardians of "normal sexuality" and its corollary the heterosexual family unit. That is why they have a barrage of laws that they can use against people for taking part in their private sexual activities.

Anal intercourse between heterosexual adults is illegal. Now sado-masochistic activities between consenting people can result in prison sentences. Videoing your own sexual activities may get you arraigned before Judge Rant and his pals. Transvestites can be done for "disturbing the peace" by wearing the clothes of the opposite sex! In short your private life is no longer your own. The police are licensed to be the Stasi of the bedroom.

On the receiving end of most of this repression are lesbians and gay men. Off duty police officers can go into a gay pub and call its customers "filthy shirtlifter".

If you object they will hit you. If you defend yourself you get done for assault. Far fetched in today's enlightened age? It has just happened in a West London gay pub.

There has been a 36% rise in the number of men arrested on "gross indecency" charges. Worse is to come.

Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill, which could be law by April of next year, will make common gay "sex crimes" punishable by harsh prison sentences. The Clause lists eleven sexual offences for which courts could hand down deterrent prison sentences "in order to protect the public from serious harm".

Five of the offences are gay sex activities and include the three most common: indecency between men, solicitation by a man and procuring others to commit a homosexual act. There were 2,780 men convicted on these charges in England and Wales in 1989. Under the new Criminal Justice Bill many would face custodial sentences.

These latest attempts to censor consenting sexual activity in the name of "civilized society" are direct attacks on lesbian and gay rights, and upon individual freedom in general. There is a basic principle that needs to be vigorously defended in the face of this wave of moral reaction.

Whatever anybody thinks of the range of sexual activities that are under attack, from sado-masochism, through to publishing books on body piercing, the state has no right whatsoever to interfere in the private life of consenting people.

The so-called SM trial and the sentences handed out are an affront to this principle. They underline the need for the labour movement, the lesbian and gay community and all genuine democrats to fight the restrictions on our sexual rights. Get the police out of the bedroom!■

RACIST ATTACKS

Remember New Cross!

ON 18 January 1981, thirteen black youths died in an arson attack in New Cross, South London. The police refused to recognise the deaths as the result of a racist attack. Ten years on the police, themselves racist to the core, have the same indifferent attitude to the relentless attacks on black people.

It emerged at the inquest into the New Cross deaths that the police suppressed the fact that an incendiary device was found in the garden of the house after the fire. Police witnesses maintained that there was no connection between the firebomb and the deaths.

New Cross has a long history of racist attacks and open fascist activity by the National Front and the British National Party. The police refused to take action against known racists in the area. When pressured to give a statement on this the investigating officer, Commander Stockwell, offered this insulting reply to the black community of New Cross:

"Police officers cannot go willy-nilly to search people's premises or question people without reasonable grounds for suspicion".

Yet in the first six months of 1980 police and immigration officers had carried out dozens of raids searching for "illegal immigrants"! "Strip and search" was a fact of life for black youth every day! Youth after youth who came into the witness box at the Coroner's Court denounced police intimidation after the fire.

At least six youths were illegally detained for three days and forced to make statements about a fight at a party in the house on the night of the fire. The fight was invented by the police to deflect from the real issues at stake. A crude attempt was made to defame the character of Owen Thompson, one of the murdered youths. He was described variously by the police as "mad", "always wanting a fight" and as the instigator of the fire itself!



1981: Police attack Deptford fire protest

Throughout the hearing, the black community mobilized to display their contempt for the proceedings. "Blood ah go run if justice no come" was the chant on pickets outside the court.

In the face of the apathy of the official labour movement, on 2 March 1981 over 10,000 black workers downed tools and marched across London to protest against the cover-up.

The Murdered Thirteen

Humphrey Brown	Gary Francis	Glenton Powell
Peter Campbell	Andrew Gooding	Yvonne Ruddock
Steve Collins	Lloyd Hall	Paul Ruddock
Patrick Cummings	Lilian Henry	Owen Thompson
	Patricia Johnson	

In Britain today there is a racist attack every 26 minutes. In paying tribute to the New Cross 13 on the tenth anniversary of the tragedy, we pay tribute to the fighting tradition of black workers who mobilized to break the silence around the massacre and to those who have organised to defend their communities against the incursions of the racist and fascist thugs.

That tradition of self-defence needs to be built upon in the face of mounting racist/fascist activity today. Every class fighter should argue within the labour movement for the forging of workers' defence squads to link up with black self-defence organizations and drive the racists, "official" and "unofficial", off our streets once and for all.■

EDITORIAL

Eastern Europe one year on



A TIDAL wave of first anniversaries is flooding Eastern Europe. One year ago this month in East Germany the fate of the Stalinist caretaker government of Hans Modrow was sealed with the mass storming of the headquarters of the secret police. The opposition of the so-called left to this action helped consolidate the influence of the right and allow the eventual victory of the West German capitalists over the whole country.

In January last year the NSF government in Romania was slowly emerging from the smoke and rubble of the Christmas revolutionary uprising against Ceausescu.

It's been twelve months of rapid change, as though history was a video on fast forward. A year of the death or downfall of Stalinist dictators, of mass demonstrations and strikes; of attempted putsches and endless parliamentary elections. Economic disaster with the Big Bang in Poland has been matched by culinary disaster with the Big Mac in Moscow. Gradual Soviet troop withdrawals from Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia have been accompanied by the steady advance of the armies of Thatcherite advisers keen to tell the restorationist governments how to bring back capitalism where once it was abolished.

What is the balance sheet of this last year and what are the prospects for 1991?

In marked contrast to the euphoria and optimism of a year ago, the bourgeois commentators are full of foreboding.They recognise that the joy felt by the masses at their first taste of multi-party politics and contested parliamentary elections is evaporating fast under the heat of ethnic and national antagonisms and economic stagnation.

Throughout Eastern Europe the economies are in recession. Unemployment is rising while real wages are falling. In Hungary industrial output fell at least 10% last year and a further 12% this year due to the collapse of the domestic market and an end to guaranteed markets in Comecon. In Bulgaria industrial production collapsed by 15%. In Poland the shelves may be stocked but many cannot afford to buy anything from them. One third of output has gone and a 40% fall in living standards is the result. This is a bigger drop than in the Depression of the Thirties in the USA. Unemployment has grown from zero to a million in a year. It is still rising.

Czechoslovakia, so far the least severely hit, will see the full shock of the transition towards capitalism this year. On New Years Day the currency was devalued by 50%, making the cost of living much higher. Prices are rising while wages are pegged and unemployment is set to rise from 30,000 to half a million by the end of the year.

The pessimism of the politicians and their scribes stems from the recognition—long since grasped by Marxists—that these difficulties are not just short-term discomforts in return for lasting capitalist prosperity in the future. There is a dawning realisation that the imperialist west is not about to pour in capital resources to turn Eastern Europe into a smaller but equally prosperous version of itself.

A conservative estimate of the cost of raising the eastern half of Germany to the level of the west is around £300 billion over five years. This sum stands in stark contrast to the paltry £5 billion for the *whole* of the rest of East Europe that has been offered by the World Bank.

The future of all these states is as semi-colonies, which will be super-exploited by imperialism. All these countries are being kept apart and forced to deal separately with the West. Key decisions about the future are not taken in their countries but in the institutions of finance capital in New York, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo. Each of the nations will be integrated into the world market only in accordance with the needs and plans of imperialism.

But if the idealists and the liberals of the bourgeoisie bemoan the fate of the revolutions of last year then so too do the apologists of Stalinism on the left. What was it all for, they ask? How can we say that the events of 1989/90 were in any way progressive when the results have been so bad?

Such "lefts" deny that there could have been an alternative outcome to the wave of revolts. They ignore the possibility that the mass struggles against the bureaucratic dictatorships could have ended in real power passing to workers' and peasants' councils, rather than to the pro-capitalist politicians in the new parliamentary talking shops. They regard the heroic battles of last year not as revolutions that were blocked and derailed, but as counter-revolutions from the outset.

What these apologists for Stalinism have ignored is that it was necessary for the bureaucracy to be smashed if the working class was to go forward to socialism. So they ignore the justified grievances of the workers under the old regimes and discount the real gains that have been wrested from the bureaucracy by class struggle methods.

Did the Czechs and the Germans not gain the right to vote, to organise in political parties and trade unions, to set up factory committees? Did they not get rid of the monopoly of political representation by Stalinism? Of course they did. And after many blows about the head they also established the right to free speech and an end to the Stalinist secret police.

In Romania did the workers not bear arms to achieve their goals? Did Romanian women not get the right to abortion? In Hungary is there not still a network of workers' councils in the factories? Did the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria not win the right to use their own language again?



But all these gains are now under threat. To make them permanent it was, and is, necessary for the working class to disarm and crush the remnants of the bureaucracy and to take democratic control over the plan themselves. In short, unless the revolution is carried through to its end, then the forces of capitalist counter-revolution will triumph, as in the GDR. In the absence of Trotskyist parties, the crisis of leadership within the working class allowed the pro-capitalist forces to build the institutions of their future rule, namely parliaments, which could demobilise the masses on the streets and transform the anger and aspirations of the workers into the animated chatter of the bureaucrats, poets, writers and philosopher-kings.

How far along the road of capitalist restoration are these countries?

Undoubtedly the greatest strides forward have been made in the state apparatus. The pro-capitalist governments elected last year have each in their own way tried to purge the Stalinist stalwarts in the bureaucracy. The greatest successes have been in Hungary, the least in the Balkans. As to the economy, last year was one of currency devaluations and convertibility. All this is preparatory to full commercial relations between the state enterprises.

But during this process the actual ownership of the bulk of the factories has remained in the hands of the state. Poland hopes to get away with privatising 50% of state factories in three years. Czechoslovakia aims to sell between 40% and 80% of each state enterprise. Hungary's government hopes it can sell off two-thirds of state assets in four years.

The problems that stand in the way of doing this are not legal but social. How do you re-create capitalism where it had been uprooted and therefore no capitalist class exists? You cannot give it all to the Stalinist bureaucrats, as much as they may like it, without risking civil war. You cannot simply hand it all over to the western firms for next to nothing for the same reason, and besides the aim is to create something of a native capitalist class even if it is in hock to imperialism.

But without major privatisation the control of the old bureaucracy over the economy cannot be fully broken. Although there is considerable disintegration, economic relations between the state ministries and the factories, and between the enterprises themselves, are regulated through the half crippled bureaucratic plan. Despite the progress of the counter-revolution in the last half year, all the countries drawn into the events of 1990—except East Germany of course—remain degenerate workers' states.

The effects of the market's reintroduction have spawned resistance. The Budapest transport strike against price rises forced concessions from the government. Earlier last spring we saw the Gdansk workers protest against price liberalisation in Poland. In November the Jiu Valley miners protested against similar measures from the NSF in Romania.

But so far the protest actions have been sporadic, isolated and often quite brief and small. Many workers are prepared to give the market a chance for a period.

Why? Firstly because they feel that the freedoms they have won are significant, and they are willing to pay the price with their present suffering which they have been told will be short if not sweet.

Secondly because the Stalinists said capitalism was bad and they do not believe their oppressors. They also believe that the bureaucracy represent the greatest threat to the advantages of the market through their systematic corruption and their obstruction to the changes.

Finally, the most progressive East European workers would like to believe in an alternative source of capital and assistance from the workers of the west as a result of successful revolutions against the imperialists. But they do not bank on it and see that to overcome stagnation inside their economies requires outside capital and that this will not be given without concessions.

But the masses are not evangelists for capitalism. They feel it is a compromise, the only immediate solution to the reality they face. In truth their real interests lie in revolutionary opposition to capitalism and its agents in the bureaucracy.

The neighbouring workers of the USSR have yet to oust their bureaucratic leaders. As the crisis deepens and the tendencies towards disintegration and chaos within the Soviet Union increase, the potential for a political revolution in the heart of the Stalinist states arises. This would promote further revolutionary struggles across Eastern Europe. The task of this coming year will be to forge vanguard parties of workers committed to political revolution throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR. ■

● For more on Eastern Europe turn to pages 10 and 11

Published every month by the Workers Power Group:
BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN 0263 – 1121
Printed by Jang International (TU):
57 Lang Street, London SE1 1QN



Major's victory wiped the smiles off their faces

AFTER THATCHER

What chance for Labour?

BY MARK HARRISON

TWO MONTHS ago Labour's victory in the next general election looked so certain that even a devout Methodist might have been tempted into Ladbrokes. John Major's election as Tory leader has narrowed, if not reversed, the odds on a Labour triumph.

While the roller coaster opinion poll forecasts and media speculation about John Smith replacing Neil Kinnock are a poor guide to Labour's real chances, the party faces a very different terrain of electoral struggle now that Thatcher has gone.

Major himself is cultivating the image of a soft spoken, caring and ordinary man. Promises are being made on a range of social issues. Some respite from the effects of the Poll Tax has been offered. Even though they are still pushing through the internal market in the NHS the Tories openly admit to having used "the language of commerce" too much with regard to the health service.

Much of this, as Labour leaders have rightly said, represents a change in style rather than substance. Anyone who believes Major's promise of a classless society probably thought their Christmas presents really were brought to them by an old man from Lapland on a sleigh pulled by flying reindeers!

Nevertheless, the changes of style and the promises on the Poll Tax will have an effect on the middle class and better off workers who provided Thatcher with her three victories and who had begun to desert her since 1988. If they do swing back to the Tories, Labour will face the real prospect of a fourth defeat at the polls.

This danger has not led to a challenge to Kinnock's leadership. It has stimulated a debate within the coalition of centre-left and right wing MPs who support Kinnock. While Thatcher was in power the strategy of both wings of the coalition was to do nothing. Her unpopularity would, they believed, be enough to win the election for Labour.

Their hopes for the continuation of this strategy were raised by the initial split vote in the leadership election and Thatcher's declaration that she would fight on. *Tribune* excitedly declared:

"Mrs. Thatcher has handed Labour's golden scenario to us on a plate. Nothing should stop us now."

A week later, with Major in Number 10, this scenario was revealed as fool's gold and the differences started to emerge.

The right wing and Kinnock himself are imbued with a fear of Labour being seen to be a radical party. Any sort of bold policy statements, any vigorous campaigning, any whiff of real confrontation with the Tories are all off limits. The blandness that Kinnock has made Labour's hallmark is to stay. To justify this, Kinnock and the right are going to great lengths to explain that Major is, really, no different to Thatcher. Kinnock himself referred to him as a "Thatcherette" and Labour's trade and industry spokesman, Gordon Brown, told *Marxism Today*:

"What we don't have in Mr Major is an alternative ideology. We've got a change of style, and a bit of rhetoric about a classless society and opportunity for all—but we do not have a way forward."

Major and the his new cabinet colleagues are being painted by Labour as the "guilty men", the people who allowed Thatcher to get away with her reign of terror and who are now trapped by her legacy. The one difference they are trying to talk up is Major's "greyness", his dullness. Given Labour's own evasions on policy issues this is a criticism that could very easily rebound on them.

The soft left leaders are clearly unhappy with this approach. People like Robin Cook, David Blunkett and Bryan Gould fear that Major has, at the very least, created the impression of renewal within the Tory party. This has reduced the chances of the Tories losing the election through their own unpopularity and internal divisions. It requires Labour to go out and win an election, to be a positive campaigning party setting its own, distinct political agenda. Blunkett called for an end to the "softly, softly" approach:

"I believe the time has now come . . . to ensure that the necessary caution of the past is turned into a campaigning conviction that ours is the future."

Robin Cook echoed this theme immediately after Thatcher's downfall. Labour, he said, need no longer be defensive:

"We no longer need to be the party of negation and can take the occasional risk of a party on the offensive."

The problem for the soft left in the Labour leadership, if they now want to be bolder, is the legacy of caution enshrined in the Kinnock leadership and its policies.

The policy review made Labour policy safe for the bosses. Carefully excised were any calls for nationalisation, unilateral nuclear disarmament, re-nationalisation of privatised industries, repeal of the anti-union laws. In short, all of the policy gains made by the left in the early 1980s were reversed. The emphasis switched to Labour's concern for wealth creation, a constructive partnership with business and the maintenance of the principal gains made by the bosses during the Thatcher years.

Even in the two areas where Labour should have the Tories on the ropes—health and education—their recent policy initiatives were pitiful

Even in the two areas where Labour should have the Tories on the ropes—health and education—their recent policy initiatives were pitiful.

On health, while they are promising to abolish the internal market, their policy of fixed budgets for hospitals and a 10 to 15% cash reserve for some that overspend goes nowhere near rectifying the damage caused to the NHS by the Tories. No figure has been given for compensating the systematic underfunding of the health service. As for health workers themselves, a divisive policy of "local flexibility" in pay bargaining will be introduced.

