



**SOCIALIST
OUTLOOK**

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A socialist response to

The green challenge

INSIDE

★ 50 years of the Fourth International ★ Chile
★ Labour Party Conference ★ Algeria



Workers protest against Pinochet

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Correction

Turning to the unions?

EVERY YEAR after Labour Party conference the left experiences a surge of renewed interest in the unions. After Blackpool we can safely predict yet another round of debate over whether and how the block vote should be reformed and its use democratised. The issue is important: however, if past form is anything to go by, interest will fade as the debate goes on, and by next year's trade union conference season the left will find itself once more on the defensive, seeking to combat a much more developed attack.

The right wing have their own axe to grind. Kinnock's antipathy to the block vote system, and the willingness of arch new-realist GMB leader John Edmonds to see its influence curbed have nothing to do with any desire for democratisation: neither Kinnock nor Edmonds has been averse to the systematic use by male-dominated unions of block votes to crush the demands of Labour's women's section. But now they see the block vote as an expression of the collective, class politics of the working class – and as such an electoral embarrassment. They much prefer the politics of the passive individual which 'new realism' has borrowed wholesale from Thatcher.

Of course we must not ignore the Labour Party dimension of the trade union struggle: the line-up of block votes prior to Blackpool made not only the leadership election but the endorsement of the policy review documents a formality. Only the defiance of Transport and General Workers Union leader Ron Todd – under seige from a Hammondite right wing inside his own union, and desperately seeking to buttress himself with left wing support – offered any respite from the new realist juggernaut.

While the Tory press kept querying whether Todd's stand on unilateralism represented his members' views, there is no reason to believe that the block votes cast by hard right union chiefs are necessarily representative of *their* rank and file. The size of the fringe meetings that were organised at this year's union conferences by the Benn-Heffer campaign, and the support for the campaign among stewards and union militants showed as usual much greater support in the unions than the minuscule union vote they attracted in the leadership election. *Labour Briefing's* analysis of the voting showed some unions voting 40 per cent for Benn, yet casting block votes for Kinnock.

However this pool of largely untapped support also tells its own story about the way left activists tend to approach the trade unions: for many, the unions are seen primarily in terms of their block votes at Labour conference or as a factor in Constituency Labour Party and other internal Party battles.

This approach is dangerously mistaken. The unions represent much more than block votes: they are the basic form of organisation of the working class at workplace level. They must do much more than decide Labour policy on unilateralism once a year: they must lead struggles over jobs, pay, and health and safety. And for the left to strengthen its hand inside the unions, we must be identified with these bread and butter issues as well as the jam of conference resolutions and policy debates.

There is a continual overlap of issues – all of which point to the need for the left to become more systematically involved in trade union struggles. The same union bureaucrats who stitched up the

leadership election and policy review votes also conspired to isolate and ensure defeat for the miners in 1984-5 and the News International printworkers: they are even now isolating and betraying the P&O seafarers. Tom Sawyer and the leadership of the National Union of Public Employees are not only right wing in the Labour Party, but doggedly opposed to strike action to fight cuts or privatisation in the NHS or local government.

Many campaigning issues taken up by the left in the Labour Party can also be given real teeth in the unions. Obvious examples include taking up the plight of part-time workers, the fight against low pay, for women's rights at work, and supporting struggles of black workers. Some unions already offer opportunities for self-organisation of black workers and women. Others, like the GMB and TGWU made only token gestures.

While the existing union leaderships consistently limit, isolate and sabotage the disputes which continue to erupt, there has been a small but significant initiative by left wingers who have learned the hard way that they must fight for an alternative approach. The Solidarity Network, drawing together militants from the miners' strike, the Silentnight strike, the printworkers' strike and other support movements, was launched a year ago at a conference in Leeds. Its small beginnings accurately reflected the levels of awareness on the left of the need to organise such work and create a systematic fightback in the unions which can in turn offer practical support and leadership to new sections of workers as they become involved in strike action. The Network has made important links with the Socialist Conference movement and done useful solidarity work with P&O and other disputes, and is to hold a further conference on November 5.

There are other important beginnings of a fightback, with active, if small, broad lefts in many unions committed to challenge the present bureaucratic leaderships.

Such trade union work does not begin or end with Labour Party issues: indeed there are many important battles to be waged in unions (NUT, NALGO, civil service unions) that are not affiliated to the Labour Party – but which are also helping to reinforce the new realists through the TUC.

Serious trade union work is a tough fight, battling to organise the left to oppose the bureaucracy, giving attention to the day to day detail of workplaces, and becoming involved in often less than glamorous disputes, as well as close contact with militants newly emerging into struggle.

But without such a fight at the base of the unions and the building of a political opposition to the new realists at the top, workers are not going to be mobilised to break the right wing grip on the union structures – including the block vote. There is a real danger under these conditions that socialism can be reduced to empty propaganda – and that all the good intentions of following through Labour's conference by a renewed fight in the unions could come to nothing.

Let's take up the debate on the block vote – but from a position of strengthened involvement in the unions at every level: that's one angle of attack Kinnock & Co. will not expect from the left!

EETPU

Right wing to Hammond's rescue

HELP is at hand for leaders of the electricians' union (EETPU) fighting to retain their membership after the union's expulsion from the TUC.

Leaders of the builders' union (UCATT) and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) have said that they recognise the EETPU as a bona-fide trade union and will not recruit its members or see its representatives removed from trade union bodies.

Ford electricians who have decided to leave the EETPU and join the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union (MSF) have received a letter from the EETPU warning them that their action will amount to support to a new hard left grouping – the Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union (EPIU) – which is now established as a union and is recruiting members.

Of MSF the letter says: 'The motivation to get you to join the MSF is purely political – it is the most left-wing union your repre-

sentatives could find'. A similar letter has been sent to electricians working for Manchester city council who have also said they will leave the union.

Militant electricians should stick to their guns. The most effective way to destroy EETPU leader Eric Hammond's credibility is to leave his union.

Despite its latest display of 'independence' in balloting over strike action on the GCHQ issue, the EETPU is a hardened business union. The Hammond leadership have set out over a long period to educate the membership in these principles. The recent ballot decision on defiance of the TUC and risking expulsion showed that they have had some success. At the same time the Hammond leadership have crushed any opposition to this process and stripped the EETPU of any last vestiges of democratic structures. If the EETPU was bad before that ballot, it will be much worse after it.

The actions of Hammond and Co. at Wapping have still not been matched by any other union: join-

ing together with employers to break other unions; replacing printers with electricians; using their own offices to recruit scabs for Murdoch, and using their own training centre to train scabs to do the jobs of strikers. The organisation they have created is now only comparable with scab organisations like the UDM or the new 'union' formed by the scabs at P&O.

We should not treat such organisations as we would treat a legitimate but right-wing trade union. In a right-wing trade union we would fight from the inside, but with the business unions our aim should be to break them as soon as possible. The whole of the left has called, with some success, for miners to leave the UDM and join a proper union – and we should have the same position with the EETPU.

Electricians can join either the appropriate union with negotiating rights in the industry where they work – MSF or the GMB or TGWU – or the EPIU. The

problem the EPIU has is getting recognition from employers, most of whom will be loyal to Hammond, although the new union is seeking recognition from a number of local authorities. One solution is joint membership of a union with negotiating rights as well as the EPIU.

Similar principles should be followed on trades councils and other local bodies. It is illogical to support the expulsion of the EETPU from the TUC and urge its expulsion from the Labour Party if it is to be recognised as a legitimate union at local level. EETPU delegates should be excluded from Trades Councils, District Committees of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, shop stewards' committees and joint negotiations with employers.

Where EPIU branches, or even electricians in holding sections of other unions, are able to send delegates they should be accepted and recognised.