Labour's education package, dubbed its "big idea", is similarly insubstantial. The grossly unfair fee-paying sector will be maintained, as will the Tory tests on seven year olds. Underpaid teachers will get "loyalty bonuses", but there will be no "blank cheque" to fund decent pay rises. Promises to build new schools are linked to the existing Tory budget allocation, and the threat to make the bosses pay towards training schemes for workers has been shelved.

These policies, along with everything else in the policy review, highlight the central dilemma for both wings of the Kinnock coalition. By presenting them as sensible and economically affordable by British capitalism, the right wing and Kinnock are giving John Major an advantage. They are indistinguishable from his own "moderate" agenda.

The Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Holme, was right when he wrote that Labour:

". . . has been prepared to jettison all socialism to the point where what it seemed to offer was conservative government without Mrs Thatcher. Unhappily for Neil Kinnock, John Major can now do that more credibly than he can."

For Kinnock's soft left supporters more vigorous campaigning around the existing policies will not convince anyone that Labour is offering anything different.

On Europe and the economy a vigorous campaign that avoids coming clean on how far Labour is prepared to go towards economic and political union and how much Labour is prepared to spend to finance a manufacturing industry revival will not be credible. Yet Labour cannot and will not come clean on these issues. They are as sceptical about European union are the Tories. And on the economy *Tribune*, in frustration, was compelled to observe:

"But unless Labour wishes its policies to be seen as a pale and only slightly reformed imitation of Margaret Thatcher's it must recognise that it will cost money to do anything that makes a difference."

The marginalised "hard" left is not in a position to offer an alternative to the policy review. Nor do its answers go beyond the tired old precepts of the Alternative Economic Strategy.

This dilemma leaves Labour with one last hope for victory: that the effect of the recession, and possibly also of a war in the Gulf, will tarnish Major's reputation and cut short his honeymoon period with the voters, particularly the middle class and better off workers. This is a confession of Labour's bankruptcy. It exposes the inability of Labour to generate even a reformist alternative to the Tories that really offers British workers something different from the policies they have had forced down their throats for over a decade by a ruthless Tory government.

In the course of 1990 the Tories were deeply unpopular. The struggle to defeat the Poll Tax caused panic in the Tory ranks. Any party seriously intending to represent the working class would have seized the opportunity to intensify that panic.

As revolutionaries we have sought to transform the Poll Tax struggle into an all-out assault on Tory and capitalist rule. But even accepting that Labour's reformism has held it back from such a strategy surely trying to build on the demonstrations that took place, calling more up and down the country, spreading the discontent, linking it to the health service, the anti-union laws and education, would not have been beyond Labour.

As it turned out it was well beyond Kinnock. And the Tories were able to resolve their crisis without the threat of external interruption. They were able to calm the nerves of the MPs and re-unite the party around Major. Labour allowed them to get away with this and it could cost them the next election.

We must not let it cost us another round of attacks. Direct action against each and every Tory attack is the best way to reintroduce panic into their ranks. It is the only way guaranteed to put an end to the onslaught of the last ten years.

If Kinnock replaced Major in Downing Street tomorrow the onslaught would continue. And those who have obeyed the union leaders' call to sit back and wait for that glorious event may find themselves waiting much longer than they expected.■

TEACHERS

Fight Clarke's appraisal scheme

WITH THE scrapping of 75% of the tests for seven year olds and the halving of the number of subjects studied by 14-16 year olds, the Tory plans for education are in tatters.

However on one issue, the compulsory appraisal of teachers, the Tories are determined to push ahead. Clarke's announcement, that by 1995 all teachers must have their performance assessed every two years, reversed the decision by his predecessor to shelve the scheme.

The appraisal will consist of a senior member of staff observing teaching methods, followed by the setting of targets for improvements. Depending on their "progress" teachers could lose pay bonuses or face disciplinary proceedings.

The "scheme" will have no national guidelines to set standards and no external assessment for staff. In other words it will be done on the cheap and depend on the whims of individual head teachers.

The reason for this is obvious. Far from "improving standards" or "helping staff development", the scheme will be used to coerce an already demoralised workforce into doing whatever senior staff say, or else. Alongside Local Management of Schools, which pits school against school, appraisal will set teacher against teacher.

Instead of being used to "build a sense of pride in the school" as Clarke laughably suggests, it will instead create a climate of fear and hostility in the staff room. "Loyalty" and "hard work" will be rewarded. Independent thought and upholding union guidelines will be punished.

Apart from anything else the probability of sexual harassment will be dramatically increased, as the majority of teachers on lower grades are women, and the majority of the senior staff who will assess them are men.

For all these reasons the scheme should be actively fought by all those interested in defending education. Teachers should hold union meetings and refuse to take part in the scheme. Any threats of disciplinary action against individuals for refusing to be assessed should be met with collective action.

Many parents and pupils may believe that appraisal will weed out "bad" teachers. Being on the receiving end of an unprepared lesson or a torrent of sarcasm from a frustrated and overworked teacher is certainly not conducive to education. But the way to eradicate such problems is to fight for decent pay and resources throughout the education sector. Then we can talk about schools being run collectively by parents, pupils and teachers. Such developments would speed the removal of the old-fashioned bullies who still try to teach through fear, and enable real pride to be established in the schools.■

CIVIL SERVICE

More hiring, less firing!

SEVERAL HUNDRED NUCPS members are currently on strike in eleven DSS offices around the country. CPSA members at Bloomsbury DSS are also on strike. They are demanding 2,000 extra jobs and an end to proposed job cuts. However, the strikers are in danger of losing their dispute—thanks entirely to their unions' misleadership.

The strikes are over the effects of the £2,000 million computerisation of the DSS benefits system (OPSTRAT). First introduced in 1988, OPSTRAT is designed to cut 20,000 jobs by reducing local offices to enquiry points and concentrating work in large computer centres. This process is essential if the government are to privatise the DSS. Luncheon Vouchers plc want to run the system!

The crunch has come now simply because OPSTRAT doesn't work! At least as many staff are needed to process claims as under the manual system. But driven by the "logic" of the market, management have pushed ahead, cutting 1,350 jobs in 1990.

This led to such chronic understaffing that NUCPS DSS members in Yeoman Street, Leicester walked out in September and prompted the NUCPS DSS Executive (GEC) to ballot nine other offices on 5 November for indefinite strike action.

Since then, one further office has come out and a national ballot for a one day strike on 7 December was narrowly lost. All NUCPS strikers are on 100% strike pay and plans for more selective strike action are afoot. This has led most strikers to believe their GEC is behind them.

The truth is the GEC are just showing the "left" face of new realism. Their strategy is not designed to win more jobs. It has more to do with saving their own inflated salaries by being seen to be "doing something" whilst the CPSA leadership is instructing members to cross picket lines. If the NUCPS GEC had wanted to save jobs they would have fought for strike action back in 1988 when OPSTRAT was first revealed. They didn't. They preferred to see those in the front line defeated while leaving the rest of the members ignorant. It is hardly surprising that the strike ballot was most heavily defeated in Scotland. Scottish DSS workers were the first to suffer the cuts of OPSTRAT and must have viewed the ballot as a cynical exercise since nothing was done when they were attacked.

Despite their current bitter differences the NUCPS and CPSA leaderships are two of a kind. The NUCPS GEC are making a token gesture of fighting back to safeguard their privileged positions. Their CPSA counterparts fear a mobilised membership—even under the bureaucratic control of selective action—as a threat to their power. They hope to point to a defeated NUCPS campaign to justify their scabbing before a demoralised membership come re-election time.

Activists in the DSS must not let the bureaucrats get away with this. Bloomsbury CPSA members are showing the way. They are striking alongside NUCPS despite only getting 50% strike pay.

CPSA and NUCPS members must follow their lead by inviting strikers to meetings and escalating the strikes, starting with the strike-bound offices and other offices where the vote to come out on 7 December was won.

Already the Wales and South West CPSA Regional Committee has come under attack for its 100% support for the strike. However, only rank and file action like this can win the dispute and pave the way for ousting the misleaders in both unions.■

Conference

Troops Out of the Gulf!

Saturday 2 February
Registration 10am
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
£5/£2 unwaged

Organised by Hands off the Middle East Committee
c/o BCM WAR London WC1N 3XX

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ECONOMY

Recession bites, jobless total rises

Unemployment is a miserable experience for the mass of people who endure it. But in times of economic upswing it recedes as a political issue as the overall numbers fall. All this is about to change, writes ***Keith Harvey.***

AS THE British economy slides deeper and faster into recession in the first half of this year the rate of unemployment will escalate.

The November figures revealed an unexpected sharp increase against the normal seasonal trend. Official unemployment is at 1.72 million (6.1%). Not even the most die-hard Tory loyalist denies that the 2 million figure will be breached during the next year and it will probably be sooner rather than later.

Of course, the Tory government has revised the unemployment figures many times over the last eleven years. Calculated according to the 1979 system official unemployment would be 2.7 million (9.4%). And even this figure understates the real numbers actually seeking work.

The most obvious fact about this level of unemployment is what an enormous waste of resources it represents. If 9% of the labour force is unemployed then this represents at least 9% lost production and probably much more.

In a rationally organised society the loss of nearly a tenth of potential wealth would be seen as scandalous and quickly remedied. But capitalism is not a rational system.

Hide

Capitalism cannot live with a permanent commitment to full employment because of the nature of the system itself. Ruling class politicians always try to hide this fact; they say, for example, that high wages of workers causes unemployment and that the solution to it is low wages. How often have we heard the retort "One person's wage rise is another person's job loss"?

But this cannot explain why it is that high wages and high profits go together just as often low wages and high profits.

Nor can it explain how it is that, when the bosses come along with redindancy notices they complain that "the public just aren't buying". This would suggest that the real reason for job losses is that the wages of many workers are too low!

In fact all such arguments are at best pointless and at worst a deliberate attempt to sow confusion. The real reason for unemployment is that under capitalism production is only undertaken or sustained if it is profitable.

To improve or maintain profitability firms are forced to recognise the effect of competition upon them. To stay in business they must constantly search for ways in which they can lower the costs of production. The best way to do this is to introduce new machinery and reduce the number of workers; this increases productivity and allows wage costs to be substantially reduced, increasing the margin of profit.

It does not matter in the end how hard people are willing to work o how little they earn; if their sweat cannot guarantee a profit then they will be thrown onto the scrapheap.

Each cycle of recovery and recession absorbs some of the unemployed as production rises and spare capacity is taken up. But a large pool of unemployed is endemic and permanent under capitalism. Marx called this the industrial reserve army of labour. In OECD countries today (the most industrialised 24 nations) this reserve army is in the region of 35 million strong.

Pool

This pool of labour has two uses for the employers. First, it represents a resevoir of idle labour that can be drawn upon or added to as the cycle of production demands. Secondly, the existence of this army of unemployed, forced by the state to live on ever more meagre benefits (and in the semi-colonies nothing at all), acts as a depressive weight upon wage levels of the employed. In a recession the threat of the sack ("I've got people queuing up to do your job, mate") is used to stifle demands for more pay and to enforce harsher conditions.

To overcome the scourge of unemployment requires the abolition of capitalism itself. Then the full productive resources of society can be employed and the poverty and lack of dignity that accompanies enforced unemployment can be overcome.

But to build a movement that can overthrow capitalism it is essential to resist redundancies and closures. Work or full pay has long been the central demand of the communist movement when faced with the threat of unemployment. This demand expresses the fact that the working class shall not take responsibility for the crisis of profits.

Loss

All available work should be divided up among the relevant workforce with no loss of pay. Should the individual employer plead bankruptcy in the face of this then the trade union movement must fight to get the government of the day to nationalise the employer and continue the operation of the factory or provide benefits at the former rate of pay.

At all times it is crucial that we stop the employers setting employed against unemployed. A movement of unemployed workers is crucial to respresent their interests in the wider labour movement, to campaign for the above demands and ensure that the plight of the rejected is not forgotten.

During this year, as they find themselves again in the endless queues and the squalid waiting rooms of the DSS, more and more workers will be forced to face up to the urgency of this task.■

Work or full pay!

CPGB

Good riddance!

British Stalinism is in terminal decline. ***Colin Lloyd*** *explains why.*

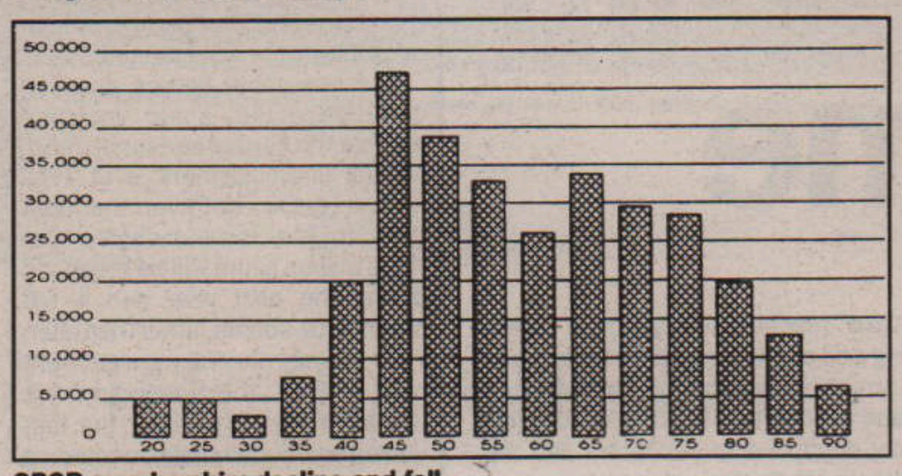
TO THE dismay of many of its members, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) still exists. Its congress in December decided to delay the liquidation of the organisation into loose association in alliance with other "progressive" forces, and to continue discussion about the future role of the party until another congress is convened.

The decision to postpone the date of its formal political suicide cannot conceal the fact that the CPGB finished as an organisation. It has no campaigning newspaper, very little public profile outside a handful of areas and its members continue to leave it in droves.

From an all time high of 47,000 members after the second world war, the CPGB now has around 000. According to the party's secretary, Nina Temple, the current rate of resignations would leave the party memberless by 1994! The decision to carry on with the party likely to bring that date forward as hundreds of the most determined "liquidators" leave in disgust.

This drop in numbers and influence is part of the world wide death agony of Stalinism. In the words of the CPGB's guru, Eric Hobsbawm, "we are seeing not the crisis of a type of movement, regime and economy, but its end." And all sections of the British Stalinist movement, not just the CPGB, are facing the same fate: terminal crisis from which there is no escape.

Both the New Communist Party (NCP) and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) now find themselves short of cash, short of members and short of a viable future after the collape of the bureaucratic regimes in Eastern Europe. The best they can hope for is to rise together as an ageing Stalinist clique.



CPGB membership: decline and fall

Wrong

But it would be wrong to see the decline and fall of British Stalinism *purely* as a result of the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. The shrinking membership and fragmentation of the CPGB began well before 1989. And the political degeneration of the CP, first into centrism, and then into counter-revolutionary social patriotism and reformism, happened more than 50 years ago.

The factional strife that led to a formal split and the creation of the rival Stalinist outfit, the CPB, began in earnest at the 1977 congress. A split in that year produced the NCP, the "tankies"—so called because of their uncritical support for the Kremlin every time it used military force to crush working class revolts. Their departure cleared the way for a struggle between two unofficial factions within the CPGB that lasted until 1983.

On one side stood the coalition of left bureaucrats who controlled the party apparatus and Eurocommunist trendies who, under the leadership of Martin Jacques, gained control of the journal *Marxism Today*. Ranged against them was a faction led by Tony Chater, the editor of the *Morning Star*, which represented the party's base inside the trade union bureaucracy.

At issue was the interpretation of the 1977 draft of the *British Road to Socialism (BRS)*, the party's basic programme. Since its first version in 1951 every draft of the *BRS* encapsulated two central policies: that socialism could be established by peaceful parliamentary means and that to achieve this the working class was obliged to make a strategic alliance with a section of the capitalist class.

While there was no difference over the first idea, the call by the 1977 *BRS* for a "broad democratic alliance" led to major divisions over *which* capitalists could be included in the alliance and what the role of the working class within it should be.

The "Chaterites" clung to the traditional idea of an anti-monopoly alliance, drawing a clear distinction between small British capitalists and big multinational corporations. They supported the Labour left's Alternative Economic Strategy of planning agreements, import controls, state subsidies and worker participation schemes. They dressed up this anti-European, protectionist and thoroughly capitalist programme as "socialist". To realise this programme the broad democratic alliance would mobilise British-based bosses, but, under the leadership of the labour movement—by which they meant the trade union bureaucracy.