Alan Thornett

Poll Tax

Build the Newcastle conference

DAVID Blunkett's reply to the debate on the Poll tax at Labour party conference showed the depths to which the Kinnockites are prepared to sink to be seen as a respectable party of government.

He argued that we wanted the poll tax to be implemented so that the Tories would be so unpopular that Labour would be elected. He showed his complete contempt not only for those in Scotland being fined at this moment for refusing to register, but for the thousands upon thousands who will have no choice other than non-payment. When the leadership argue that people will be led into poverty and debt though resistance to the tax, they show their ignorance of

the reality facing millions under third term Thatcherism.

The London week of action against the Poll tax, which greeted Parliament's return, was led off by a successful demonstration in South London. This is just one of many initiatives across England and Wales which demonstrates that when the left wakes up to the centrality of this issue there is a good deal of potential support which can be mobilised.

The conference called by Chesterfield in Newcastle on December 10th can provide a much needed forum to generalise the lessons of the fight in Scotland, to bring together activists working around the campaign and to publicise the impact of this vicious attack on the working class.

It is therefore unfortunate that some forces within Poll Tax groups are not responding positively to this event. The Communist Party in particular, are withholding support because the meeting has been called by the Socialist Conference. They have yet to explain what they disagree with in the statement issued to obtain sponsorship. But the mere use of the word 'socialist' makes their popular-frontist hackles rise.

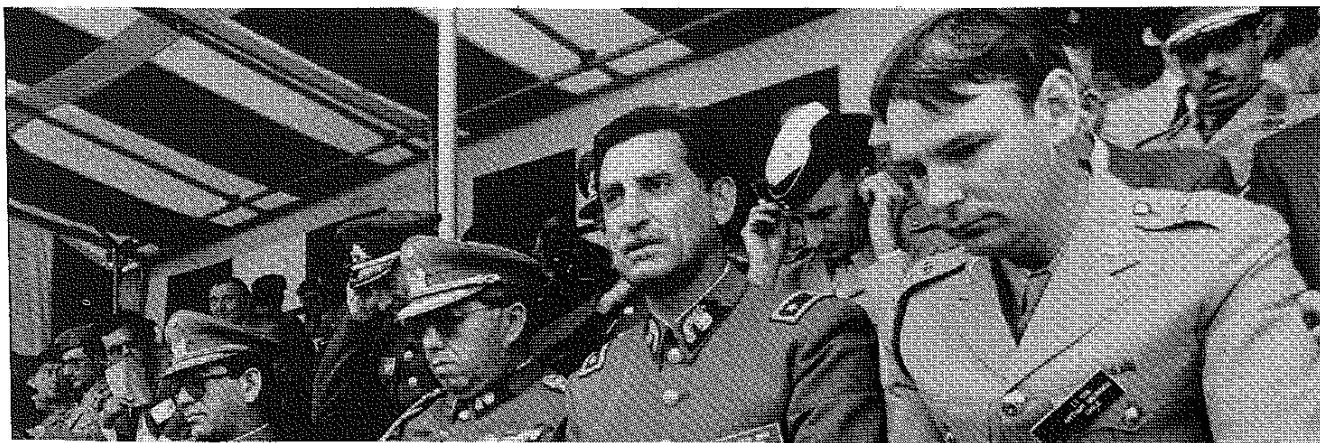
In this context it is also problematic that another conference is being organised in Oxford on Nov 26th. Many activists have argued that this will result in a fragmented movement, with the north prioritising Newcastle and the south, Oxford. Nor do we believe that the crucial job at the

minute is to structure the existing poll tax organisations; the job of building such groups through actions which will publicise the effects of the tax is much more of a priority.

The stakes are too high to let sectarianism or organisational ineptitude weaken our resistance. The Newcastle conference must be built and from it a mass demonstration, with official labour movement support called for April.

Terry Conway

★ Conference ★
<i>'Build the opposition to the Poll Tax'</i>
Newcastle Medical School December 10, 11am-6pm



Chilean Generals view British military hardware

C. GUARITA/REFLEX

Chile

What next after the celebrations?

A ROAR of approval went up around the world as the news came out that General Pinochet had lost the plebiscite in Chile on October 5.

All but the most hardened reactionary or Thatcherite gave a cheer. You can imagine the scene in Santiago as people danced through the night: a serious cause for celebration.

The breadth of support for the celebrations in Britain was as wide as it was in Chile. It was a rare occasion in the recent Labour Party conference where everyone could applaud together with equal feeling. But will the dictatorship actually fall? Does the unity of the 'vote no' campaign have any future?

The vote against the bloodstained dictator represented a real blow against the right wing regime, possibly a fatal one; but only the future will tell. There is everything to play for, and the actions of all sides count. The dictatorship has many other lines of defence following their defeat in the plebiscite.

The 1980 'constitution of liberty' still remains in place, a fraudulent 'constitution' that legitimises the totally arbitrary use of executive power. Article Eight, prohibiting the establishment of marxist or communist parties or any organisations 'based on class

warfare' remains in force.

Pinochet himself still has 18 months in power under the terms of the plebiscite even *after* the 'no' vote; and if that is not enough, he is commander-in-chief of the armed forces for life: hardly encouraging factors in the fight to restore democracy, let alone the fight for socialism.

The good signs are that the enemy are already beginning to squabble among themselves. The right wing's main man is down, so the fight is on for a successor, a new right wing president.

The chiefs of the national police and both the navy and the airforce have made comments distancing themselves from Pinochet, though navy chief Merino is seen if anything as even more of a fanatical anti-communist than Pinochet. Now he is casting doubt on whether Pinochet will stay the full 18 months, while airforce chief Mattei has talked of possible negotiations with the opposition. They are looking for alternative ways to maintain their power, and their disagreements on how to do this, and conflicting personal ambitions may well work to the advantage of the Chilean workers and peasants.

On the other hand, although the wide diversity of those campaigning for a 'no' vote helped produce a successful result, it might also

work in favour of the regime, which still won 43 per cent of the vote. Many from the Christian Democratic party argued that the boat should not be rocked in the period leading up to the plebiscite, and that there should be no mass protests or demonstrations against the regime.

These people were wrong; it was precisely the mass pressure that forced the regime to take the risky step of going for a vote. Only such pressure can lead towards a real change in the politics of government and a dismantling of the military state. That is, of course, not what the Christian Democrats are aiming at.

The Christian Democrats played a key role in Pinochet's overthrow of Salvador Allende's popular front government in 1973, and now see themselves as natural successors to the dictatorship that they helped set up. They think it is time for a 'clean' change of image for the government, while retaining the same content. They support the 1980 constitution.

They see themselves as able to reach an agreement with the regime, since they would guarantee immunity for those responsible for the torture and murder of so many Chileans. This would kill stone dead any hopes of real change following the plebiscite.

The 16 parties which par-

ticipated in the 'no' campaign managed to achieve a rare degree of unity around their limited but significant aim. On the left as well there have been less divisions and in-fighting than has been prevalent in recent years.

The Socialist Party, MAPU, the Communists and the MIR agreed that the plebiscite is only part of a greater campaign which must involve mass mobilisations against the regime as a whole. There must be a clean break from the regime and no negotiations with it, though both Socialist Party leader Ricardo Lagos and the Communist Party had only recently argued for negotiations or 'dialogue' with the dictatorship.

The Communist Party shifted its line substantially to the left as the campaign went on, adopting the call for a mass movement to create conditions for a new provisional government.

Ricardo Lagos has emerged from the events as the leading figure among the left organisations, though he believes Chileans are not yet ready to vote again for a Socialist president, and is reportedly 'saving himself' for an electoral bid in the 1990s. We will undoubtedly be hearing a lot about him in reports on Chile in the coming year or so.

Gareth Mostyn



What's happened to Jesse Jackson?

US Elections

The bosses' each-way bet

ABOUT 450 years ago, John Heywood wrote a comedy called 'The Four P's'. The play's title referred to four liars and scoundrels, each of whom practiced a trade beginning with the letter 'P'.

Now 'The Four P's' have returned. Each one of the modern 'P's' is a liar, a scoundrel and – a Proletarian!

That's right! The Fab Four [presidential candidates] rave about their proletarian roots. Michael Dukakis (the unions' favourite) sings ballads to his immigrant father, teenage love, grocery shopping, and mowing the lawn on a summer's day. George Bush salivates over pork rinds and country music.

Bush recalls how he packed his two kids and 'everything we had' into the family Studebaker and headed west for the Texas plains. There, he says, they 'lived the dream – Little League, you know, football on Friday night'. Very touching.

Even Dan Quayle and Lloyd Bentsen have carried their blue-collar rhetoric to wherever workers congregate – labour meetings, county fairs, and union picnics. Speaking before the United Food and Commercial Workers convention, Bentsen drewled that the theme of his campaign was 'a good job and decent wages'.

The Democrats charge that the Republican administration has 'treated the working men and women of America with disdain'. But the Republicans are not to be undone. In their party platform, they profess that 'the bosses of the Democratic Party have thrown in the towel and abandoned the American worker'.

As Jimmy Durante said: 'Everybody wants to get in on the act!' Each one of our 'Four P's' wants to be the friend of the worker. But, given their record, the Republicans will find it tough making friends.

Under the recent administrations of both Republicans and Democrats, poverty has increased. In 1973, eleven per cent of the population lived under the poverty line. Now poverty is officially around fifteen per cent. Over thirty million people are listed as 'Poor' – another dreaded 'P' word.

At this point another kind of capital 'P' comes to mind. Lest any X-rated words leap out at you, let me tell you what 'P' really stands for.

Each one of our 'Four P's' is a *Plutocrat*. Rather than describing a Mickey Mouse character, a plutocrat is defined by the dictionary as 'a member of a wealthy ruling class'. Most of us will probably never have the opportunity to shake the hand of a plutocrat in our lives, even if we

would wish to. We just don't move in the same circles.

Generally, what a plutocrat has, that we seem to lack, is money. *Newsweek*, in its August 29 issue, lists the assets of the presidential hopefuls. Spendthrift Dukakis seems to be the poor man of the lot. He is only 'worth' \$464,365, but stands to inherit another \$1 million after his mom's death.

It appears, furthermore, that George Bush – after packing his kids into the old Studebaker – went on to earn a bundle in the Texas oilfields. He is worth \$2.6 million, according to *Newsweek*.

When fellow Texan Lloyd Bentsen entered politics, he stepped down from the corporate boards of Lockheed, Continental Oil and several other banks and corporations. But he happily still retains his ranch, a farm, a \$1 million town house, and investments for a total of at least \$10 million in assets.

Meanwhile J. Danforth Quayle hangs in with \$50 million to his name – though Quayle's family has assets of from \$600 million to over \$1 billion, according to most accounts.

Thus our 'Four P's' rank within the wealthiest 0.1 per cent of the population. This small sector, not coincidentally, owns close to thirty per cent of all privately owned wealth in the USA.

Of course none of the candidates, with the possible excep-

tion of Quayle, is quite in the category of the Mellons, Morgans and Rockefellers – families that control fortunes equal to the assets of many countries. But as members of the same economic class, the candidates' interests are intimately linked with those of the top leaders of American capitalism.

A review of the hefty contributions that the capitalist class makes to the political campaigns of the Democratic Party may raise suspicions that the party's agenda does not exactly coincide with the theme of 'a good job and good wages' for working people.

Lloyd Bentsen's contributors, for example, include airline tycoon and union-buster Frank Lorenzo, ultra-right tabloid owner and fellow union-buster Rupert Murdoch, chicken magnate Frank Purdue (employer of thousands of underpaid black women), and corporation buyout artist Henry Kravis – *who is also a member of George Bush's national finance committee!*

Who pays for such politics – as usual? As if you couldn't guess!

Now I know the word that best describes the four candidates. It's *Pickpocket*.

Michael Schreiber
(reprinted from *Socialist Action* (US), September 1988)



'Shut up, I'm talking!'

Algeria

Chadli's headache

THE SUDDEN explosion of popular anger in the streets of Algerian cities has shaken the Algerian ruling autocracy out its roots. For the last 26 years, basking in the glory of the one-million martyrs of the Algerian revolution, the ruling FLN has steered with an iron fist the young republic towards a 'brave new world' - a socialism 'à l'algérienne' which dazzled a whole generation of muddle-headed western revolutionaries into thinking that it was 1917 all over again!

A quarter of a century later, the FLN is still hanging on to power although its 'socialism' is in deep trouble. The 'socialism' miracle was nothing but a mirage on paper.

Vast prestige projects, particularly in steel and petrochemicals, engulfed massive investments but remain semi-paralysed by the huge bloated state bureaucracy. Agriculture, based on state farms established in the richest farmlands expropriated from the French colonies can barely deliver one third of the country's needs. Ninety-five per cent of the country's income comes from oil revenue, and with the drop in price, Algeria not only lost 40 per cent of its state revenue but had no alternative but to start building up a huge foreign debt. With the economy in tatters, the only viable sector - the parallel market - flourishes for the benefit of the racketeering nomenklatura tied to the state bureaucracy and the ruling party. Symptoms of

economies in ruin are always the same: inflation, shortage of food, corruption, soaring unemployment that sooner or later lead to social tensions and explosions.

It is no surprise that President Chadli's panacea was to reverse gear and Thatcherise the economy: austerity, cuts and privatisation of the huge state sector. For the first time since the revolution, state enterprises instructed to make profits have started making redundancies. Even the symbol of the collectivist state - the Ministry of Planning - was abolished in November 1987.

Chadli began his 'reforms' quietly in 1986 when he put his strategic vision, the 'national charter', to a referendum which he won overwhelmingly. To put his charter into motion, Chadli set his eyes in winning the support of the FLN congress taking place this December which not only decides the main economic orientations for the next five years but also appoints its general secretary to be the single candidate to the next presidential election in early 1989.

Chadli saw himself as the only contender for another term of office with complete free rein on the main strategic choices. He took no notice of the Algerian working class which he knew was demoralised by 26 years of the political desert and saddled with an amorphous state trade union - the UGTA - whose only role was to prevent workers from acting to defend their interests. This time, however, workers were for the first time confronted with redundancies, wage freeze and a sharp fall

in their standard of living. Sections of the FLN, with their sympathising wing in the UGTA, who are hostile to Chadli's liberalisation plans were keen to see some unrest developing, but only sufficient to put them into a better bargaining position. They quickly gave support and encouraged the first wave of strikes by car workers at the Ruiba-Reghaia heavy vehicle factory (Berliet). Having made their point, they started ushering car-workers back to work when disaster struck. Post-office workers came out on October 2nd and called for a general strike. Two days later, the first skirmishes between unemployed and student youth and the police transformed the situation. Soon the rebellion embraced the whole country. Street riots spread to Blida, Mostaganem, Oran, Constantine and even Annaba - Chadli's home town.

Whether emulating the less recent bread riots in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, or the *intifada* in Palestine, Algerian youth vented their anger on every symbol of opulence and state corruption. Luxury shops, town halls, police stations, government offices, state supermarkets - Galleries Algérienne, Souk al Fallah - Mouhafdahs (FLN district offices) went up in smoke. Chadli knew that he had to stop this from becoming a general conflagration and he ordered the army to nip it in the bud. Riot police, gendarmerie, paratroopers, tanks, and helicopter gunships confronted the demonstrators leaving a trail of dead and wounded. Few Algerians

believed their people's army capable of such a ruthless blood-bath.