Broad

For the "Euros" the broad democratic alliance was increasingly invested with an altogether different meaning. Heavily influenced by the rise of feminism, pacifism, environmentalism and other "new social movements and forces", the Euros argued that the broad democratic alliance should comprise these movements and that the working class should take its place alongside them as just one of a number of special interest groups.

In evolving this version of the alliance the Euros found themselves at odds not only with the USSR's brand of "socialism", but also with any brand of it whatsoever. They embraced the separatist and anti-socialist ideas of the petit bourgeois leaderships of the "new movements". And, in rejecting the concept of an "anti-monopoly alliance" they opened the door to the idea that sections of multinational capital could find a welcome in the strategic alliance with the working class.

It was in the early 1980s that the practical consequences of these differing interpretations of the 1977 *BRS* made themselves felt. Thatcher's victories over the working class pulled the two factions in completely different directions. The Chaterites, suffering from a dramatic decline in their industrial influence, symbolised by the sacking of Longbridge convenor Derek Robinson, harnessed themselves to the Bennite movement in the Labour Party. This, they believed, would provide the vehicle for a left Labour government committed to the Alternative Economic Strategy.

Marxism Today put forward a very different strategy. Convinced that Thatcherism represented a powerful new form of right wing authoritarian populism, it argued that the only way to check the Tory advance was to extend the broad democratic alliance beyond the new social forces. The SDP-Liberal alliance, wet Tories, any anti-Thatcher capitalists that could be found all had to be brought into the alliance. The Bennites were castigated for sectarianism. The working class was attacked for being "economistic" and, according to Hobsbawm, was not merely suffering defeats but was "a declining class". Socialism was written off as a practical goal.

Inevitably this interpretation of the broad democratic alliance, involving as it did a rejection of the Keynesian economic policies of the Labour left and accepting as inviolable the role and rule of the market, brought internal strife in the CPGB to a head. A struggle for control of the *Morning Star* in 1983 was won by the Chaterites, who had a majority within the non-party People's Press and Publishing Society, the formal owners of the paper. The Euros responded by expelling Chater, and Mick Costello, the party's industrial organiser, at the November 1983 congress. This was followed by months of expulsions and resignations leading to an undeclared split.

Unhindered by the need to maintain any pretence of unity both sides developed their respective strategies by deepening their errors. *Marxism Today* became a mouthpiece for dissident Tories, police chiefs, Alliance politicians and anyone else who was willing to attack the working class. The miners' strike was denounced because miners were too macho, their ideas of solidarity were outdated in the face of Thatcherism and they were disrespectful to the middle class. As *Marxism Today* put it, "the actions and approach of yesteryear as models for today's struggle and victories are counter-productive." The Euros' one claim to fame in the strike was the role their supporters and fellow travellers played in getting it called off.

During this heroic struggle, and later in the print, seafarers' and dockers' strikes, the Chaterites were only willing to echo the line pushed by the respective union bureaucrats. The *Morning Star* was the bureaucracy's willing mouthpiece. No criticisms of them were allowed, even while Todd fatally derailed action in the docks in 1989.

The split was formalised in stages. In 1985 the Chaterites formed the Communist Campaign Group and in 1988 set up the CPB. It published yet another edition of the *BRS*, this time modelled on its own traditional Stalinist conception of the anti-monopoly alliance.

Ruins

Yet its entire perspectives are in ruins. The eclipse of the Labour left, the continuing crisis of the USSR, the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe, all pull the rug from under the feet of the CPB's version of the peaceful road to socialism.

The CPGB has hit back with its own new programme, the *Manifesto For New Times*, a document that explicitly ditches Marxism in favour of a cocktail of humanism, feminism and green politics. Neither party represents a serious force within the British working class. Indeed, despite its decision to carry on, the CPGB has no belief in its own future. Nina Temple explained on the eve of the December congress:

"The *Manifesto For New Times*, initiated in articles in *Marxism Today* and developed into a strategic intervention by the Communist Party, embraces this vision [of individual liberty] but the party itself is a totally inadequate vessel for this politics."

Beatrix Campbell put it more bluntly:

"What I want is a party—as in cocktail—to say the party's over."



Nina Temple: "CPGB is a totally inadequate vessel for this politics"

Stalinism has reached this nadir as a result of its own internal contradictions. In the mid 1930s it made an irrevocable step into the camp of counter-revolutionary reformism. Since then its strategy, in Britain as elsewhere, was the popular front, an alliance with the bourgeoisie in which the independent interests of the working class are strictly subordinated to the needs of the "progressive" or "democratic" capitalists. Under orders from Stalin the Communist Parties made peace with their own ruling classes. This peace has endured.

Correct

Trotsky predicted the consequences of this strategy and, though it has taken longer than he thought for them to fully manifest themselves, he has been proved correct.

In 1927 Trotsky wrote that the Stalinist theory of "socialism in one country" would mean "the beginning of the disintegration of the Comintern on social patriotic lines" as each of the national CPs outlined their own national road to socialism.

When the Comintern approved the strategy of the popular front in 1935 and signalled its passage into the reformist camp, Trotsky anticipated that the Communist Parties would liquidate themselves into social democracy. All that stood in the way, he said, was the bureaucratic party machine, not the politics. Now the ideological trauma of the east European events have overcome that obstacle.

The history of the CPGB's decline and fragmentation is a history of both of these processes interwoven and, at the same time, in antagonism to each other.

Attempts to woo the bourgeoisie into a popular front alliance have been thwarted by working class attempts at independent action, from the election of a Labour government in 1945 when the CP was calling for an all party coalition, to the year long class battle of the miners in 1984-85.

Meanwhile with the growing isolation of the reformist left the CP's attempt to become part of it could only be carried out in opposition to the project of a strategic alliance with small manufacturing bosses, wet Tory judges and Prince Charles.

Pushed

This contradiction pushed the British CP to breaking point. The split has resulted in the CPB opting to become the lifeless appendage of left Labourism while the CPGB is following the logic of the popular front strategy by liquidating itself, breaking all links with the workers' movement and fully embracing bourgeois politics.

We no more mourn the demise of British Stalinism than we do the passing of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe. In strategic terms, whatever the activities of individual militants, Stalinism has obstructed the creation of a genuinely revolutionary party in Britain for far too long.

It has misled and mis-educated generations of worker militants. It has paved the way to terrible defeats for the working class. It has provided cover for countless traitors in the trade union bureaucracy.

To those small number of militants still influenced by Stalinism or within the ranks of one of its fragments we say—reject Stalinism, turn to Trotskyism. To the fragmenting remains of the Stalinist party we say—good riddance!■

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Taxing the Tories

THE CANDIDATES in the Tory leadership battle fell over each other to promise a "review" of the Poll Tax. But those who think the Tax is finished are mistaken. Thatcher's flagship will sail on for two more years at least. And after that? As the Tory leadership surveys the options it is clear that the replacement for the hated Tax could be as bad or even worse.

The Tories are being pushed into a review of the Tax because of its massive unpopularity. The Tory rhetoric about it being "fair because it was equal" convinced nobody but themselves. Now they regret it.

One by one Tory leaders have come out to do public penance for the Poll Tax. Lawson has called it "a disaster". Major claims "We were bounced into it quickly . . . and we were bounced without thinking because of the political fuss". He has given Heseltine the job of carrying out "a very thorough, constructive and fundamental review".

But the review took only a few days to reveal the dilemma facing the Tories.

The Poll Tax was no accident. The backbench MPs may have supported it without thinking, but there was a well thought out intention behind it: to massively reduce public spending on local services, to place the burden of paying for them onto working class families and to decrease the influence of Labour councils on spending policies.

The uniform Poll Tax was designed to lever Labour out of office through passing the cost of locally provided services directly onto the electorate. Nicholas Ridley, one of the architects of the Tax, claimed it would allow voters to choose between "wasteful" Labour councils and "responsible" Tory councils.

When this bold application of market forces failed to have immediate effects on council spending the Tories decided to increase central government meddling through "tax capping". Last year 21 councils were forced by ministerial decree to reduce their tax levels. This year councils will be limited to an average bill of £358.

The result has been drastic cuts in local services. This year it is not only capped Labour councils who will be making cuts in the region of Hammersmith's £11.7 million. Tory Warwickshire will have to cut £6 million, and Berkshire £11 million. In Scotland where capping is combined with the effects of massive non payment Strathclyde is facing cuts of £20 million and Lothian £30 million.

Despite this level of spending reduction, which after eleven years of Thatcherism is forcing councils to cut right to the bone of education and social services, it is still costing the Tories billions of pounds to ease the pain of introducing the Tax. Only last summer the Tories were forced to allocate an extra £3 billion on top of the "transitional relief" already available to high Tax councils.

Now they are faced with the choice between electoral defeat and an even bigger injection of cash. But through increasing their spending they are defeating the central objective of the Tax.

BY PAUL MORRIS

Heseltine's "review" is which short term measure will deliver most votes for least money.

A straightforward cash injection to reduce the bill for everyone is the most expensive and least likely option. It costs £1 billion just to bring the average Poll Tax bill down by £28 per person. Rising costs mean that it would cost the Treasury £2 billion just to peg bills at their present, unpopular, level.

Heseltine is more likely to opt for increased "transitional relief". This is a method of using central government money to lower the burden of the Tax where the increases over the rates have been highest. It will affect mainly the North and includes many Tory marginals.

On top of this Heseltine is likely to improve rebates and exempt certain groups like pensioners.

The problem with all of these short term solutions is cash. The Treasury has already warned that it cannot afford much more than the £3 billion it paid out last summer. Most of its £3.5 billion reserve cash is earmarked for the Gulf war.

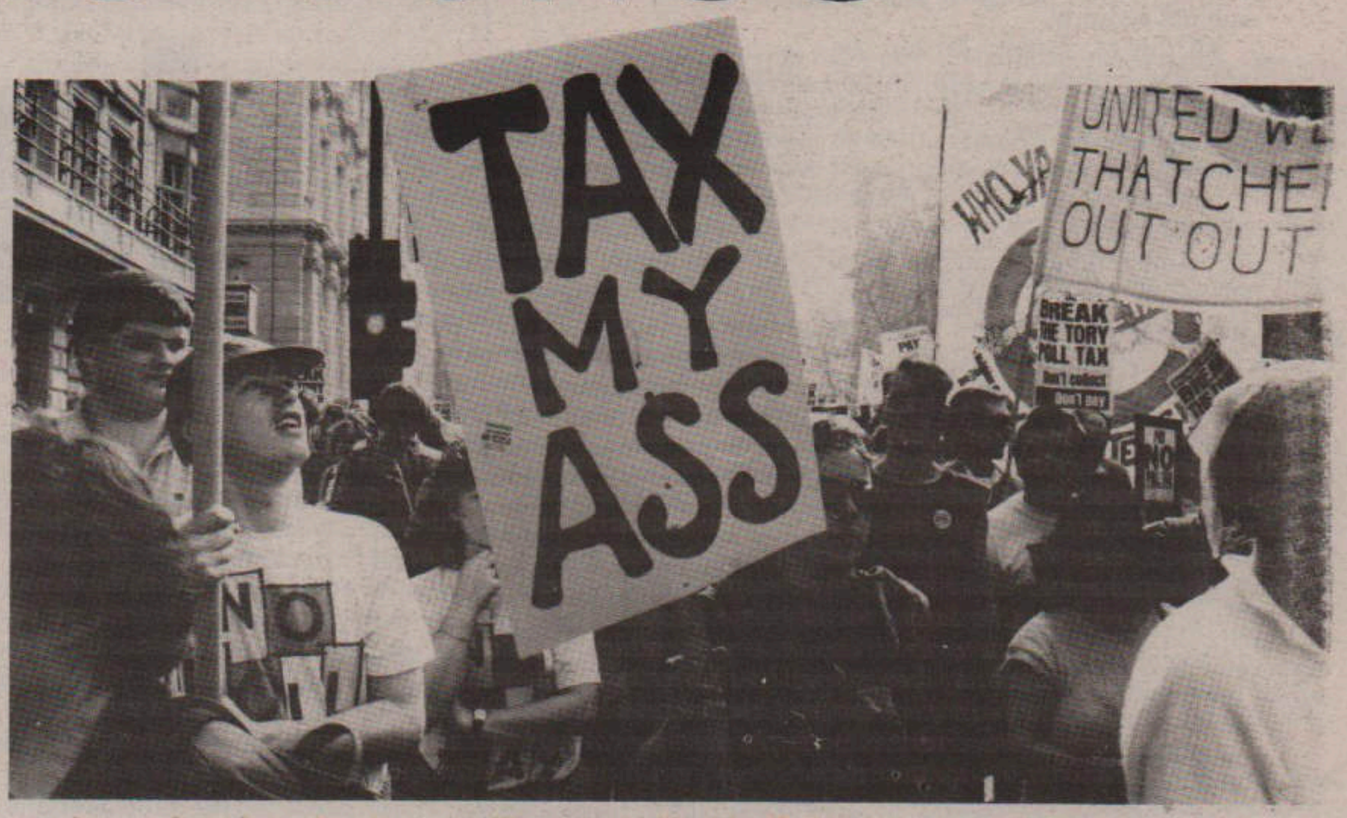
But none of these immediate solutions even begin to address the central problem of local government. The strategic problem the Poll Tax failed to solve remains. The bosses need a system of local administration which cuts spending. The Tories need a system which addresses this need of the bosses but also allows them to get re-elected.

The Tories came to office in 1979 determined to massively reduce government spending by stripping away the social gains granted to the working class after the second world war. One of the most costly gains was the growth in local government services: free secondary and higher education, a big increase in arts and recreation services, a massive expansion of public housing and the emergence of social service provision for the old, the sick and the most vulnerable sections of the working class.

Though local councils became bywords for bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption and third rate services, they nevertheless improved the living standards of workers compared to the pre-war period.

Local government, designed by 19th century capitalism to oversee the gas and water supplies, mushroomed into an employer of millions of workers and a consumer of billions of pounds of government money, itself raised through taxes on the bosses' profits and the workers' wages.

Throughout the years of the post war economic boom spending on local government services grew twice as fast as the economy as a whole. And it continued growing even when the boom was over and profits became scarce. The bosses demanded massive cuts in public spending, and got them; first from Callaghan's Labour government, then from the Tories.



Over the past decade successive cuts in central government grants have increased the proportion of council spending paid for by local rates or Poll Tax from 18% to 27%.

But even this could not stop Labour councils spending money on services needed to protect the worst off from the ravages of the profit system. The Tories tried rate capping.

They introduced one restriction after another on the way councils spend their money. But it did not sufficiently stem the flow of cash to local government. So they finally invented the Poll Tax, the weapon which has now blown up in their faces.

The depth of their strategic trouble was revealed by Heseltine's call for a cross party consensus on local government. He called on Labour to take part in talks to find out "to what extent we can establish common principles for the role and future direction of local government".

This was a call to take the question of council spending "out of politics" in the same way as Northern Ireland and the Monarchy are meant to be "above party politics". It was a clear admission that the bosses need a dramatic restructuring of local government and a commitment from all parties to address this goal and ensure the stability of a new system. It is a sign that local government spending cannot be cut further without another big reorganisation and a further attack on the working class.

Heseltine's preferred option for that attack would be to take education out of local government and put it into the national budget paid for out of national taxation. This would cut the Poll Tax bills and at the same time remove a large proportion of public spending from the indirect control and pressure exerted by workers at the local ballot box. It would also render local education policies redundant and centralise both spending and policy making.

The appeal of this for Heseltine is that it could halve the bills but allow the Poll Tax to be kept in some form. However it would also lead to income tax rising by up to 4p in the pound, something the Tories would find politically difficult to justify.

This radical solution has implications far beyond spending policy. It would mean dismantling a large part of local government and totally restructuring education. In the short term the Tories are not confident enough of their political support to pursue such a radical reorganisation unless, of course, they get the support of the Labour Party.

Labour's alternative, supported by some sections of the ruling class in parliament, industry and the media, is a return to a "property tax" similar to the rates, but with houses revalued to increase the amount paid by working class households in comparison to the rich and the middle class. This would leave local government structures and the system of a central grant, supplemented by a local tax, in place. Such a system would continue to face pressure from the central government and the bosses to cut spending, whilst further shifting the balance of paying for services onto the working class.

What solution should workers fight for? Services clearly need to be defended and extended. We need more houses, extended childcare, better education and improved recreational facilities. But this means more money, not less. The only way to avoid the bulk of this extra cost being placed onto the workers through higher income tax, Poll Tax or rates is to force the bosses to pay.

That means fighting for a wealth tax, not a Poll Tax. At national and local level all taxes should be based on a steep "ability to pay" ladder.