Having quashed the revolt, Chadli addressed the nation and proposed constitutional reforms as if they were a concession. His real agenda was to defuse the situation and start reoccupying political positions from his adversaries. Soon after his speech, thousands of civil rights activists, trade unionists, and politicians were rounded up and will be tried as rioting hooligans. At the same time, state supermarkets were flooded with luxury goods and food never seen on shelves for several years.

To what extent the popular explosion has shifted the balance of forces before the next FLN congress remain to be seen. What is certain is the sudden confident mobilisation of the working class which belied all those who have denied that it could play a role anymore in the political life of the country.

What is also certain is that the crisis of a state capitalist class, perhaps the most developed in the Arab world, will open a new chapter in the demise of Arab nationalism. Whether Chadli survives with the help of a much more naked military dictatorship and/or in alliance with the fundamentalists, will not resolve the long term problem of a decaying state capitalism.

Only the Algerian working class can resolve them. For this, an Algerian Solidarnosc is still to be built.

Jim Boumelha



British nurses: abandoned by union leaderships

British nurses need French lessons!

FRENCH nurses, inspired by the example of the British nurses' strikes earlier this year, are now showing British health workers how it should be done.

While Tory health secretary Kenneth Clarke was still giving unions the run-around on the funding and implementation of last spring's pay award and regrading exercise, 240,000 French nurses were hitting the streets in a massive one-day strike on September 29.

And as leaders of COHSE and NUPE were publicly snubbed and refused even a meeting with Clarke to discuss unresolved grading issues – and the government insisted gradings would be unilaterally imposed on nursing staff – French nurses stepped up the pressure with a huge 100,000-strong national demonstration and a programme of rolling 24-hour strikes.

One obvious difference is that while the British nurses who have taken action are largely organised in unions (mostly the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), with the National Union of Public Employees

(NUPE) more reluctant to sanction strikes), only five per cent of French nurses are unionised. Their mushrooming strike movement has not therefore had to contend with indifference or outright sabotage from national union officials, and has been led instead by an unofficial nurses' coordinating committee including trotskysts from the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire.

This rank and file body began meeting in Paris to formulate pay demands last April, and was at first attended by 100 nurses from 22 hospitals. By mid-September it had grown to 500 nurses from 108 Paris hospitals and 12 in the provinces.

Such has been the success of this coordination in expressing the anger of nurses at their low wages and worsening conditions that they have even forced the reluctant bureaucrats of the Communist Party-dominated CGT union confederation into action, creating links with other groups of public sector workers pursuing their own pay demands against the Rocard government.

This pattern – partly reflecting

the extremely low level of union organisation in France – is very different from events in Britain, where the January and February explosion of militancy has been ground down by months of inaction and indecision from national officials. The Tory government's shrewdly 'generous' pay award with its intricate regrading proposals has also bogged down many activists for months on end.

The result has been the irony of French nurses marching under the slogan 'British nurses beat Thatcher, we can beat Rocard', while British nurses themselves have in many areas run into stonewalling managers refusing to concede them the grading (and therefore the pay) to which they are entitled.

Kenneth Clarke's well-trumpeted concession of an extra £138m towards funding the nurses' pay award still leaves a gap of at least £60m, on top of shortfalls on other pay settlements in the NHS, and a widening gap caused by rising inflation. The National Association of Health Authorities has warned that 94 per cent of health districts are planning

cutbacks to balance their books: this will make them even more stubborn in resisting union appeals over grading claims.

However, it now seems that COSHE's key base of psychiatric nurses are emerging on the scene, and may push the unions into a national 'work to grading' policy, beginning with some large London Hospitals.

Meanwhile, flummoxed by Clarke's tactics, union leaders have again handed the initiative back to the anti-strike Royal College of Nursing, making no call for industrial action (either strikes or 'work to grading') to enforce the pay deal and prevent further attacks.

As a new winter of crisis approaches, the lack of a rank and file movement remotely comparable to the French nurses' movement underlines the real problem – a resounding silence from national leaders and a feeling of local isolation. Socialists in health unions and elsewhere should be redoubling their efforts to break this isolation and build support for a new round of struggle.

Harry Sloan



The market leaves thousands in sub-standards hostels.

A. MOORE/REFLEX

The Housing Act: The Tories go to market

THE TORIES plan to do away with council housing. The timescale is ten years and there are still four and a half million council homes left to go. The successful 'right to buy' policy of Thatcher's first term has already put them a fifth of the way there; but it is running out of steam.

The Housing Act which will become law next month aims to take the Tories nearer their goal by establishing a free market in rented housing. The mechanisms for doing this contained in the Act are four fold:

- decontrolling rents to produce 'market rents'.
- creating new, less secure tenancies.
- imposing Housing Action Trusts (HATs) which will compulsorily purchase certain estates, do them up, and sell them off to private landlords.
- catalysing the privatisation of estates (the misnamed 'tenants' choice proposal) by a combination of undemocratic procedures, squeezing council spending options and tax enticements to

prospective landlords.

In sum, the act is a developer's charter. But it is not without contradictions. While the Tories will certainly be able to continue undermining local authority housing by forcing changes in its financing which will cause rents to double, it is not clear yet whether developers will risk capital on a large scale on buying council estates who can't afford the rents. Simply, there's more money to be made elsewhere – not least, while the boom lasts, in buying homes for owner-occupation. So far, the Tories won't commit themselves to paying housing benefit at whatever level is demanded by the landlord or 'market'. On the contrary, they're committed to paying less.

One obvious consequence of all this will be a dramatic increase in homelessness. Already there are a quarter of a million people officially classed as homeless (double the 1979 figure) and this doesn't include many categories of people (youth, single people and so on) with nowhere to call home. You will see the numbers will double but the figures will halve as the Tories will almost certainly intro-

duce legislation to redefine homelessness. Just as 16-18 year olds are no longer unemployed, anyone not actually sleeping under the arches of Charing Cross will be deemed to be housed.

And overturning the Homeless Persons Act is not the only thing in the pipeline. Expect further bills soon to change the financing of council housing.

Can a fightback be built? Already the tenants movement is undergoing a significant revival. Meetings in the six areas due for the first HATs have drawn thousands of anxious tenants opposed to the private sector. Certainly at estate level some victories will be chalked up. The onus is on the Labour Party, local authority trade unions and Labour councils to co-ordinate these struggles and lead an attack on the government's policy. Is it too late to point out that a sustained campaign of non-implementation of the poll-tax would be the best basis on which to build it?

Now that barbarism has become an obvious basic plank of government policy it is time for Labour's

leadership to act. Yet, bedazzled by the apparent success of the Tories, the Labour Party has frozen in the middle of the road like a small animal transfixed by the headlights of the Tory juggernaut.

Rather than wait to be run over a socialist policy for housing needs to be developed. The starting point for such a policy is the reform of the owner occupied sector – now 65 per cent of all homes in Britain. Ending mortgage interest tax relief, imposing a capital gains tax on sales and taking second homes into public ownership would slow things down. That should be followed by the nationalisation of the land to make rational planning possible. In addition there is an obvious immediate need for an emergency building programme to house the homeless, cater for new household formations, and to replace the crumbling Victorian terraces against which DIY enthusiasts wage their weekend losing battles. The time to start it is now.

Mick Cattlin

Wanted:

A new force in student politics

THE 'Beat the Blues' demonstration called outside Tory party conference by Sussex area National Union of Students (NUS) against student loans and voluntary membership of NUS drew 3000 students.

It was not supported by the Kincockite leadership who claimed that it was a general anti-Tory mobilisation, rather than one focusing on education policies.

Yet again they showed their determination to put their support for political pluralism above the need to defend the interests of students. *The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP)*, numerically the largest left force within NUS also failed to mobilise seriously, sending only their comrades from those

colleges already supporting the action. *Socialist Organiser* and their pressure group Socialist Students in NOLS (SSiN), proved by their poor turnout once again their inability to be anything more than an influential pressure group.

The largest contingent on the demonstration was composed of students from Coventry Poly, where over 1000 students living in poly accommodation are currently on rent strike.

First year students arriving at the poly were forced to sign contracts and pay money for rooms that they had never seen before. Some students are paying as much as £36.50 per week for breakfast and tea (both inedible and a ten minute walk away!) and a very damp room. This can be compared to the government's estimate of

£14.60 for rent contained in the grant.

Rooms had not been cleaned over the summer, there are asbestos doors, wiring is 30 years out of date, and laundrettes have machines which last functioned over four years ago. People with children, including single parents, are in halls that are five miles from the Poly and therefore being isolated from student life.

At the same time the Poly has improved the customer side of the refectory, so that it now looks nice for conference lunches but the food for students remains tragically poor and the standards in the kitchen appallingly low.

The conference called by the left caucus at Manchester Polytechnic on November 26th gives an opportunity to build on

the sort of anger and militancy developing in Coventry and elsewhere and to begin to construct an alternative leadership in the NUS.

It is necessary to build a left that answers the day-to-day questions of grants and education cuts but which also fully supports the right of self-organisation for women, black people and lesbians and gay men and which opposes imperialism in Ireland and Palestine.

The Manchester conference must be the start of such a new and necessary challenge to the Kincockites.

Carl Taylor

★ Conference ★
'For a New Left in NOLS and the NUS
November 26th Manchester Poly
Details: Trevor 061 231 5738

BAe: the asset strippers

WORKERS at a third Royal Ordnance depot, this time at Hamble, near Southampton, have walked out when faced with closure and redundancy by British Aerospace management. They follow workers at the Patricroft munitions factory near Manchester, and the armaments plant at Bishopston near Glasgow, who walked out on strike when BAe announced 2,000 redundancies to be introduced across two plants over the next two years.

There are now reports that this is just the start, and that BAe plans to close ten plants across the group with a land value of over £1 billion and a loss of 30,000 jobs in what has been described as an 'orgy of asset stripping'. BAe has also announced the closure of two thirds of the Austin Rover complex in Cowley with a loss of over 6,000 jobs.

BAe acquired the ordinance factories in April last year for just £190m, and this year bought up the Austin Rover Group for a mere £150m with £550m of debts written off. The Royal Ordnance purchase involved 16 sites with 7,000 acres of MOD land - valued as 'current use' for the purposes of the sale. Now it emerges that once the plants are closed and the land released onto the speculative market it will be worth multi-millions more.

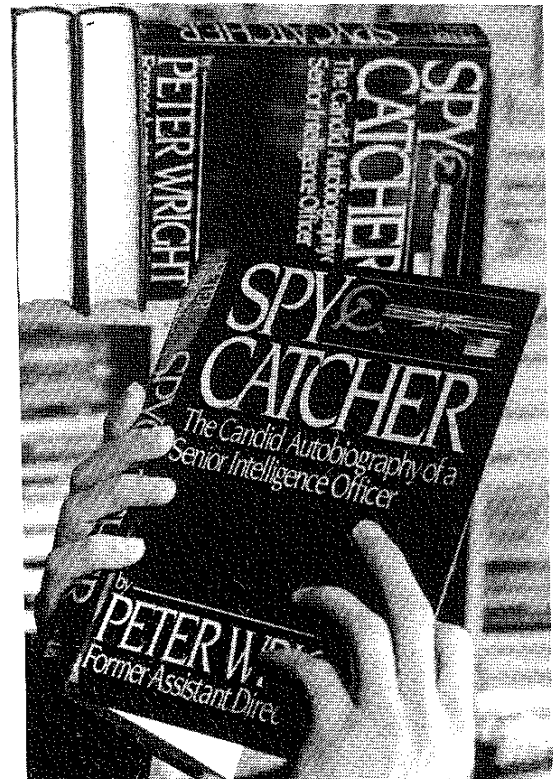
These acquisitions make BAe the biggest property company in the country.

The Labour front bench has demanded a parliamentary inquiry into BAe asset-stripping as parliament resumes after the summer recess. They say that there is evidence that Royal Ordnance factories were undervalued by millions of pounds when they were privatised last year.

The strikes demonstrate the importance of taking immediate action, since they have produced more results in a week than had been achieved at Austin Rover in the months since their closure announcement in August, and right-wing convenors have repeatedly blocked any action - even a clear rejection of the closures. As a result, the issue dropped out of the news and has rarely been mentioned by trade union or Labour leaders at national level.

Shop stewards at Ordnance factories have pledged a nation-wide boycott of any work moved into their plants from the sites to be closed. They have established a campaign to defend the plants and are to lobby parliament on the issue this week. There is now a clear need for a joint campaign and joint action by workers in all the threatened plants right across the BAe asset-stripping empire.

Alan Thornett



Spycatcher: Tory suppression overturned MI5 exposed

Labour Party statement on Ireland:

Writing off withdrawal

In September the Labour Party published a 32-page document outlining its 'democratic socialist programme' for achieving an end to 'violence, poverty and division' in Ireland. The document, complete with foreword by the Right Honourable Neil Kinnock MP, is the party's most important document on Ireland for a very long time – to judge, at least, by its length.

The Labour leadership's usual contributions on Ireland consist of attempts to outdo the government in its condemnation of 'terrorist' violence or its congratulations to the SAS. Given this, some people might interpret the publication of the document as a great step forward for the withdrawal movement.

It is understandable that the left might feel a sense of victory, in that the leadership has been forced to say something on Ireland other than its usual knee-jerk reactions to the latest 'atrocities'. But it would be foolish and premature to start popping champagne corks (or whatever it is that anti-imperialists do on these occasions) at this point.

The approach outlined in the document goes as follows. The Labour Party is a democratic party and therefore it will not make any changes in the sovereignty of the six-counties without the consent of the majority. However, it is in favour in principle of a united Ireland since it recognises that '... the national question, and hence the border, is central to the "troubles" and that only the resolution of that question can bring peace'. Hence it will embark on a political programme designed to win the consent of the loyalists to a united Ireland.

The loyalists will be given a veto on the question of sovereignty but they will not be given a veto on policies designed to win 'consent'. The document's authors admit that they don't know how they will measure 'consent' but they assure us that a future Labour government will be able to ascertain somehow that 'consent' was being given.

The two key words in the document are reform and harmonisation: reform of the north and harmonisation with the south. Its only criticism of the Anglo-Irish Accord is that there is not enough reform and not enough harmonisation in it. Irish people everywhere will be delighted to hear that what the Labour Party has in store for them is some weighted average of the economic, legal, political, educational and cultural institutions of the 6- and 26- county statelets.

The reform part of the programme is

designed to achieve 'the erosion of historically and culturally entrenched communal antagonisms to enable a united Ireland to function harmoniously'.

Thus it gives the impression that the problem with Ireland is the obsession of its people with history and with religion – a typically anti-Irish racist assumption.

The more detailed aspects of Labour's reform programme are not greatly different from what it promises the working classes of England, Scotland and Wales.

It will 'introduce measures designed to begin to reverse the extreme inequalities which have resulted from the market-based policies of the Conservative Government'. For instance, it will create a unit of the Northern Ireland Office to co-ordinate state investment and economic assistance.