The big businessmen, the super-rich landowners and the over-paid managers should be ruthlessly squeezed. The poor, the old and unemployed should pay nothing at local or national level. All taxes which don't discriminate betwee rich and poor—like VAT, car t etc—should be abolished and le ied through a tax on income a profits instead.

With a steep local income a property tax working class co munities could begin to get t services that really meet the needs. Not as decided by so unelected bureaucrat or time-ser ing Labour councillor, but as d cided by themselves.

Workers could fight for contr of local services at every level; co trol by the workers who provi the services, from refuse collecti to education, and control by tho who use the services.

Workers will have to fight f this in direct opposition to t needs of the bosses. They extend and modernised local governme and the education system to pr vent "anarchy and revolutio breaking out in the slum comm nities of 19th century Britain. The granted concessions and servic beyond the bare minimum on when workers fought for them.

Forcing the bosses to pay f services starts with the strugg against the Poll Tax which h dominated the last three year The partial retreat of the Tori indicated by the resignation Thatcher and the promise to r view the Poll Tax is not the end the fight. But the size of such victory will be severely limited the bosses are allowed to condu an orderly retreat, with Labo and Tory parties in a new conse sus over the need for "firm limit to local spending.

That is why we must contin the anti-Poll Tax struggle. Despi all the promises to review the T it is still there. And according Heseltine "there is no prospe whatsoever that a final answ can be designed, passed throu parliament and implemented under a two year timescale".

We should pursue Thatcher leaking flagship and sink it befo it reaches the safe haven Hesel ine is preparing.

The best way to prevent the Po Tax fiasco being followed by a other grand scheme to cut o services and force us to pay f those that are left, is to carry o the fight against the Poll Tax, resi all moves to take education out local government and fight t commit Labour to a steep wealt tax at local and national level, n a return to the rates.■

With a steep local income and property tax working class communities could begin to get the services that really meet their needs. Not as decided by some unelected bureaucrat or time-serving Labour councillor, but as decided by themselves.

Defend Iraq, imperialis

What is the war drive against Iraq all about? The media and the politicians tell us that tens of thousands have to die in a "war of liberation". Kuwait's freedom is their noble goal, we are told. Every inch of Kuwaiti territory won from the Iraqi army will be reported in the newspapers and on TV as a triumph for freedom and a blow against tyranny.

All this is rubbish. Within the anti-Iraq coalition the armies that count are those of the United States and Britain. As a recent article in the *Independent on Sunday* put it:

"As soon as British and American officials discuss the command structure of the anti-Saddam forces in Saudi Arabia, it becomes instantly clear that there is no one 'grand alliance'. There are two. The allies and the coalition. The allies, of course, are the United States and Britain."

Determined

These are the two imperialist powers determined to have a war in Iraq: not to liberate Kuwait, but to establish political and military supremacy in the Gulf, secure cheap oil supplies for the west and neutralise any threat to the world order of exploitation and oppression that they are seeking to create.

Even the public statements of Britain and the US make it clear that re-conquering Kuwait is only part of this grand design. Thatcher, before her fall, made clear that a defeated Saddam would have to face reparations and a war crimes tribunal. Major is equally determined to achieve the same war aims. Bush, who said "Saddam is worse than Hitler", has made clear that he wants to secure a permanent military presence in the Gulf, restabilise the area for US oil companies and destroy Hussein's regime.

Their war will be an imperialist war, fought to defend profits and military supremacy. Our rulers are not interested in freeing Kuwait or abolishing tyranny. If Kuwait is to be freed why do they want to restore the rule of the Emir? His regime was a cruel dictatorship. A handful of aristocrats around the Emir held all political power. There was no general right to vote for the people living and working in Kuwait. There were no democratic rights whatsoever for the thousands of immigrant workers. In what sense will the return of the Emir "free" Kuwait?

The re-conquest of Kuwait by the imperialist armies will "free" Kuwait for continued imperialist exploitation. The rich Kuwaitis will continue to be free to live their international playboy lifestyles. The big oil companies will be free to drain the oilfields of this British created city-state. The general staffs will be free to utilise military installations in this strategic part of the Gulf. None of this will give freedom to the workers and poor within Kuwait.

If the imperialists are so concerned about the freedom of oppressed peoples why has the US blocked condemnations of Israel's systematic and brutal persecution of the Palestinians? Why do they condone the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and yet condemn Saddam's occupation of Kuwait? The reason is simple. Israel is the agent for imperialism in the region. Its oppression of the Palestinians can be overlooked so long as it faithfully carries out this role. Iraq has deviated from its allotted role as a subservient provider of oil and has brought down



Socialist Organiser) at Labour Party conference, put it; there should be no military action by British forces, "unless they have explicit authorisation through a resolution passed by the Security Council". Well now they have it!

In a bid to maintain their pacifist credentials Benn, CND and the Stalinists of the *Morning Star*, are now pushing long term and extensive sanctions as the way forward. Faced with the UN deadline they are claiming that sanctions, the economic war on Iraq, haven't had time to work. If we keep them going and tighten them up we can avoid war, they tell us. The *Morning Star* gleefully reported shortages of essential goods in Iraq and asked "Had [sanctions] really had time to bite?".

This line is as bankrupt as the left reformists' faith in the peaceful intentions of the UN. The use of sanctions is a form of coercion against Iraq. Their very use begs the question, what happens if they do not budge Saddam Hussein? As Tom King, the Tory Defence Minister put it, how long should Kuwait be asked to wait? If you accept that it is the job of imperialism, whether via the

Benn's UN says yes to war

WHEN TONY Benn went on his peace mission to Baghdad the British embassy was instructed to be "as unhelpful as possible." It's debatable whether these instructions were issued by the Foreign Office or Labour's leadership. Both see Benn's efforts to stop the war as close to treason. He would "not be representing the Labour Party." said Kaufman, Labour's foreign affairs spokesman.

The Labour leadership is fully committed to war in the Gulf. Gone are the days when Neil Kinnock sported CND badges on his duffle coat. Today he prefers to match the Tories in threats to bomb Iraq into submission. Labour's policy of keeping Britain in step with the United Nations is their only slight difference with the government. But this does not stop Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition from declaring its support for war. Kaufman uttered dire warnings about Iraq taking over the whole Middle East and made clear that, "if, in the end, the only way is by force, then force will have to be used."

Many workers, repulsed by the drive towards a murderous inferno, will understandably view Benn's position as courageous and principled. His willingness to force a vote in the House of Commons on the war, and lead 42 MPs to oppose it in the face of intimidation by the Labour whips, is to be applauded. This does not make his strategy for preventing a war, or his view of the solution to the Gulf crisis, correct. On both counts Benn, the Labour left and the miscellaneous pacifists and centrists who support him, are wrong—and dangerously so.

At the core of Benn's strategy is reliance on the United Nations (UN) as an agency for world peace. He foolishly believes that an organisation fashioned by US imperialism and always subservient to its fundamental needs can act as a neutral arbiter. But the UN has never stopped a war. Its peacekeeping forces, on the rare occasions that they have had any effect on events, have kept the peace on behalf of imperialism. More importantly the Security Council of the UN, as the present crisis shows, is not any sort of arbitration body. It is a council of war.

At the outset of the Gulf crisis Benn was content to allow the Security Council take the lead in restraining the USA's bellicosity. This reflected his long standing belief that the USSR and China were a force for world peace and could be counted upon to veto US plans. But Gorbachev has presented Bush with no major obstacles; all the Soviet leader has asked is that he get some aid and assistance for the USSR in return for his pro-imperialist stance.

Benn's reaction to this was to move the goalposts. Now it is the General Assembly that apparently represent the "essence" of the UN with its majority of Third World states. But this body is absolutely without power and Benn also ignores that it too is stuffed with vile pro-imperialist anti-working class repressive governments that can be bought off by imperialist bribes and bullying, especially when they take their place in turn as temporary members of the Security Council.

During the current crisis the UN has, unflinchingly, followed the orders of Washington. When Saddam invaded Kuwait the UN imposed sanctions. This, as everybody including Benn knows, could only be successfully imposed if it was backed up by armed force. It is an initial act of war. Benn's response was, and remains, full support for this particular act of war. "The illegal occupation of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein which the UN sanctions, which we all support, are designed to reverse" was his view of the crisis and its solution. He accepted that to make these sanctions work a naval task force should police the Gulf.

So long as the UN limited its displeasure with Iraq to the call for sanctions Benn's position was at least consistent. He was for an economic war, not an all—out military confrontation, under the auspices of the UN rather than the United States. He was able to castigate Hurd for suggesting that Britain could "wage such a war without going back to the Security Council." The flaw in his argument came when the Security Council was reconvened and voted *for* war.

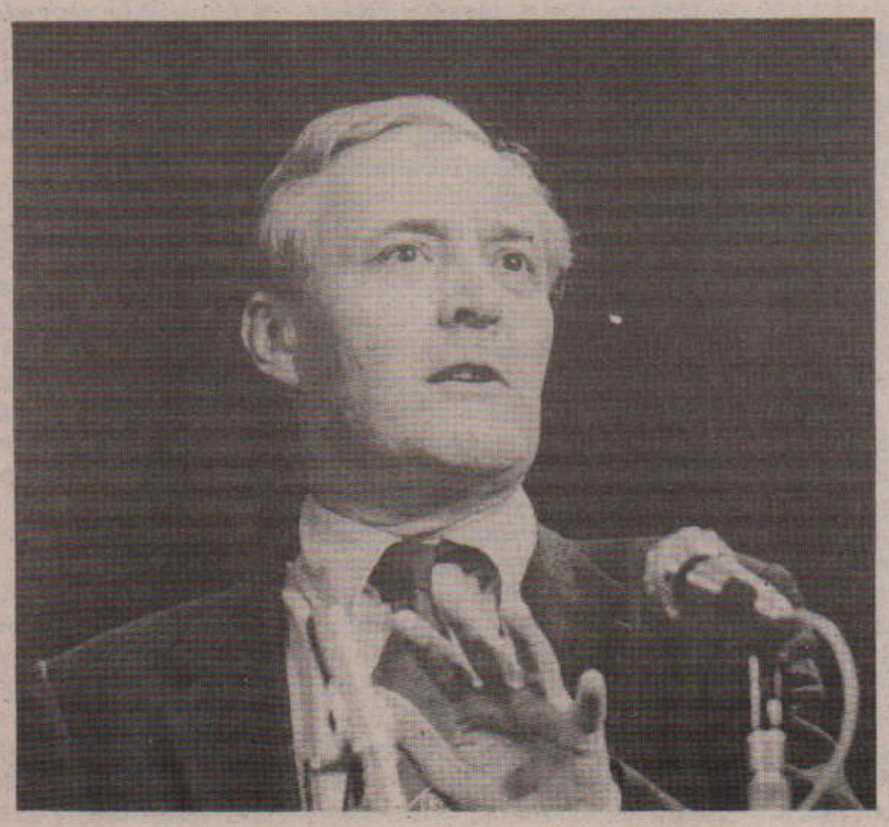
The UN resolution said that "states co-operating with Kuwait" were empowered "to use all necessary means" to get Iraq out of Kuwait if Saddam had not pulled out by 15 January. In anyone's language this is an authorisation for war. The US, as always, got its way in the UN. The muddleheadedness and danger of Benn's reliance on the UN was revealed by his response to this vote. "The world peace movement has scored a notable victory", declared Tony Benn. It was wrong to believe that "the resolution carried by the Security Council provided a political authority for war." An agreed deadline for war was a "victory" for peace!

Underlying this barmy conclusion is Benn's belief that the UN stands for something different from the US. The UN merely wants Iraq out of Kuwait. The US wants military bases in the region, cheap oil and world domination. So, if Saddam withdraws from Kuwait he will help bolster the UN and block the US. As he explained after his trip to Baghdad:

"I said to him: 'you depend on the UN and, in the long term the world will be run by the UN or the United States.' "

The whole history of the UN proves that this perceived clash of interests is non-existent. It is timely to note that the assembled forces in Saudi Arabia will now be able to attack Iraq with the blessing of the UN—something that Benn and Heffer, as part of their strategy for "peace", called for from the outset!

As the Fire Brigades Union resolution, supported by the left (including



Tony Benn

defeat sm!

the wrath of the imperialists on its head.

Principle has nothing to do with it. Naked self interest is what Britain and the US are defending.

The imperialists' claim to be fighting against Saddam's dictatorship is just as hollow. The continuation of his dictatorship was facilitated by extensive US, British and French support for the Ba'athist regime, during and after the Iran/Iraq war. The imperialists applauded him for his brutal crushing of the Communist Party in Iraq. He was supplied with the technology to enable him to launch poison gas attacks on the Kurds. He is in power today because of imperialist money and arms given to him yesterday.

Only when dictators turn against their imperialist masters do we hear bleatings about the cause of democracy from Whitehall and Washington.

In Haiti, in America's backyard, a dictator just as brutal as Saddam has just overthrown an elected president. At best the US government will utter a few protests.



UN or not, to deal with Iraq, as the Labour left do, this is a pertinent question. And the answer ends up as exactly the same one given by Labour's Defence spokesman, Martin O'Neill:

"We have to persist with [sanctions]. They must be given a chance. But those of us who urge this course must recognise, at the end of the day, we may well have to use force."

This is the real logic of pursuing the sanctions option, the real logic of siding with imperialism's pre-war measures against Iraq. You end up supporting their actual war.

The threat of war in the Gulf has so far given Benn and those on the left who support him the option of preaching peace. But the task of *achieving* it is beyond him. We cannot rely on the UN and we cannot side with the imperialists over sanctions if we really want to stop this war. We have to defend Iraq against imperialism, actively support the defeat of imperialism and build an international working class movement capable of pursuing these goals by taking class struggle action against our main class enemy—the British, US and other imperialist bosses.■

Ritual

The grand coalition against Iraq is stuffed full of dictatorships and semi-dictatorships. Why does Britain's government ban television reports on the real nature of the Saudi regime that it is out there "defending"? We are not allowed to hear about the ritual floggings and executions that are a hallmark of Saudi life, or the unelected nature of the Saudi ruling family, or the absence of democratic rights in Saudi Arabia. The same goes for a host of other coalition partners ranged against Iraq. If the issue is the "defence of democracy against dictatorship" is it not a little strange that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and the other grossly undemocratic states in the coalition, are not being called to account?

Imperialism does not want, does not care about, democracy in the Middle East. Its policy of plundering the region's oil reserves and obstructing the balanced industrial and agricultural development in the Middle East, as in Africa, Asia and Latin America, deliberately fosters dictatorships. Their rule, free from the niceties of democracy, is imperialism's best guarantee of stability, profits and the continued enslavement of those countries. This is why Britain and the US have said nothing about restoring democracy in Iraq. They will establish another dictatorship, but one more pliant and responsive to their needs.

For every one of these reasons we draw one inescapable conclusion. The workers in Britain, the US and the other countries of the coalition, do not have the slightest interest in supporting their rulers' war. It is their war, not ours. A victory for their armies will not benefit us one bit. It will strengthen their rule. It will enable them to impose their will throughout the Middle East and the rest of the semi-colonial world. It will provide them with vast profits. It will bring them nearer to their goal of a new world order of exploitation where the exploited and oppressed are powerless against the imperialist military machine.

It is in our interests to bring about the defeat of our "own" imperialist armies by ruthlessly pursuing the class struggle at home. Our main enemy is at home.

Working class internationalism demands that we cannot simply sit back and say "a plague on all your houses". Iraq, despite Saddam's dictatorship, is a country that has long been oppressed by imperialism. Iraq is an impoverished, underdeveloped country in hock to imperialism to the tune of $30 billion. Its oil wealth during the 1970s was incapable of breaking the chains of servitude. All its major industries are dependent on imperialist investment. And the profits the Western bosses repatriate from those investments starved Iraq of the funds that could have enabled it to develop and diversify its economy. Even its ability to produce oil is courtesy of the technology of the imperialist powers. And, as Saddam himself observed, Iraq is dependent on the imperialists to buy its oil.

The complete dependency of Iraq on imperialism is qualitatively different to the interdependency of the imperialist economies with one another. It is the dependency of a subordinate nation, an oppressed nation, one whose development is deliberately stifled by imperialism.

A victory for Iraq would be a blow to imperialism. It would weaken their world rule and sabotage their plans for a new, oppressive world order. That is why it is the duty of working class internationalists not merely to oppose the war drive; when then fighting starts workers must do everything in their power to bring about the victory of Iraq.

This will stick in the throats of many workers, even those revolted by the prospect of war. How can we support the victory of the Butcher of Baghdad? The defence of Iraq against imperialism in no way implies that we politically support the regime of Saddam, or that we excuse his monstrous crimes against the Iraqi workers and poor peasants. Revolutionaries have always argued for the overthrow of this dictator, well before the bosses' media made him their pet hate figure.

But today, he is not the main enemy of the Iraqi masses. Imperialism poses a far greater threat to them. Victorious imperialism will intensify their exploitation, their misery and their oppression. Until the threat of such a victory is removed then a war by Iraq against Britain, the US and the coalition will be a justified war.

Reality

It is vital that workers face up to the reality of the war. It will cost the lives of tens of thousands. Both sides have the technology to knock out tank-loads of young soldiers as if they were space invaders. Both sides will inflict maximum casualties, maximum terror against soldiers and civilians alike. And after the working class youth has spilt its blood, sustained horrific physical and mental scars, the world's rulers will patch together a peace in the plush surroundings of the international conference centres.

Today's enemy will become tomorrow's business partner for the bosses. If proof is needed look at the Argentine ships sailing alongside Britain's in the allied blockade.

Working class action can still prevent a war. The action by Spanish dockers who blocked ships taking military supplies to the Gulf points the way forward. Spreading such action would cause untold problems for Bush and Major.

If, despite such action, war begins it remains vital that we build a movement to stop the war through workers' action—action aimed at crippling the war machine of Bush and Major and forcing imperialism to retreat from the Middle East forever.■

IN DEFENCE OF MARXISM



Dodging the draft?

AS THE spectre of war in the Gulf loomed larger, reports increased of individuals refusing call-up and soldiers refusing shipment to the Gulf in protest against the war.

The call up of medical reservists in Britain prompted Labour MP Tam Dalyell to urge defiance of the call up. In the US the legacy of the anti-draft struggle during the Vietnam war will serve as a model for many to emulate today.

Amongst the young men and women being mobilised in their hundreds of thousands many individuals are revolted by the propaganda that is drumming them towards war.

They can see that the war is a blatant imperialist exercise to secure cheap oil and a permanent military presence in the Gulf.

The armies are overwhelmingly made up of working class youth, and in the US in particular black youth, who are "conscripted" by poverty and unemployment. It is they who will pay the bloody cost of securing Bush and Major's war aims.

Revolutionary socialists defend, and stand in solidarity with, each and every young soldier who revolts against the inhuman regime that sends them out to die for imperialism. But Marxists have never advocated "conscientious objection", the individual refusal to serve in the armed forces of the capitalist state.

Despite being made up largely of workers the army is not "our" army. It is totally in the service of capitalism and imperialism, commanded and officered by the upper classes. It would require the whole structure of these forces to be broken down by a social revolution to change this.

We fight against conscription because we are against a single penny being spent on imperialist war and a single person having to die to defend the bosses' profits. That is why we call on Labour MPs to vote against every measure of conscription and every demand for war funds in parliament.

But Marxists do not call on individual soldiers to defy the call up or break military discipline, though we will defend those who do so.

What is wrong with being a "conscientious objector"? From the standpoint of the tasks of revolutionary socialism and the class struggle, everything.

Revolution will not be achieved peacefully. The bosses will attempt to cling on to their wealth and power by every possible means, including violence. To counter this, workers must learn military technique.

Our programme for achieving this is to fight for the abolition of the standing army, for military training for all and for a workers militia. If we cannot secure this then we fight within the armed forces to make sure the working class derives the full benefit of military training. As Trotsky explained:

"We can't oppose compulsory military training by the bourgeois state just as we can't oppose compulsory education by the bourgeois state. Military training in our eyes is a part of education."

The reason for this is clear. As distinct from the pacifists we want to prepare ourselves for armed struggle against the capitalist state. We want to do so as good revolutionaries and good soldiers. Lenin, during the First World War, was adamant on this:

"Today the imperialist bourgeoisie militarises the youth as well as the adults; tomorrow it may begin militarising the women. Our attitude should be: All the better! Full speed ahead! For the faster we move, the nearer we shall be to the armed uprising against capitalism."

As against the pacifist objection to violence in general, and therefore to being drafted, Lenin added:

"An oppressed class which does not strive to learn the use of arms, to acquire arms, only deserves to be treated like slaves."

In the class struggle we can use military training to our advantage, even when insurrection is not the immediate task. The one time in Britain when serious workers' self-defence guards were built, in the strikes of the early 1920s, they were effective because they were organised and led by ex-soldiers. Their military training proved decisive in beating off police attacks on picket lines.

Of course this does not mean that our first task is to urge everybody to enlist! We must do everything we can to win the working class to all out opposition to the war.

But if the war lasts any length of time, then the mounting toll of suffering and the economic costs shovelled onto the working class at home will begin to undermine the chauvinist war propaganda.

In such conditions a similiar disillusionment will set in amongst those at the sharp end, those facing chemical weapons and hi-tech firepower.

The working class squaddies and GI's will ask, like their predecessors in Vietnam and Korea, why they came to somebody else's country to wreak havoc and to suffer and die themselves.

When this happens opponents of the war will be needed at the front to organise resistance.

The only way to stop war is to destroy the cause of wars: imperialism and exploitation. But that can only be done with arms in hand. The major wars which have left 100 million dead in this century have invariably presented revolutionary opportunities to the working class.

When vast numbers of workers find themselves inside the capitalist military machine the job of socialists is to go with our class, to suffer the same fate and fight the same struggle.

Trotsky argued that this was a principle for Marxists:

"Revolutionists no more separate themselves from the people during war than in peace. A Bolshevik strives to become not only the best trade unionist but also the best soldier."

Despite the draconian discipline and the absence of any democratic rights it is the duty of class conscious workers in the army, cautiously and secretly at first but seizing every opportunity, to expose the bloody imperialist nature of this war. When the time is ripe, when their fellow soldiers are willing to join them, action must be organised to disrupt and bring a halt to the war machine. This, rather than conscientious objection by isolated individuals is the best road to halt the war.

Today, although Britain's 35,000 troops in the Gulf are volunteers in a professional army, we must not neglect the fight for collective resistance in the armed forces. Through active resistance, not only will the lives of many US, British and Iraqi soldiers will be saved but the day will be brought nearer when we can finally bring the imperialist war mongers to account.■

THE LONGEST WAR

No more Bloody Sundays

ON SUNDAY 30 January 1972 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association called a demonstration against internment without trial. All marches and parades had been banned and the British army was given instructions to break up future demonstrations.

Upwards of 20,000 people turned out for the march. The British army sent in the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment to prevent the march leaving the Bogside. There were skirmishes along the way but little real confrontation between the marchers and the army.

Suddenly, at the end of the march, the army opened fire repeatedly on the crowd. Thirteen civilians were killed, and another was to die later from his wounds. Twenty nine people were wounded. Seven of the original 13 were teenagers. Army officials claimed that the Paras had been fired on by IRA gunmen and had shot only in self-defence, that the crowd had hurled petrol bombs, that four of those who died were on an RUC wanted list. Each of these allegations was subsequently withdrawn. At the conclusion of his inquest into the shootings, the Derry coroner reported:

"It strikes me that the Army ran amok that day and they shot without thinking of what they were doing. They were shooting innocent people."

A commission established by the British government would, however, report in April that the troops had done nothing wrong. Colonel Derek Wilford, the officer commanding the Paras, was awarded an Order of the British Empire in the 1973 honours list.

In the period 1968/69, Republicans and Civil Rights activists had any illusions they may have harboured in the possibility of reforming the Northern Irish state, beaten out of them. Nevertheless, the repressive capacity of the British state was met with full resistance by the nationalist people. Armed actions by the Provisional IRA led to the assassination in February 1971 of the first British soldier killed in Ireland in almost 50 years. The Provisionals escalated their bombing campaign in the same period.

In May 1971 the Stormont parliament threw off any pretence of democracy. Prime Minister Brian Faulkner issued a directive:

"Any soldier seeing any person with a weapon or acting suspiciously, may, depending on the circumstances, fire to warn or with effect without waiting for orders".

"A shoot-to-kill" policy by any other name!

The period 1971-72 gives ample demonstration of the strategy pursued by British imperialism in the North since partition. Along with the escalation of repression came moves to co-opt the constitutional nationalists of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) onto parliamentary advisory committees. At the same time, the Loyalist working class was used as a stage army for British imperialism, with workers at the Harland and Wolff shipyard staging marches to demand the re-imposition of internment without trial. Their wish was granted. On 9 August 1971 army raids were carried out at dawn in nationalist areas of Belfast and other parts of the North.

A total of 342 people were arrested without charge during the first 24 hours of internment. Within 48 hours, 116 were released! Of the 226 who were then officially interned, most would later be moved to specially constructed prison camps at Long Kesh. A total of 2158 orders of internment were to be signed during the next four years.

Fourteen internees were selected to undergo sensory deprivation experiments. They were subjected to what became known as the "five techniques": hoods were placed over their heads; they were made to stand against a wall for long periods; they were denied sleep; food and water were given only irregularly; they were subjected to "white noise." It was a deliberate attempt to break down the 14 internees in the hope that they would incriminate others.

If the barbarity of the British state appeared boundless, so was the resistance of the nationalist people. The mass of the nationalist population commenced a rent and rates strike in protest against internment. Government figures showed 26,000 participating in the strike.

In the aftermath of the carnage of Bloody Sunday, the revolt of the nationalists briefly spilled over into the Southern state. The British embassy in Dublin was burned to the ground at the end of a 20,000 strong protest march. A similar number marched in London, including thousands of Irish workers. The march was attacked by police and 130 arrested.

As the cracks in the Orange state began to show, the Loyalists organised to defend their "privileges". William Craig, former Home Affairs minister, set up the neo-fascist Vanguard organisation, and told a crowd of over 60,000: "We must build up a dossier of the men and women who are a menace to this country because if and when the politicians fail us, it may be our job to liquidate the enemy."

But the challenge of the anti-Unionists was too strong. Faced with the prospect of the imminent collapse of Stormont, the British state acted to preserve its increasingly fragile grip on the Orange state and imposed direct rule from Westminster.

The mass opposition to internment, the protests by Irish workers north and south and the unity between Irish and British workers on the Anti-Internment League demonstrations before and after Bloody Sunday, show the real revolutionary potential of the struggle for Irish self-determination. They also reveal the centrality of the mobilisation of the anti-Unionist working class in their own interests as the only means of smashing the Orange state.

DEMONSTRATION

ASSEMBLE:
Hyde Park, London
1pm Saturday
January 26th 1991

BULGARIA

Stalinists out of office but sharing power

BY KEITH SPENCER

IN THE stormy events of 1989, the ruling Bulgarian Stalinist party escaped the wrath of the mass of the working class. But seeing what happened to Ceausescu in next door Romania, the pro-Gorbachev wing of the Communist Party engineered a peaceful coup against the country's leader of 35 years, Todor Zhivkov.

Under their new leader Peter Mladenov, the Stalinists quickly renamed themselves the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). They promised elections, a transition to the capitalist market and a number of democratic concessions. The freedom to organise was granted along with the right to demonstrate and to publish oppositional newspapers.

These measures, together with a limited purge of those who had been associated with the Zhivkov years, enabled the BSP to head off any discontent and give it a degree of popular support which was confirmed in the June elections.

The speed of the elections, the disorganisation of the 16 opposition groups within the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the fact that all that held them together was hatred of the BSP, allowed the BSP to secure 211 out of the 400 parliamentary seats.

After June the BSP strategy was to try and get the UDF into the government. That way it would have to take joint responsibility for drastic and unpopular economic measures which were in the pipeline and which both government and opposition substantially agreed with.

Trust

But the UDF refused to join the newly formed government. They said they had no trust in the BSP despite their claims to be converts to the market and democratic rights. To entice and pacify the UDF, the BSP's leader was again replaced in June by Lukanov, a man more committed to the discipline of the capitalist market. Lukanov could see no way forward for Bulgaria other than "bidding farewell for ever to its absurd economic system."

But Lukanov came under immediate pressure from the Stalinist hardliners to delay and even veto the erosion of their power. At the summer BSP party Congress the hardline elements within the party were able to dominate to an extent that not one reformist was elected onto the 160-strong party council. Alexander Lilov (Zhivkov's ideology chief for ten years) was elected party chair with 66% of the vote even though reformist elements in the party had called for his sacking.

On the other side Lukanov courted the growing hostility of the UDF. In August the BSP headquarters were attacked and burned. The UDF parliamentary resistance effectively paralysed government by denying the BSP the necessary two-thirds majority it needed for most important measures. Finally, in the last week of November, mass strikes against the BSP led to the resignation of Lukanov and the establishment of a UDF government.

The downfall of Lukanov marked an end to the attempt by sections of the BSP to take the economy in a capitalist direction in alliance with parts of the opposition. The irony is that the opposition which ousted Lukanov and his government have nothing to offer the working masses of Bulgaria except Lukanov's austerity programme. One of his last acts on 22 November was to get parliamentary approval for a 100 day crash programme of austerity.

The BSP government drew heavily for this programme on the advice of the US National Chamber Foundation. The initiative will remain with the system of bureaucratic planning. But the national plan sets out to privatise agriculture and industry, end subsidies and lift wage and price controls. It will introduce measures to soften the blow of unemployment, now at 40,000 and rising.

The second stage of the plan up to May 1991 includes tax and banking reforms and the free circulation of foreign currencies. Furthermore, reforms of the legislative code will be made to encourage the growth of private property so as to enable the privatisation of small and medium sized enterprises over five years.

The programme, now in the hands of the UDF, will be unable to solve any of Bulgaria's worsening economic problems. In August rationing was introduced. By October a whole series of staple goods such as chocolate, tinned foods and meats, had disappeared from shops in Sofia. The harvest was down on last year and it has been estimated that 188 out of 293 staple goods are in short supply.

Industrial output slumped 15% in 1990. Material shortages and factory closures result from the incessant erosion of the bureaucratic planning mechanisms. Fuel shortages are worsening with the breakup of Comecon. The crisis in the Gulf has exacerbated Bulgaria's energy crisis. With a catastrophe looming in both fuel and food supplies this winter, the future looks very bleak.

Neither the BSP nor the UDF offer the working class of Bulgaria a progressive way out of the economic stagnation and political impasse. Despite their disagreements they will find common ground in attacking workers' rights and living standards as they seek, in their respective ways, to profit from the drive towards capitalism.

Downfall

To date one trade union federation—*Prokepa*—has fought the BSP from within the UDF. Originating in 1989 out of the Sofia intelligentsia it grew on the back of the 300 or so strikes that followed the downfall of Zhivkov.

Its leadership is reactionary and favours rapid privatisation. *Prokepa* took the lead in calling the general strike that led to Lukanov's fall. But the initial response was weak.

The decisive turn of events occured when the much larger Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CITU) came out in support of the general strike. The Confederation had been the old Communist union machine but soon established its independence, sacked many local and regional officials and reorganised the unions on a trades rather than geographical basis.

CITU's leaders are cast in the mould of social democrats favouring a "mixed economy". The main leader, Petkov, has raised the prospect of forming a Labour Party out of the CITU and independent of the BSP and UDF. It is within this development that revolutionaries in Bulgaria must try to operate. They must fight in any such party for a revolutionary political programme that rejects the road to capitalism whilst maintaining the struggle to overthrow the old bureaucracy.

Many workers think that it is possible to defend themselves by rejecting party politics and attempting to wage a struggle through trade union organisation alone. This is a fatal illusion. To oust the bureaucrats from the state and prevent the UDF entrenching their hold on office, the Bulgarian workers and Turkish minority need a revolutionary party. The immediate steps towards this today are to fight for a programme that can avert the coming catastrophe:

- Establish workers' control of the mechanisms of food and fuel distribution
- Index wages against inflation
- Prevent the privatisation of state factories
- Wrest control of the plan from the bureaucrats before they sacrifice it completely on the altar of the capitalist market
- For a proletarian political revolution in Bulgaria and throughout Eastern Europe



The BSP HQ on fire in August

USSR

Conservatives strike back

Gorbachev faces a fundamental dilemma. How to continue his market restructuring of the Soviet economy whilst at the same time maintaining stability within the state and the Union? ***Clare Heath*** *surveys his choices.*

FURTHER marketisation in the USSR depends on the support of the pro-perestroika reforming forces in the USSR. Maintaining order requires the support of the military and key sections of the bureaucracy, many of whom are opposed to democratisation and fundamental economic reform. That is the dilemma Mikhail Gorbachev is facing.

The logic of the market in the USSR is the break up of the Union. The republics with rich natural resources, those with a reasonably advanced industrial structure wish to free themselves from the obligations they have towards their poor and demanding brother and sister republics.

The logic of military authoritarianism to hold the Union together is to retard the process of economic reform as it gathers dynamism and as its disruptive effects on national integrity and on the bureaucracy's interfering role become clear; China is living proof of this.

The December Congress of People's Deputies turned into a rally dominated by the old-style conservatives, during which Gorbachev was granted increasingly centralised powers and the reformers were trounced.