It will co-ordinate European and external investment and it will increase public spending on housing and infrastructure.

The document states that 'Much of Labour's longer-term economic strategy will be based on the strengthening of economic ties with the Republic'. Given the disastrous state of the 26 county economy, that is a statement more likely to encourage nationalists to sign up with Ian Paisley than to encourage loyalists to consent to the removal of the border!

On political reform: 'A Labour administration will promote the negotiation of an agreed system of devolved government including a power-sharing executive as envisaged in the Anglo-Irish Agreement'. However, if 'political parties' (it doesn't specify which) don't agree a structure for a devolved government, a Labour government will continue with direct rule. Even if such a devolved government structure could be agreed, the document warns that a Labour government will continue to hang onto direct control of any areas it sees fit.

The second half of this political programme is designed to win consent – 'harmonisation'. To carry out this programme, a Labour government would use the institutions set up by the



British Troops in Dublin, 1917

Anglo-Irish Agreement – an agreement which has failed in every possible respect. In place of any recognition of this fact, we have a proposal to expand the scope and resources of the Agreement, the Inter-Governmental Conference and the secretariat which services it. There's nothing like starting out on a sound footing!

Among the subjects due to be harmonised are the economy, social security provision, educational provision, legal structures and last, but most certainly not least, security. To facilitate the latter, 'measures will have to be taken to rebuild public confidence in the respective police forces and other security services'. In particular, we can look forward to the eventual integration of the different agencies. Readers (and Robert Russell) will be forgiven if they were under the obviously mistaken impression that this is one bit of harmonisation which has already taken place.

So there we have it, the biggest document on Ireland the Labour Party has produced for many years – one page for every county in Ireland. Yet in almost every respect it is a waste of paper. It will not contribute one iota to Irish unity or to furthering the rights of Irish people to determine their own future. In fact, it explicitly rules out the one policy which might achieve that end – a commitment and a timetable to withdraw.

Perhaps this is all we can expect from a leadership which picks out as one of the three failures of successive British governments, the failure 'to steer Northern Ireland's people towards a just and democratic accommodation of their differences'.

If only that were the worst of it.

Jean Reilly

Rocky road for Kinnock

Labour party conference demonstrated the scope of Kinnock's ambition to re-fashion the party into one that would be seen by the ruling class as fit to govern. The Policy review and Kinnock's speech firmly establish that the leadership wish to manage capitalism more efficiently than the Tories. But conference also indicated that the left has not been crushed and in some ways is stronger than a year ago.

The decision of Benn and Heffer to run in the leadership elections against Kinnock and Hattersley was never seen primarily as a contest about votes. Rather it was a political stand to attempt to stem the tide of new realism which seeks to change the whole nature of the British labour movement. The challenge acted as a focus for many militants including outside the Labour party. Certainly it is the case that without it the left would have been in an even weaker position after Blackpool.

Through introducing a series of rule changes (the infamous agenda 2) which had not been discussed anywhere in advance, the leadership have taken a gigantic step to undermining the sovereignty of conference and moving towards an individual membership party on the same lines as most European Social Democratic parties. The most important changes are the decision to centralise all membership applications through Walworth Rd, the decision that 20% of the PLP have to nominate someone before there can be a leadership challenge, the imposition of bye election candidates and suspending members under investigation. These are designed to produce a much more passive membership and could lead to intensification of the witch hunt. Further it was made clear both during and after conference by Kinnock that decisions by conference were fairly meaningless given the Policy Review.

The most dramatic event of the week was Ron Todd's pre-prepared speech to the Tribune rally in which he made a passionate defence of unilateralism. This intervention clearly changed the mood of conference from one in which the leadership had complete control to one in which there was hope of some successes for the left. While Todd himself wishes to differentiate between support for the 'dream ticket' and support for their policies, neither the leadership nor the media will brook such subtleties. The press gave Todd the Scargill treatment not because they don't know the difference, but because the right need to isolate him.

There was no serious challenge to the presence of the EPTU scabs at conference. Several constituency delegates raised the point

at the beginning of conference and were fobbed off. But no one single trade union delegation raised the issue – not the NUM nor the printers. Twice during the week EPTU speakers came to the rostrum and were

heckled when delegates mainly from the CLP's realised what was going on. But it was yet another illustration of the strength of new realism in the labour and trade union movement that no effective protest was mounted.

Conference saw a further stage in the dismantling of the youth organisation with the setting up of a National Youth Campaigns Committee, which will be dominated by the soft left and in which the LPYS will have only a minority voice. This committee will elect the youth representative on the national executive committee, and only the full national executive can now convene the national youth conference. The debate on the women's organisation demonstrated that while the leadership would like to go down the same road here, they are more cautious because the balance of forces is less favourable. They are determined not to accede to women's demands for more control and are hoping to use the trade union block votes to get their way. As they have not yet managed to come up with a complete solution, the consultation will go on another year. Strong campaigns need to be developed to defend the women's organisation and extend its voice within the party.

The debate on Black Sections saw an important new development in the discussion with a resolution from Pollock which called for consultation on the setting up of a black socialist society, in line with earlier calls made by TGWU deputy leader Bill Morris. The resolution itself was ambivalent, supporting the right to black self organisation but using neo-colonialist language in its reference to 'blacks and asians'. It characterised the debate around black sections as a 'problem'. And while the mover made clear that in his view they were talking about a black organisation not a anti-racist club for white liberals, this is not spelt out in writing – giving the NEC a chance to decide



Donald Dewar: dampening poll tax resistance

WAYNE EDGINTON

otherwise. *Labour Briefing* called for a vote against on this basis. Black Sections themselves called for abstention on the resolution – probably an indication of differences amongst their ranks about the best tactics in the situation. They intend to participate in the consultation which will be an important process but which is likely to receive treatment from the NEC as contemptuous as that suffered by youth and women.

The standard Black Sections resolution itself was defeated but did receive support this year from NUPE. It is vital that over the next year the consultation is used to build increased support for Black Sections themselves rather than getting lost in cosy chats with Walworth Road. The left needs to take on board the ideas raised in 'Black Agenda' and integrate them into our policies and practice.

The debate on the poll tax was a frustrating non-event. Whereas at the special conference in Scotland the forces supporting non-payment were strong enough to answer the leaderships challenges; that we would lead people into massive debt through a non-payment campaign, that labour could not advocate breaking the law, in Blackpool the retort was much less developed. This is clearly an indication that building a mass campaign against the tax that can alter this balance of forces is a major priority for the left in England and Wales.

The discussion on Palestine was contradictory. On the one hand conference passed policy supporting the *intifada*, recognising the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, supporting Palestinian self-determination and calling for Israeli withdrawal from the 'Occupied Territories'. At the same time it supported the NEC statement, which pretends that an Israeli Labour government would offer a way forward, offers no support to the uprising and calls for a Palestinian

On the Fringe

THE POTENTIAL to develop a serious fightback against the overpowering tide of new realism was demonstrated most clearly not on conference floor, but through the fringe. The *Labour Briefing* meeting after the leadership results were announced provided a welcome lift for ragged spirits. Three hundred and fifty people packed into the room to hear Benn, Heffer and many others. It was unfortunate that many left before listening to the final speeches from Harringay councillor, Martha Osamore and Mandy Mudd from

Briefing make the most powerful contributions of the evening. The Socialist Conference fringe meeting was another useful step in establishing the vital role this current plays in building the left inside and outside the party.