Group

The most coherent group at the Congress was the Soyuz (Union) group headed by the sinister lieutenant Colonel Alksnis. They demanded the banning of political parties, the suspension of all parliaments and the declaration of a state of emergency. In the face of Soyuz the so-called liberals were almost silent. Although not all of the Soyuz demands were met, the majority of the congress lined up behind the "conservatives" to grant Gorbachev draconian powers. He was given the right to rule by Presidential decree and to appoint his own government. He has the power to initiate martial law whenever he decides.

On resigning last month, foreign minister Shevardnadze proclaimed:

"The reformers have gone into hiding, dictatorship is coming and trials await the Soviet people."

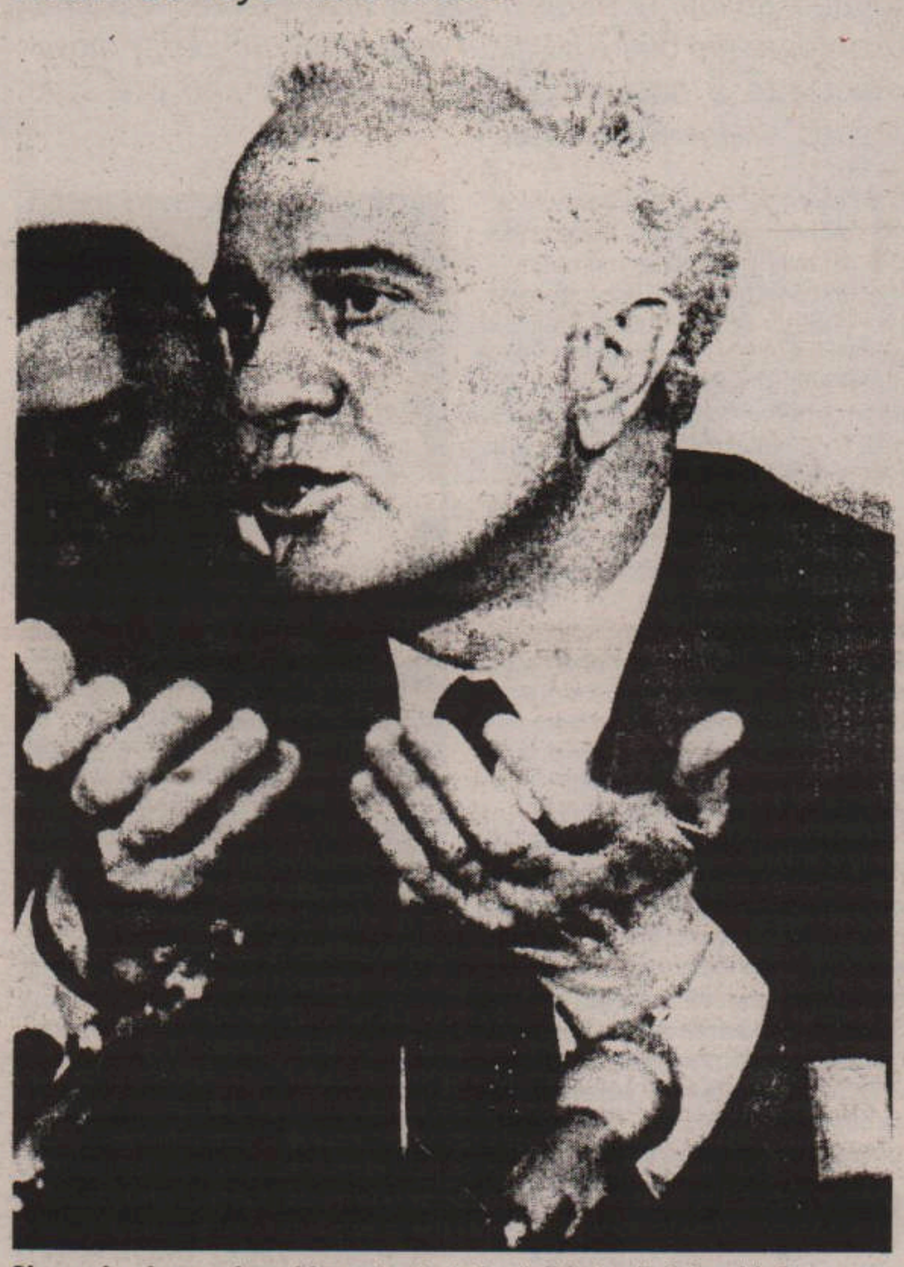
Did the Congress prove Shevardnadze correct? The agreed measures clearly lay the basis for Presidential dictatorhip, but as yet Gorbachev has not proved able to decisively use these powers because of the contending forces within the bureaucracy.

To rule by Presidential decree requires the backing of loyal armed forces. The Soviet Armed Forces may be a little shaky in the face of popular revolt, divided as they are along nationalist lines, but their officer corps remains 95% Russian or Russified Ukrainians. These officers are themselves divided between those who wish to retain a conscript army and those who want a new professional army.

Sources

But there are alternative sources of "law and order" which Gorbachev can seek to use. In addition to specialised divisions of the army (the *Speznaz* and the Black Beret battalion) there are the crack troops of the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) and the half million strong KGB. Between the army and these other forces there are about 5 million troops that Gorbachev would hope to win the support of.

In order to retain the loyalty of the military Gorbachev has to make concessions to their political leadership. They are generally conservative about the economy, hostile to the nationalist movements and anti-democratic. They are part of a coalition of "conservative" forces which ranges from the KGB chiefs, through the managers of the arms industry, to the enterprise managers in the countryside and the republics who fear closure of their plants or farms if marketisation proceeds.



Shevardnadze: resigned in protest at the "slide to dictatorship"

This coalition also includes those layers of the bureaucracy who favour a much slower pace of marketisation than that proposed by the reformers. They hope thereby to be able to gradually convert their privileges, acquired through corruption, into the beginnings of private wealth which will enable them take their place within the ranks of a new bourgeoisie.

The Congress represented a move by Gorbachev towards this conservative wing of the bureaucracy.

He offered no concessions to the independence movements. Congress agreed his new Union Treaty which is a concession to the hardliners and a rebuttal of the demands of the republics. The new treaty proposes retaining a single currency, unified economic system and common foreign and defence policy.

The worsening dislocation of the economy is due to the break up of the old planning mechanisms and the development of unregulated and corrupt black market enterprise. Hoarding by producers and wholesalers, combined with republican and regional trade restrictions, lead to distribution bottlenecks, shortages in the shops and rotting products stuck somewhere in transit.

The protectionism of the republics, which began with the resistance by the Baltic independence movements, has now become widespread throughout many republics; they increasingly place residential restrictions on who can buy goods in their shops.

Skirt

In addition many republics are entering into bi-lateral trade agreements with each other which skirt around the role and influence of the centre.

It is having to deal with this mass of contradictions which makes Gorbachev much more than simply a prisoner of the conservatives. In order to implement rapid marketisation a strong and confident state power is required to deal with the working class resistance which the price rises and job losses associated with marketisation produce, and to prevent the inter-republican, inter-regional and inter-ethnic trade wars developing into uncontrollable civil war. This is why he remains a bonapartist figure forced to move between the camps as he deals with conflicting problems which often require conflicting solutions.

What can break the present impasse?

The imperialist west is neither willing nor able to pour investment into the USSR at the moment. Their massive expenditure on the Gulf crisis and the economic recession leave the imperialists without the funds necessary to smooth a path back to capitalism in most of Eastern Europe let alone the massive USSR. This leaves them reluctantly supporting the tough stance taken by Gorbachev in relation to the republics, and remaining silent about his newly acquired dictatorial powers.

Favour

Ultimately, the imperialists would probably favour the break up of the Unfon into smaller countries which could be more easily exploited. But in the short term they are more fearful that the break up of the Union would precipitate an uncontrollable civil war.

Could Gorbachev go over completely to the conservatives? Gorbachev took a major step towards dictatorship at the December Congress of People's deputies.

But he will not survive long if he completes the move in this direction—his programme is not that of the hardliners and they would not trust him as their loyal leader after his years of perestroika and glasnost.

Nor would he have any role to play as a democratic front man for such military rule since he would be a completely discredited force among pro-glasnost forces

On the other hand if Gorbachev were to break with the military and throw his lot in with the independence movements and rapid marketisers he would be likely to precipitate civil war in the bureaucracy and massive upheaval within society.

Gorbachev has no alternative, therefore, but to pursue a strategy that is doomed to failure. With the republics he seems likely to maintain a hard line in order to retain the loyalty of the military.

The use of force in specific situations, such as the "protection" of Communist Party buildings or lines of communications in the Baltics, and future crack downs on national uprisings as in Tblisi and Baku—none of this is excluded.

Through the limited use of such force he would hope to make his Presidential edicts stick without risking a full scale military takeover and declaration of a state of emergency throughout the Union. But the latter is not ruled out, either with or without the leadership of Gorbachev.

Independence moves in the republics and generalised economic dislocation look set to intensify, not ease, in the next months. Therefore attacks on the nationalities and on the working class will increase in the USSR as the bureaucracy seeks to stabilise its rule and the economy.

Gorbachev will be posed with the choice of settling any social or national disputes through making concessions or cracking down hard. His room for manoeuvre with the working class is shrinking as economic conditions worsen.

The same problem is posed in relation to the independence movements.

Whilst he will continue to attempt to deal with them separately where a military intervention or concessions are required, he is hoping to avert the necessity of a big military assault on the independence movements through taking the draft union treaty to a referendum. He hopes this legalisation of the continued denial of national and republican rights will avoid the break up of the union.

But the republics have already given their verdict—many of their representatives were absent from the Congress or refused to participate in the vote. They will continue their moves towards independence and will only be halted by a major climbdown by Gorbachev on the nature of a new treaty, or through a military clampdown.

The working class will inevitably resist the coming attacks. There are already signs of a reawakening of militancy. There are independent unions in every major industrial town and region and talks of strikes against the threat of up to 12 million workers losing their jobs in the next year.

Chronic

But at the moment the working class movement is very weak, divided by regionalism and sectoralism. There is a chronic crisis of leadership which is heavily influenced by pro-market ideas. But the potential of a unified resistance exists against job losses and price rises.

Against Gorbachev and the KGB, and against the variety of pro-market and separatist leaders, the working class must organise itself to intervene directly to avert the impending economic, national and political crisis that threatens the USSR. It must oppose every move toward a military crackdown and resist it by strikes, and arms if necessary should it happen.

It must use the relative freedoms it has won to build all-union workers' councils that struggle to defend the rights of national minorities *and* the integrity of the Soviet state.

It must fight against capitalist market reforms in favour of a democratically planned economy in the hands of the workers themselves.■

the LRCI

NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

ARBEITERMACHT

German Trotskyists join PDS

SUPPORTERS OF the German Trotskyist paper *Arbeitermacht* have taken the bold step of joining the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). This is the successor to the old ruling Stalinist party in the GDR, now re-constituted as an all-German party.

The PDS remains in a state of flux following the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the restoration of capitalism in the GDR. A wide-ranging debate is continuing in its ranks, which the reformist leadership is using to steer the party in a social-democratic direction.

Within the PDS the Trotskyists aim to continue their fight for a revolutionary action programme to mobilise the powerful German working class against the attempts of the bosses to make them pay the costs of capitalist restoration. To do this the comrades have produced an Appeal for the Formation of a Trotskyist Platform in the party, providing concrete answers to the internal crisis in the PDS as well as developing a programme for working class action to meet the bosses' attacks.

This step has undoubtedly proved worthwhile. It is enabling the comrades to test the superiority of their arguments against the social-democrats, Stalinists, and centrists within the party. The party leadership have also had to sit up and take notice of the Trotskyists. Shortly after they joined Gysi, the PDS leader, issued the scarcely concealed threat that extremists and Trotskyists would not be tolerated.

Entering the PDS has provoked an entirely predictable torrent of abuse from the sectarian groups active in the former GDR. One group, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter, accused the Trotskyists of being a "fifth Column" for the Stalinists, whilst the Spartacist Workers Party of Germany claim that the comrades have capitulated to the social-democratic course of the leadership.

What the sectarians are obliged to avoid mentioning is the series of very clear revolutionary demands contained in the comrades' Appeal, and the consistent criticism of Stalinism and social-democracy contained in *Arbeitermacht*. Indeed the building of a Trotskyist Tendency within the PDS will do infinitely more to challenge the reactionary party leadership than a thousand and one literary denunciations in the sectarian press could ever do.

The Trotskyists have joined the PDS with their ideas intact. They are conscious that in so doing they are making a significant contribution to the fight for a new revolutonary leadership for the German working class.

Copies of *Arbeitermacht* are available from Workers Power, price 50p per copy.

PODER OBRERO (PERU)

Fighting Fujimori

LAST MONTH we received the latest two magazines of Poder Obrero in Peru. The December 1990 issue is devoted to the third anniversary of the National Popular Assembly. PO[P] analyse how this self-proclaimed "embryo of a new state" has been completely bureaucratised and how the centrists (especially the Morenoite and Lambertist currents) habitually capitulate to that bureaucracy.

This month's publication concentrates on events since the election of Fujimori last summer. The background to his election victory is explained, as is the second "Fuji-shock" austerity package delivered at Christmas.

Also Poder Obrero devote space to an analysis of a progressive new phenomenon in the Peruvian labour movement. For the first time the union federations are holding mass assemblies of workers to discuss the current crisis and PO[P] discuss their experience of intervening in them.

Other recent activities and publications of Poder Obrero include a pamphlet on the reformist PUM party, the nature of the Fujimori regime, the crisis in the Gulf and the joint organisation of solidarity forums on El Salvador and Iraq. An English language edition of the Platform of the Popular Youth Co-ordination is available now from Workers Power.

This platform represents the latest success of Poder Obrero in fighting among oppressed groups for the Trotskyist Programme.

The comrades ended a busy year by sending the completed Spanish translation of the *Trotskyist Manifesto* to the printers together with the first issues of *Guia*, the journal of the Andean Trotskyist Liason Committee, which brings together comrades of PO[P] and the LRCI's fraternal Bolivian group—Poder Obrero-OCIR.

IL MANIFESTO TROTSKISTA

The LRCI programme, *The Trotskyist Manifesto*, is now available in Italian. Price £3.00, including postage, from Workers Power.■

The LRCI
Arbeiter/Innenstandpunkt (*Austria*), Gruppe Arbeitermacht (*Germany*), Irish Workers Group, Poder Obrero (*Peru*), Pouvoir Ouvrier (*France*), Workers Power Group (*Britain*)

The Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (*USA*) and the GAM (Ost) are sympathising sections. Poder Obrero (OCIR) (*Bolivia*) is in the process of discussions with the LRCI with the aim of becoming an affiliated section.

POLAND

Reaction tightens its grip

On 9 December 1990 Lech Walesa was elected as Poland's new President. This personal triumph came almost 10 years after he emerged as the leader of the newly formed Solidarity trade union. It also marked the final disintegration of the political wing of the Solidarity movement into a host of competing parties and pressure groups, writes ***Harry Wall.***

TEN YEARS ago Solidarity blossomed into a mass trade union of over ten million members—the first in Eastern Europe outside the control of the ruling Stalinist parties. Martial law in 1981 and subsequent repression failed to destroy it, although it emerged in 1987 considerably weakened with only about 2 million members.

Over the last few years this base was used as a vehicle for the political ambitions of a variety of groups and individuals within the intellectual milieu attached to Solidarity. This layer increasingly constituted itself as an "unofficial" political wing of Solidarity. Faction riven from the start, its components ranged from the ostensibly Trotskyist to the most reactionary Catholic nationalist.

Nevertheless, these forces remained united enough to produce an overwhelming defeat for the Stalinist candidates in the 1989 "35% free" elections—so called because 65% of the seats were reserved for the Stalinists and their allies. Solidarity candidates won outright more than 95% of the seats they were allowed to contest.

Office

After that victory Walesa refused to stand for any political office. Having helped bring it about he decided to stand outside of and above the compromise with the Stalinists so he could distance himself if necessary from the result. Instead Walesa sponsored one of his long time advisers, the Catholic intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki, for Prime Minister.

Mazowiecki's government embarked on a programme, common to almost all of Solidarity's factions, of "normalising" Polish society. This meant instituting parliamentary democracy on the western model, "liberalisation" of the economy and clearing out the old Stalinist *nomenklatura.*

As Walesa anticipated, Mazowiecki found himself in an impossible position. Poland's economy was in crisis with rampant inflation and a massive foreign debt with no hope of repayment. His ministers had to work within the structures erected by the Stalinists to run a strictly centralised command economy whilst trying to dismantle them to allow the "invisible hand of the market" free rein over the economy.

Mazowiecki came under pressure from all sides. His free-market advisers, most notably his finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz, wanted to push ahead faster with reducing inflation and privatising the 96% of



the economy in state hands. His price was rocketing unemployment (from virtually nil to over a million in the course of a year—and still rising) and a cut in real wages of 36%.

On the other hand, sections of workers staged warning strikes and demonstrations. Mazowiecki came to power on the votes of millions of workers and peasants, but with a programme that was bound to lower still further their standards of living. He made promises that the weak would be protected and that things would get better in the long run—but did nothing practical to keep them. On the contrary, as industrial output slumped by 25% real wages were slashed and the lines of unemployed began to lengthen.

Walesa used this period to enhance his personal prestige by demagogically attempting to be all things to all people. He promised to defend workers' interests, yet threatened to ban strikes. He promised to expose weak Polish industry to the world economy, yet to defend Polish industry against takeover by foreign capital. He promised a return to a normal civil society, yet tolerated open and vicious anti-Semites in his camp.

In short, he acted like a typical Bonapartist figure: waiting in the wings, set apart from the day to day problems of government, criticising its shortcomings and making contradictory promises to court favour with all sections of society. Increasingly critical of the compromise with the Stalinists as the bureaucracy's pace-setting reforms became positively archaic with the rapid disintegration of Stalinism in the rest of Eastern Europe, he was nevertheless careful to commit himself only to "speeding up" the drive to the market.

The resulting tensions split Solidarity's political wing into two hostile camps—both claiming to represent the real tradition of the 1980 movement.

On Walesa's side were the Centre Alliance and the Christian Civic Movement, both primarily composed of members of the Citizens' Committees that had run the 1989 election campaign. In response the pro-Mazowiecki Civic Movement-Democratic Alliance (ROAD) was formed by disgruntled intellectuals from the ranks of liberal advisers to Solidarity and the government.

There had already been arguments between these two sides in the run-up to the 1989 elections. Many Solidarity candidates were imposed by the pro-Walesa Citizens' Committees against the wishes of local Solidarity groups. Walesa's authoritarian tendencies were commented on then—most often by comparison with Jozef Pilsudski, the autocrat who ruled Poland between the wars.

The first round of the Presidential elections in November of last year saw the balance tilted firmly in favour of Walesa despite the surprise candidature of Stanislaw Tyminski. Support for this maverick Polish/Canadian/Peruvian businessman was based on no more than promises of "jam tomorrow" even more vague than Walesa's.

This man with no past and no programme, openly rumoured to be the candidate of the *nomenklatura* and secret police, managed to beat Mazowiecki into third place. He thereby illustrated the despairing hope of the Polish masses that their suffering must be rewarded, that Tyminski's international connections might presage a flood of western aid to rescue Poland from the abyss.

But imperialism will not rescue Poland. The international banks will not relieve the massive $49 billion foreign debt. It is this that gives the west a whip hand in directing Poland to its eventual place: kneeling at the table of the big powers waiting to be given crumbs in return for bigger and bigger slices of Poland's national wealth.

Despite his victory December's result represented a blow to Walesa too. Having seen off Mazowiecki in the first round Walesa beat Tyminski in the second round by a big margin. However, only 54% of voters bothered to turn out this time, giving Walesa only 40% of the possible vote. He was hoping for a crushing victory, with massive popular support, to legitimise his position as the saviour of Poland.

President

Now that Walesa has been elected president he is losing no time in confirming the worst predictions made about him. He has selected a new prime minister, Krzysztof Bielecki, of the "privatise it all now and worry about it later" school, and is keeping on Balcerowicz as finance minister. Unemployment is confidently predicted to rise to between two and three million.

In order to maintain his independence from Parliament and freedom of action, Walesa is gathering around him an unelected Presidential Council. Dominated by his old supporters from the Citizen's Committees it will provide him with a general staff with which to conduct a war against the last redoubts of the Stalinist bureaucrats if any resist the final drive to capitalism which will centre on privatisation. It will arm him to attack the workers on whose backs he has made his career and who now stand in his way.

This year will see many battles offered by Walesa. The Polish workers must resolve their present chronic crisis of political leadership in order to join those battles and defeat him before he swaps the chains of Stalinism for those of imperialism.■

CASTE AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Will India disintegrate?

***Lesley Day** examines the background to the riots and pogroms*

INDIA FACES a new year of continuing uncertainty and crisis. The government of Chandra Shekhar is in a precarious minority position. Shekhar exists in office only through the tolerance of Rajiv Gandhi, the leader of India's traditionally dominant Congress Party.

Shekhar heads a minority faction of the Janata Party whose leader, V P Singh, lost power after a no confidence vote in November. Congress is biding its time, unwilling to take over the government for fear of being blamed for the current crisis.

The last months of 1990 saw increasing communal tensions and violence including anti-Muslim pogroms and fierce opposition from higher caste Hindus to positive action measures for other caste groups.



Police beat back Hindu chauvinists in Ayodhya

Unrest

V P Singh's government failed to stem the unrest and was finally brought down when the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) withdrew its support in parliament. This was in protest at government troops attacking a Hindu "pilgrimage" which threatened the Muslim holy site at Ayodhya.

While proclaiming its secular credentials, the current government cannot marshall the forces to deal with any of the main features of the crisis of India's society or economy—a rising tide of communalism, separatist movements, caste antagonism and, contributing to all of these, severe economic difficulties highlighted by the huge gap between rich and poor. Approximately 30% of the eight hundred million population live below the official poverty line.

Yet since independence, India has seen huge development as an industrial capitalist nation. It now comes in the top 15 countries in the world in terms of industrial output. In agriculture, the Green Revolution meant that in the 1980s India became virtually self sufficient in food.

Logic

India's rapid industrial development has been cited by many to prove that the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution is no longer valid. It is used as evidence that the modern semi-colonial ruling class can drag the underdeveloped areas of the world out of backwardness, that the modern bourgeoisie remains a relatively progressive class. Thus, the logic follows, workers' revolutions are not needed in order to solve the basic tasks of democracy and development.

The national, social and political crisis that is rocking India refutes all of these claims. Every element of the crisis stems, directly or indirectly, from the Indian bourgeoisie's inability to develop the economy in the same way as modern imperialist countries like Britain and the USA. Modern India, where space technology exists alongside the caste system and the bride price, is a classic example of the uneven and combined development forced on semi-colonial countries by the imperialist system.

India's growth and development has been partial and uneven and the benefits have gone only to a limited section of the population. For instance the Green Revolution, the land reform programme sponsored by the World Bank, disproportionately benefited richer farmers in the northern states. New industries, affluent suburbs, prosperous big farms all co-exist with the world's worst poverty. Literacy at 43% is one of the world's lowest and in many villages the poorest children get no access to education. Women's oppression is severe and deeply rooted.

The extreme unevenness of India's development has created centrifugal tendencies in the state and society. The rich farming layer in the agriculturally prosperous areas has increased political weight. The national bourgeoisie is unable to agree on the role of the state and the Congress Party as they did in earlier decades. Ever greater numbers of the dispossessed are created by the land reforms—a mass of urban and rural poor who are prey to communal, religious or ethnic prejudice. The regional bourgeois and middle classes increasingly resent central government diktat.

For several decades, India's ruling Congress Party charted a path of development firmly in the interests of the national bourgeoisie—both the growing number of industrialists and the big landowners. It followed a path of heavy state intervention in the economy together with protective tariffs. A large bureaucracy administered state-led industrial and agrarian development. While remaining a capitalist country, India borrowed concepts like the "Five Year Plan" from the bureaucratically planned economy of the USSR. And although firmly tied into the world's imperialist economies through banking and finance, India's ruling class sought a measure of autonomy not only through state control but also through its "friendship" with the Soviet Union.

Through their domination of Congress and the state machinery, rich industrialists were able to direct benefits to themselves. They used nationalisation as a way of taking over "sick units" of industry. They manipulated licensing and loan systems. Huge corporations such as Tata came to dominate the economy alongside state concerns. Similarly, big farmers were able to benefit most from irrigation projects, cheap credit and state backed marketing systems.

This highly state-ised economy began to stagnate by the late 1970s. Sections of industry sought liberalisation and, under the tutelage of Rajiv Gandhi, Congress relaxed state controls and encouraged more foreign investment. For instance, although the Coca-Cola company was kicked out of India in the 1970s, Pepsi was let in during the late 1980s!

The easing of controls in the 1980s, against the background of past investment and rising demand, fuelled a boom. Growth rates of 5-8% were the norm in the 1980s. But the economy came to earth with a bump in 1989 when growth slowed and the negative consequences of the liberalising policies took their toll.

India's economy was very clearly subject to the world imperialist economy: to debt, trade deficits and inflation. Increasingly, the price for growth will be heavier dependence.

Contending

If there are differences within the ruling class about economic strategy, there are even greater contending pressures from the increasingly important "kulak" class of rich peasants and their allies amongst the very wealthy farmers. These layers benefited most from the Green Revolution. In some areas, and amongst the poor peasantry, land has been sub-divided into smaller and smaller plots, increasing inefficiency and indebtedness. At the other end of the scale, land has been concentrated into the hands of a few rich landowners. By 1985, 5% of proprietors owned 45% of the land. Besides this, in areas of greatest agricultural success in northern India, the richer peasants have prospered.

These richer farmers are anxious to expand and diversify. They are demanding a greater share of the nation's resources and have had some success. The Janata Dal government in 1989 awarded 50% of the development budget to agriculture. Many Indian politicians like to "play the rural card". Foremost amongst these has been Devi Lal, from the northern state of Haryana. While representing the interests of bigger farmers, he has been able to drum up support from the middle peasantry as well.

Others anxious to win the support of small and middle peasants have argued for special treatment for their caste groups, which are usually among the so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It was the attempt by the V P Singh government to implement positive action measures for the OBCs which caused such turmoil last summer. The traditionally privileged higher caste groups, particularly those in the urban middle classes, resented the proposals. They feared the loss of the mainstay of many middle class families—a job for at least one family member in the public sector. One such job can make all the difference between survival and sinking into poverty.

Changes on the land have also contributed to demands for separation and autonomy. Undoubtedly the growth of a prosperous farmer section anxious to move into industry and commerce in Punjab state has been a major factor in fuelling the growth of Sikh separatism. Government repression has poured petrol onto the flames.

Demands for separation or autonomy have also grown in a number of other areas—Kashmir and Assam in particular—where repression and starvation of central resources form part of a real national oppression.

While the better-off sections of society feud over resources and policy, the poor have been suffering—and providing fodder for the communalist violence. Seventy per cent of the population is still dependent on the land. There is the small peasantry eking out a precarious existence and often seriously in debt. Increasing enclosure of common land has meant loss of grazing rights. For 3 million people, indebtedness means bonded labour.

The continuation of extreme poverty and dependence both contributes to, and is fed by, caste oppression. Just as the wrath of the higher caste groups could turn on the OBCs, so the middle ranks join in the oppression of Untouchables. There are over one hundred million Untouchables, over half of whom are landless labourers. Frequently the Untouchables have been the victims of pogroms.

While caste can be set against caste in a situation of poverty, religious antagonism can also be drummed up. This has been a favorite game of unscrupulous bourgeois politicians in recent years, in particular the whipping up of Hindu chauvinism against Muslims. The leaders of the Hindu right garner support from amongst the poor whose wrath might otherwise be turned on the rich and powerful. This had devastating consequences in the last part of 1990 with the Ayodhya "pilgrimage", sparking a wave of terrible pogroms against the Muslim minority.

Muslims make up about one hundred million of India's eight hundred million population. In many areas, and in normal times, Hindus and Muslims coexist. But the background of imperialism's divide and rule policy, compounded by India's bourgeois parties playing on the religious divide, means that the right wing can rely on using religious prejudice. And in the background various Hindu fascist organisations stand ever ready to organise and lead the pogroms.

Impasse

Overall India's ruling class finds itself at an impasse. The traditional ruling coalition around the Congress Party has been weakened over several decades. A return to economic growth will be at the price of less autonomy for the national bourgeoisie. The newly enriched landed lobby is fighting for greater power. Even if growth continues it will remain partial and uneven. India's bourgeoisie has proved incapable of developing the nation in a manner which will meet the burning needs of the masses—food, shelter, land, jobs, freedom from caste and religious oppression. Increasingly it is unable to hold together the multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. On the evidence of the last few years, whichever party is in power by the end of this year, it will meet unrest with greater repression.

The theory and programme of permanent revolution clearly retains its validity for India. No section of the ruling class offers any answers to the problems created by combined and uneven development. The bourgeois-democratic tasks of solving the problems of land, literacy, caste, and national oppression have to be combined with the struggle to overthrow the capitalists and their state. Only the Indian working class, in alliance with the poor peasants, have the power to do this.■

"MIDNIGHT OF THE CENTURY"

Twilight of the RCP

The prospects of revolutionary change have receded into the dim and distant future, according to the RCP. ***Bridget O'Shea*** *explains why this bleak outlook is wrong.*

In November, the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) announced the end of their weekly newspaper *the next step*. The decision was taken "in line with the party's wider perspectives, in response to the dramatic changes in international and national politics in recent months." (*tns* 34, 2.11.90).

The justification for this was that the use of the "weekly paper . . . as organiser had become more and more restricted." On an international scale "the demise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has further discredited Marxism in all its forms, and indeed any notion of collective solutions to the problems of capitalist society."

The RCP claim that "the prospects for human progress are worse than at any time this century. Not even in the dark days of fascist triumphs did the prospects for social transformation and the creation of a new society appear so remote".

Apparently, "we confront a unique combination of circumstances, the legacy of a prolonged period of working class defeats. These began with the containment of the revolutionary upsurges of the early twenties and were consummated through the impact of Stalinism, fascism and war in the thirties and forties".

Collapse

This "legacy of defeats" has "reached its apogee with the final collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The result is an unprecedented convergence of working class depoliticisation and capitalist confidence".

Is this pessimism justified by the current objective situation? Is it true, as the RCP claims that it is "impossible to elaborate a coherent strategy for building the party through intervention in the world"?

No. As Trotsky wrote in 1935, any organisation which supplants "active intervention into the actual struggles of the masses of workers" with "propagandistic abstractions" will be "utterly incapable of preserving proportion either in ideas or actions".

The issues raised by the RCP go beyond any conjunctural problems. They go right to the heart of the Marxist method itself: have these defeats occurred because of a primarily subjective weakness of working class politics and organisation, or because objective circumstances were not ripe for working class victory?

Trotskyists believe that it is primarily the subjective weakness that has caused defeats: the "crisis of leadership" which Trotsky spoke about in the 1930s has been an ever-present feature of the class struggle since then.

While the RCP also emphasise the subjective weakness of the workers' movement and the left the problem is that the RCP's political method leaves it incapable of doing anything to remedy that subjective weakness. On the contrary, for the RCP the wrong ideas, bad leadership and inadequate organisations of the working class are part of objective reality which the party observes, analyses, criticises. But it does not grapple with these weaknesses in a living struggle within the workers' organisations.

The RCP is an organisation which, since its inception, has been incapable of seeing the need to take the existing class struggle as its starting point, and develop a programme to take that struggle forward to the seizure of power.

Instead it has consistently retreated from "the imperfect struggles of the working class" in favour of literary denunciation of reformism and vacuous calls for a "new leadership".

It is this method which has blinded the RCP to the contradictions of the present period.

When the RCP tell us that the working class is "deprived . . . of any existence as a definitive political force" we must ask them to consider just one of many historical examples.

In Brazil the emergence of a powerful new labour movement was signalled by the wave of strikes in 1978, the founding of the Workers Party in 1979, and the strike wave which culminated in the Sao Paulo general strike of 1983. The level of working class action was such that the military dictatorship was forced to beat a retreat from power. Attempts to force down wages in the subsequent period met further resistance, with a general strike in August 1987, a wave of steel strikes of November 1988 and a general strike involving 35 million workers in March 1989.

In the same period the Workers Party ultimately consolidated itself as a reformist party. Was this inevitable? No.

Does it mean that Marxism is of "no consequence to the flow of history" in Brazil today? No.

It is both possible and necessary for revolutionary Marxists to intervene in such a movement, despite its temporary lulls and defeats. And the potential for transforming such a movement into the struggle for power is enormous.

Countless other examples can be brought forward to refute the RCP's characterisation of the epoch as one of generalised reaction. From France in 1968 to Iran in 1979, and on numerous occasions since, the working class has entered the field of history as a player for the highest stakes.