The second *Briefing* meeting, on Thursday gave delegates a welcome opportunity to assess the week and the tasks flowing out of it without a parade of long speeches from the platform. Other useful meetings were held around single issue campaigns by the Labour

Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Black Sections, the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine and many others. It was very unfortunate that so few people made the long trek to the Women for Socialism meeting, and thus missed for my mind the most riveting moment of the week, the contribution from Elean Thomas, from the Workers Party of Jamaica, who not only spoke of the struggles of women in her country but gave a very powerful poetry reading.

homeland in the same way that South Africa creates bantustans. Despite these problems, the fact that the composite was passed is a major step forward on this crucial issue.

On Ireland the resolution opposing employment discrimination was passed – a small but significant step forward. But on the key question of withdrawal there was little support. Only the ACTT and the NCU among the trade unions are likely to have voted for it (there was no card vote). It is vital that the 'Year of Action' is used to build a much stronger current in the unions and constituencies which will support withdrawal.

The key decisions of conference on which the leadership was defeated were:

- one woman on every shortlist,
- for a national minimum wage and 35 hour week; opposition to employment training (ET) schemes,
- reaffirmation of unilateralism.

The decision on one woman on every shortlist was opposed by the NEC explicitly on the basis that it would undermine shortlists of one, making clear that this was a victory not only for women but on the question of party democracy. The decisions on minimum wage, 35 hour week and ET schemes were a shot fired by the unions and the TGWU in particular to warn Kinnock there were limits as to how much they were prepared to concede to Thatcherism. This understood in the context of Todd's stitch up of the TGWU executive to unanimously back Kinnock-Hattersley. The message is 'we will support your leadership and most of your policies but there are limits'. While we have no illusions in these forces, we have to look at the possibility of developing concrete campaigns for the implementation of these policies in which we attempt to involve them to make sure the line is held at next years conference.

Obviously defending the decision on unilateralism is particularly important. We should understand that Kinnock was always clear that this would be the most difficult battle to win, which is precisely why it is not dealt with in the policy review. And he has made it clear that he will ignore conference decisions on this and everything else.

All these victories were won because

of the support of the trade unions especially the TGWU. It is clear that one of the things that will be up for decision at next years conference and will dominate discussion over the next year is the question of the relationship between the trade unions and the CLPs and the question of the block vote. Obviously we have a position that the way the block vote is used is undemocratic. This must be raised consistently whether or not votes are going our way. We should point out that the leadership is inconsistent on this question – they only started to howl about the block vote when it went against them. We are in favour of democratisation of the block vote; for a campaign for consultation of members of unions on policy before votes are cast and for the expression through voting of minority and majority positions. There is justifiable resentment in the CLPs about marginalisation, exemplified at this conference not only in the few constituency speakers that were called, but even in the seating arrangements which meant that many CLP delegates were out of sight of both the chair and the TV cameras. We believe that the CLPs should have more say in decision making than currently, but we should take time to discuss out whether we support Benn's 50/50 formula or a different breakdown. But the key thing is that it is necessary to go on the offensive over the question of

trade union democracy at the same time as to take to fight to defend and extend socialist policies into the unions. Detailed discussions need to take place over the next months to elaborate precisely what demands the left should raise and what organisational structure is best equipped to take up this battle.

The results of the leadership contest were clearly worse than the left had hoped. Benn won 0.340% in the affiliated organisations, 5.872% in the Constituency Labour Party section and 5.185% in the Parliamentary Labour Party section: totalling 11.370%. In the Deputy leadership contest Hattersley took 31.339% in the affiliated organisations section, with Heffer getting 0.007% and Prescott 8.654%. In the CLPS, Hattersley took 18.109%, Heffer 4.06% and Prescott 7.845%; in the PLPS they got 17.376%, 5.430% and 7.195% respectively. This gave them a total of Hattersley 66.823%, Heffer 9.483% and Prescott 23.64%. In particular Hattersley's vote in the constituencies is a sign of the strength of those Kinnock supporters who will back Hattersley as part of the ticket.

The campaign had a number of weaknesses. In particular, the ambivalence about whether to go ahead meant that when the decision was finally taken there was insufficient opportunity to take the debate into the trade unions. There



Jeremy Corbyn addressing Briefing fringe meeting

Labour Women ignored

THE NEC produced a report in which they ignored the decisions of Womens Conference on:

- Resolutions from Women's Conference being debated at Annual Conference.
- Women's Conference electing the Womens Section of the NEC.
- Women's Conference proposals on electing the national labour womens committee. They used the fact that trade union delegations had abstained at Labour Womens conference as an excuse for their position. Since when did the labour movement decide policy on the

basis of abstentions? Unfortunately while a very positive alternative to the NEC statement was put and debated, under pressure from the Womens Action Committee the mover agreed to remitt. WAC's line at the beginning of the week had been that this debate was much less important than that on one women on every shortlist.

Once it became clear that other women thought differently they tried to take charge of the tactical decisions despite the fact that they had done no work to get the resolutions onto

the agenda. Finally their line was that it was better to remit to an NEC that had already shown its contempt for the women's organisation in its report than lose the resolution by millions of votes because of trade union opposition. This whole performance demonstrated the need for the much better organisation of Labour women at future conferences. It is to be hoped that the Women for Socialism conference will provide the basis to begin that work in plenty of time for next year.

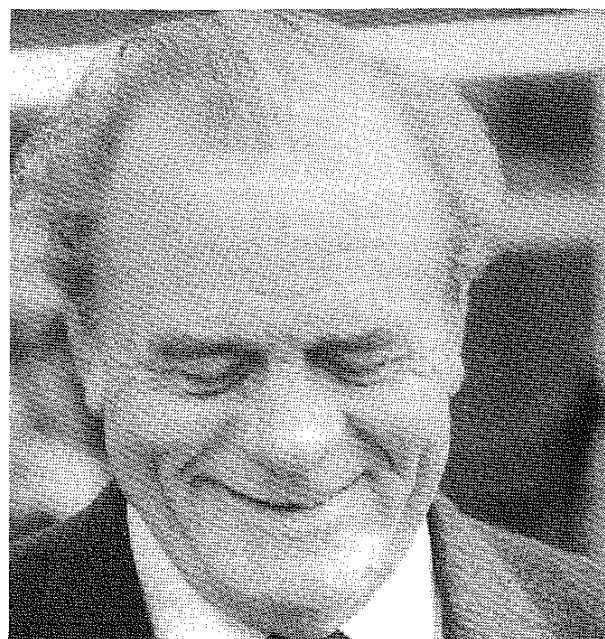
Dani Ahrens

have also been difficulties about the democracy of the campaign with regional organisers being imposed on local campaigns with no prior discussion with them. These weaknesses are not particular to the Benn Heffer campaign but of the whole Labour left. But coming out of Labour party conference steps are planned that will improve the situation.

The Campaign Group has launched 'Campaign '89' on the basis of a twin track approach: campaigning within the party for socialist policies and elected representatives to carry them out; and campaigning outside the party together with other movements 'through the Socialist Conference network' around issues such as the Poll Tax and Employment Training and towards the development of alternative policies. It is pledged to take up the debate on policy into the unions in a way that was not done this time. Campaign '89 is also committed to organising national meetings of representatives of the regional campaigns for socialism, trade union broad lefts and other national campaigns. There remains some discussion about the exact nature of these meetings, but the initiative is undoubtedly a sign that the Campaign Group intend to broaden their base over the next year and understand the need to turn to the unions.

While there has not been a clear decision to stand for the leadership next year, this is being discussed very openly. The conditions of this debate are much better than last year, because it is earlier, because it follows a positive challenge this year and because there are developments within the soft left which were not taking place a year ago.