Only the eyes of a passive propagandist could recognise the current situation as one of "unprecedented working class depoliticisation". Disorientation, misleadership, grasping at straws, desparately searching for answers; this is what characterises the mood of the working class vanguard from Eastern Europe to South Africa to Central America. Such a situation is not hopeless for revolutionaries. It offers endless possibilities for intervention. But intervention, into the living struggles of the working class, has never been the hallmark of the RCP.

> ***"the prospects for human progress are worse than at any time this century. Not even in the dark days of fascist triumphs did the prospects for social transformation and the creation of a new society appear so remote".***
> **(Living Marxism *December 1990*)**

The RCP's conception of the tasks of a revolutionary party has always been idealist. The RCP has always taken as its starting point the need to alter workers' ideas through passive propaganda, rather than through exemplary intervention in the existing struggles of the working class.

Instead of recognising that changes in consciousness take place in leaps as a result of struggles and the subjective role of revolutionaries in those struggles, they imagine that in order to struggle in the first place, the wrong ideas of the workers must be pushed out of their heads through literary explanation.

This is what leads them in Britain to claim that there is no class question at stake in the anti-Poll Tax fight and to proudly abstain from it. It is what leads them to claim that the workers' movement has ceased to exist in Britain, and that a new one is needed.

For a long time this outlook fuelled the RCP with the blind optimism of the sectarian. It set out to construct its own workers' movement single handed. It set up party fronts on every conceivable question, stood against Labour at the polls and proclaimed itself a "party" with only a few hundred members.

What has happened to disabuse the RCP of the idea that they could make progress in this way?

On the one hand, the collapse of Stalinism, on the other the total failure of the "mini-mass party" to grow.

It is ironic that the RCP is disorientated by the crisis of Stalinism. As an organisation the RCP could hardly be accused of having harboured illusions in Stalinism as a force for progress. Indeed, less than a year ago, the pages of *Living Marxism* were full of applause for the mass anti-Stalinist movements which had appeared across Eastern Europe:

"For revolutionary Marxists these events confirm the bankruptcy of the Stalinist distortion of Marxism and remove a major obstacle to building a genuine anti-capitalist alternative in the West." (Mike Freeman, April 1990)

So what went wrong?

When the Stalinist bubble burst so too did the illusion that these societies were a force for peace and progress. For every hardline Stalinist trade union bureaucrat there have always been ten woolly-minded middle class liberals prepared to believe in Stalinism's progressive role in "third world struggles" from Nicaragua to Southern Africa.

This was the audience the RCP consciously set out to address and recruit from. Not of course to bolster their prejudices but to challenge them. The problem is that the collapse of Stalinism, the negotiated sell out of many of the "third world" struggles, has massively disoriented this section of society and pushed it to the right.

A party whose activists assess the mood of the masses by selling glossy magazines in London's Oxford Street is bound to come away with the RCP's pessimistic impression. Now that the intelligentsia is becoming disinterested in left-wing politics there is little left for the RCP to do.

The RCP now admit their difficulties in recruiting. They write of the sudden "absence of a readily identifiable constituency" for their ideas. They throw up their hands in despair at the entire character of this epoch of wars and revolutions. This is the inevitable end product of their petit-bourgeois orientation: infection with the despair widely felt within their own milieu.

In *Living Marxism* (August 1990) Frank Richards quotes favourably Trotsky's statement that:

"Far more frequent than the victories are the defeats of the oppressed. Following each defeat comes a long period of reaction which throws revolutionists back into a state of cruel isolation."

But he neglects the conclusion Trotsky drew from the real and bloody defeats of the 1930s:

"It is necessary to carry on the work of educating and organising the proletarian vanguard with tenfold energy."

Strategy

Richards and the RCP draw the opposite conclusion:

"Until the working class begins once more to act and react to events as a social force in its own right, it will not be possible to make any significant advances in the spheres of revolutionary strategy and tactics."

In adopting this course, the RCP abandon any link with the Leninist conception of the vanguard party of the working class. The role of the party, for Lenin, was to bring scientific socialism into the working class struggle. For the RCP the working class must reconstitute itself before the party can intervene!

There is an alternative method of party building for small groups of revolutionaries which avoids repeated swings between these manic-depressive modes of operation. It is the Trotskyist method of the fighting propaganda group.

The role of a small nucleus of revolutionaries is to constitute itself as a fighting propaganda group. This involves outlining the practical consequences of a Marxist analysis for the working class in order to answer the critical question: what is to be done? It means joining in the struggles of the day with answers that really point in the direction of challenging the capitalists and their state.

The RCP never understood that and now it is paying the price.■



Brazilian metalworkers' strike 1980: "of no consequence to the flow of history" for the RCP

Peruvian elections

Dear Comrades,

In the last issue of the paper you published a very good article about the political situation in our country. However, we would like to correct some points. The situation in Peru moves on very quickly and already the government minimum wage that you cite (£78 a month) has been lowered to £25. This is in a context where the prices for food here are as high as in England and where we have 80% unemployment or under-employment!

Unfortunately, contrary to what you reported, the miners have not yet gone on general strike. The main reason for this is the cowardly actions of their leaders who had previously voted for Fujimori.

In the election we alone on the Peruvian left refused to call for a vote for any Presidential candidate since they were all bourgeois. We did, however, critically support the parliamentary candidates of the reformist workers' organisations in the United Left (IU).

In the second round we sent a letter to all the radical organisations to promote a movement for a blank vote and a general strike against the inevitable economic shock that was being prepared, but this was rejected.

We want to draw your readers' attention in particular to the criminal attitude of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) during this affair. The USFI in the late 1970s had about 5,000 members and was the third strongest electoral force.

They dissolved themselves completely into the reformist PUM and brought themselves to the disgraceful pass whereby their famous leader Hugo Blanco appeared on TV to argue against the campaign for a blank vote and in favour of a vote for Fujimori!

The Morenoite and Lambertist organisations also had a very opportunist line in relation to the IU. When their popular front election list was founded these groups wanted to stand within it. Although they were unable to stand on the IU list in the end, these fake "Trotskyists" never once denounced the IU Presidential candidate Henry Peace for being a bourgeois candidate.

These two centrist currents eventually signed up with a Maoist group on a programme that was clearly popular frontist. Yet their opportunism was only rewarded with a national vote of 0.07%. This "James Bond" figure compares badly with the 12% they received in an earlier election.

It is this kind of discrediting farce, which drags the reputation of Trotskyism through the mud, that Poder Obrero is fighting against.

In comradeship
Luis Robles (Poder Obrero)
Peru

✍
Write to:
Workers Power,
BCM 7750,
London WC1N 3XX
✍

Robinson's pro-imperialist record



Dear Comrades,

The article by Jim Larkin on Mary Robinson's campaign for the Irish presidency (Workers Power 137) carried a striking omission.

No mention was made of Robinson's support for extradition, or of her desire to "modify" Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution which declares the whole of the island to be the territory of the Republic. Nor did the article address Robinson's 1985 resignation from the Labour Party over the Anglo-Irish Agreement, in solidarity with the unions in the North.

Mary Robinson is pro-extradition and pro-partition. At a time when the British state is flattering the constitutional nationalists and sweet-talking the moderate face of Loyalism, while colluding with the Southern bourgeoisie in the extradition of Republican fighters like Dessie Ellis, such an oversight cannot go unchallenged.

The downfall of the Irish left has so often been its failure to seriously address the significance of the national question. In 1968/9 the constitutionalism of the left meant it was wrongfooted by the right in the Civil Rights milieu and let the Republican movement revitalize itself by drawing off the youth—youth who could have been won to a Trotskyist movement which put forward a strategy of permanent revolution in Ireland, linking workers north and south. We cannot afford the same mistake twice.

Yours in comradeship,
Nick Riley

Sunday shopping

Dear Comrades,

It seems that when it comes to helping out his friends in big business the Prime Minister is not one to let the law of the land stand in his way. In answer to a question in Parliament just before Christmas about the Sunday trading laws John Major stated that they were "bizarre". He expressed sympathy with the plight of the retail industry bosses who, facing declining sales in the present recession, felt bold enough to break the law to rescue their profits.

What a contrast to the sharp and repeated attacks by Tory and Labour front bench alike on those of us who feel the need to break the law and not pay our Poll Tax. Of course, it is a different kind of economic necessity that drives us to break the law!

Neil Kinnock is always denouncing Labour left and Scottish Nationalist MPs for inciting people to break the law by their stand on non-payment but we heard nothing from Kinnock against Major. It would be nice to think this was only because Neil believes in a Christmas truce in the class war but unfortunately for him the truce lasts 365 days a year.

It is said that the trade union officials in USDAW, the religious lobby and the retailers may well get together with the Home Office to come up with some proposed legislation to reform the present law. Naturally, no socialist can object to to shops being allowed to open on a Sunday; workers who have few days on which to shop should not be prevented from going by religious bigots.

The problem is that the right of some workers to shop collides with the right of shop workers not to work on Sunday. And when right meets right . . . the trade union bureaucracy steps in to get the worst possible deal for everyone!

Shop workers must not allow the USDAW officials to stitch up a rotten deal on wages and hours over their heads. The only way to safeguard their rights is to establish workers' control over the hours worked during the week, over overtime and unsocial hours rates of pay and days off in lieu, and even then only allowing Sunday working for those that want to do it.

Yours fraternally,
Alan Moore
Preston

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.

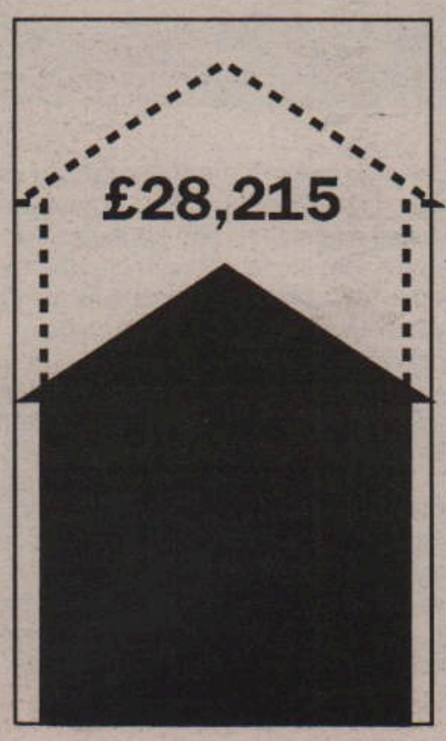
Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

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!

workers power

Fighting Fund



Due to the continued success of the fighting fund we have been able to buy vitally needed new technology for use in the writing and lay up of *Workers Power*. Thanks to a South London reader who sent us £150 this month.■

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Issue number 138 January 1991

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British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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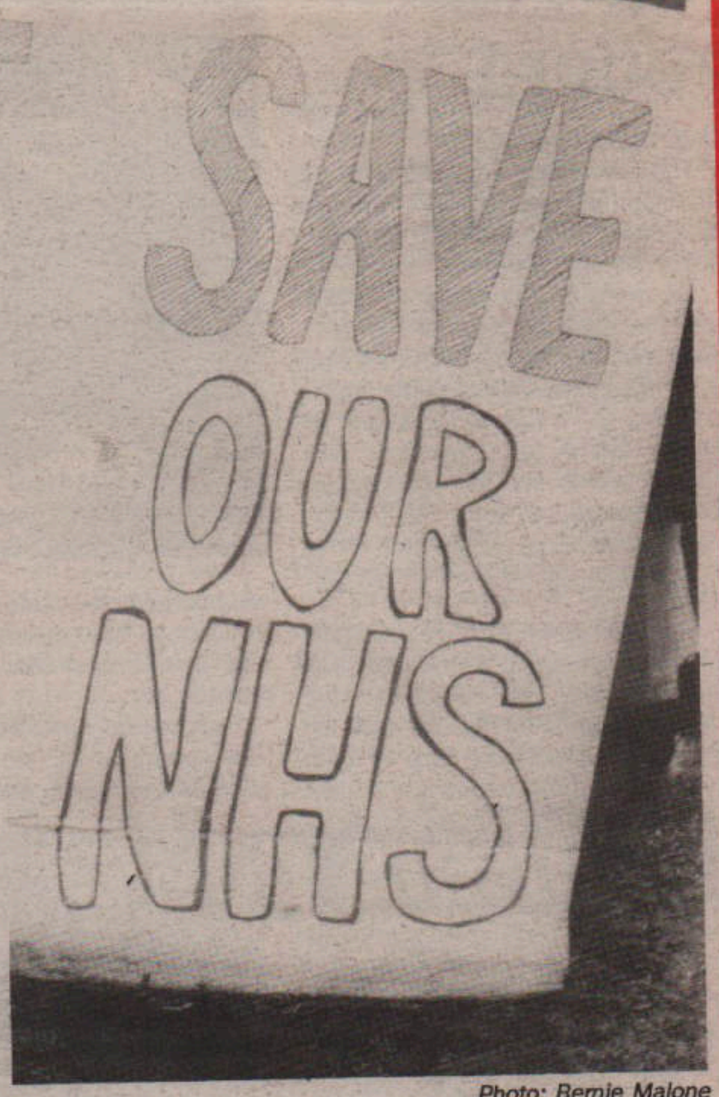


Photo: Bernie Malone

WHILE 79 year old Julie Branch lay dying on a hospital trolley for nine hours at Kings College Hospital in London, "caring" Prime Minister John Major was telling Parliament about his dream of a "society of opportunity where people can better themselves and their families".

Julie Branch died because Kings College Hospital was in the middle of a £5.5 million "savings programme" and had cut 116 beds. Nationally 4,500 beds have been closed to save money this winter as health authorities try to meet the government target of breaking even before the implementation of the White Paper reforms in April.

Working class people are far from being able to better themselves and their families. Recent figures show that in Tory Britain the health gap between rich and poor is widening.

More

Unskilled men are one and a half times more likely to have a long-standing illness than professional peoples. 28% of unskilled men and 32% of unskilled women had illnesses which limited their lifestyles, whilst only 10% of professional men and 15% of prefessional women had such illnesses.

Waiting lists have escalated to just under one million, the highest since March 1979, with a 4.3% increase in the last six months alone. Major, who claims to "unfailingly use the NHS", heads a government which has told health authorities to put reducing waiting lists second to ensuring the smooth transition to a marketised NHS.

Health Minister William Waldegrave says there is no money available to ease the current crisis in the NHS. Asked what he thought of the fact that people were having to wait longer for hospital admissions he said that it was "unfortunate".

The present acute shortage of resources in the NHS is directly related to the implementation of the White Paper in April.

Health Authorities have been told to break even by April so that the new market mechanisms do not inherit any debts. Add this to the long term chronic underfunding of the service and you get hospitals cancelling out-patient clinics, closing to "non-urgent" admissions and leaving thousands of jobs vacant.

But the demand for book balancing by April will not be followed by the swift recovery of the new "business-style" NHS. Far from it. The usually conservative *British Medical Journal* asks the question "What hope have the new reforms of working? . . . the short answer is none".

Under the new system health care services will be bought and sold on the "internal market" with the aim of reducing costs through competition. District Health Authorities (DHAs) will be responsible for purchasing health care for the local community. They will enter into contracts with the providers of the services, hospitals in their own and other districts, opted-out "self-governing" hospitals and the private sector.

Market

As part of overseeing the transition to a health care business which operates on market principles, the structure and composition of DHAs has been changed.

The new authorities are smaller and less accountable. Local authority and trade union representatives have been removed. The majority of non-executive members are industrialists, lawyers or accountants. Where local councillors have been appointed, three fifths are Tories. The overwhelming majority of the new chairs of the 190 English DHAs are from industry and have political links with the Conservative Party.

Rhetoric

For all the government's rhetoric about "putting patients first", the NHS has been given the most anti-working class management possible!

A recent survey carried out by Queen Mary and Westfield Colleges, London, forsees many inner-city health authorities suffering budget cuts of up to 70%.

Since 1979, 468 hospitals have closed, and 16% of hospital beds have been lost. According to Dr Robin Vicary, a London hospital medical executive:

"even a minor flu epidemic could leave people just going around in ambulances, desperately trying to find a bed to lie in".

Unfortunately they could be facing more than a flu epidemic. A war in the Gulf will place massive demands on the already overstretched service. Military planners have told health authorities to prepare for a "worst case" scenario of 20 planeloads of casualties being received in the UK each day. Family doctors are being warned to be ready for their patients to be discharged from hospital even though they may be ill, to free beds for military casualties.

Depend

The understaffed hospitals on which we depend are testament to eleven years of Tory rule—we can afford no more!

Health workers should launch a fight for strike action against threatened cuts in pay and increased hours now. They should link this to a fight against cuts in service provision, and against the White Paper itself.

NHS militants should lead an offensive battle for full funding of the NHS, and a massive programme of public spending to re-open hospitals and build more as need demands.

We must not pay with our health and lives for the bosses' crisis.■