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) fringe meeting saw John Prescott attack Robin Cook for his position of non-payment of the Poll tax. The fact that Prescott himself was on the platform was an indication of the LCCs ambivalence towards the leadership challenge. Within this context, David Blunkett's message to the Tribune Conference on October 22nd/23rd comes as no surprise. He says 'It cannot be stressed to strongly that there is a need for those who reject the sectarianism of



Todd: dramatic intervention

WAYNE EDGINGTON

the left to regroup so that they are neither manipulated by the centre-right or the oppositional left. Too many party members who yearn for a cohesive and positive left approach, existing groupings inside and outside the parliamentary party appear to have lost that role'.

He argues that a new group needs to be set up, which is different from either Tribune or the Campaign group. Peter Hain, who has been arguing for left re-alignment for some time, claims that Tribune is no longer an identifiable left force. Rather he argues, it has been 'a forum through which the leadership can pull people into line'.

These developments, important in themselves, have even greater weight because Todd and the Transport and General Workers Union 'left' are very much involved in the Tribune milieu. It is vital that Chesterfield and the Campaign group have an orientation to drawing these forces into joint activity at the same time as being clear about the need for a leadership challenge and the need to fight the witchunt.

The Chesterfield movement is in a stronger position than it was over a year ago and clearly many of those mobilised through the Benn Heffer campaign can be won to its banner. The key events over the next months include November 5th's Solidarity Conference, sponsored by Chesterfield, which will provide a forum to discuss the lessons of recent industrial disputes and map out solidarity tasks. The fact that Chesterfield has agreed in principle to organise a major conference next autumn needs to be built as a way of strengthening the trade union lefts.

The December 10th conference on the Poll Tax will provide a vital opportunity to bring together militants from Scotland now facing fines for non-registration with those from England and Wales, where awareness of the viciousness of Thatcher's flagship policy is beginning to be more widely understood.

Febuary's Women for Socialism conference provides a welcome opportunity to begin to establish a real national current of socialist

feminists, and must be seriously built in the Labour party, in the trade unions, among lesbians and black women and in the many single issue women's campaigns.

Other important initiatives include conferences around Gorbachov, on democratic rights and on green politics. These initiatives give the left the possibility to develop our own policies in response to the Kinnockite policy review and to begin to work together in action against some of the major attacks on the working class.

Kinnock and his supporters have demonstrated their loyalty to the market and their inability to put forward a strategy which will gain electoral support for the party, let alone defend the interests of the working class. The task for the left is to provide a coherent alternative to this dead-end. While this is no easy job, the basis has been laid through the Benn-Heffer campaign and the development of Chesterfield. It is a challenge to which the left must rise.

Theresa Conway



50 years of the Fourth International

The founding conference of the Fourth International took place in 1938. As our contribution to a fifty-year balance sheet of the world trotskyist movement, we publish an article by Dave Packer on the continuing relevance of its founding 'programme': *'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International'*.

Packer argues that not only is the transitional programme full of lessons and insights of great value to socialists in the 1980s and into the 1990s, but it remains the bedrock of revolutionary socialist strategy.

We also publish interviews with Eileen Gersh, a revolutionary militant whose lifetime of political activity spans the entire period of the history of the Fourth International, and Charlie Van Gelderen, another militant who attended the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938.

A trotskyist since the 1930s

AT SEVENTY-FIVE Eileen Gersh is still active as a supporter of *Socialist Outlook*, and has recently been very much involved in the Fight Alton's Bill campaign. But her political life started over fifty years ago in the early 1930s – a period dominated by capitalist depression, the rise of fascism and the approach of world war. A period, also, in which the young trotskyist movement was battling to keep alive revolutionary socialist politics of the kind that had led to victory in Russia in 1917.

As an undergraduate at Oxford University, Eileen got involved with the Labour Club. 'My parents were Liberals of the Lloyd George school but even while I was at school I realised that their's was an obsolete point of view and that the progressive possibilities were in the Labour Party and lay with socialism. It was obvious that if anyone was going to do anything about the depression it was the Labour Party. Then at Oxford I began to read Marx. It was mostly the political and economic situation that radicalised me.'

An important memory for Eileen is of a hunger march from Wales which arrived in Oxford in 1934. 'We were drafted to help prepare meals for them, peel potatoes and things like that. We went out to meet the marchers and came in with them, shouting slogans. I was given a pail of water, a sponge and some rubbing alcohol to do their feet and treat their blisters! I don't think they would have dreamt of asking men to peel potatoes – and they didn't ask any of us women to do any of the important organisational tasks. But women were quite prominent among the speakers we invited to the Labour Club: I remember listening to Dora Russell, Charlotte Haldane, Naomi Mitchison.'

'When Oswald Mosley's fascists organised a meeting in Oxford a group of us went to picket it, and some went inside to attempt to disrupt it. Then we held an impromptu anti-fascist demonstration through the city.'

Later in 1934 Eileen moved to London where she joined the

Wimbledon, Merton and Morden Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth (LLY). This was where she was introduced to the trotskyist movement, through Arthur Wimbush and Vic Carpenter. It was a small group and not formally linked to Reg Groves and his small group in nearby Balham. 'We used to go out at weekends and set up a speaking platform borrowed from Reg Groves,' she explains, 'We would take our stand out and, with the Labour Party speakers' notes, hold forth in the street.'

Her branch of the LLY, of which she became vice-chair, was very active and, she remembers, 'overwhelmingly working class in composition. We had secretaries, clerks, metal workers, dustmen. We had anything from a dozen to twenty attending each meeting. Nationally the LLY was led by a pro-League of Nations disarmament current, which was carried overwhelmingly at conferences at that time – so it was to the left of the Labour leadership.'

'One of the things our branch did was to help organise tours for Spanish children during the Spanish civil war. We organised a concert given by Basque children.'

In 1938, the year of the founding of the Fourth International, Eileen moved to the United States. 'We were not talking seriously about the Fourth International when I left Britain – everything seemed up in the air.' But, once in the United States, Eileen went to see US trotskyist leader James P. Cannon: 'Cannon told me about the founding of the Socialist Workers Party, coming out of the Socialist Party and about the founding of the Fourth International.'

Eileen was to remain in the United States for forty-seven years, moving back to Britain in 1985. But for a period during the war she more or less dropped out of political activity. 'I got married, had children and I did not go out of my way at this time to get involved politically. But then in the late forties I began to get involved in the

anti-nuclear movement in Chicago which developed after the war.'

I asked Eileen how she came to rejoin the trotskyist movement in the US after a number of years absence. 'When my daughter was seventeen she went to the University of Pennsylvania and met up with the Young Socialist Alliance [the youth organisation of the Socialist Workers Party]. She brought home the *Militant* [the SWP's paper] for me to read. I recognised it, of course, and got in touch!'

Soon Eileen was right in the thick of things again – helping the SWP to find an office for their pro-choice work with the Women's National Abortion Action Committee, 'then I helped set up meetings at the University of Pennsylvania for that. Then there was the anti-Vietnam war movement. I got more and more involved.' Finally, in 1972, after many years of working with the SWP as a close sympathiser, she became a member – joining not only her daughter but also her son, who were by now members of the party.

Eileen witnessed the degeneration of the Socialist Workers Party and the adoption by its leadership around Jack Barnes of increasingly revisionist positions and an undemocratic internal regime. Along with many others, including most of the long-standing cadres of the party, she was bureaucratically expelled in 1984. 'They instituted new practices for the SWP. They did everything they could to avoid debating with those who opposed them in the party, and then finally they expelled us.'

Despite witnessing the destruction of the party she had done so much to build, Eileen has not given up hope in the battle for socialism and the building of a real trotskyist movement. She is still in contact with those in the US who are trying to rebuild a revolutionary movement under very difficult conditions. And she continues her political activity to this day. Her life is an inspiration and an example to younger generations of revolutionaries.

Socialist activism is often assumed to be the prerogative of the young, especially in Britain where a conservative labour movement establishment can often absorb today's youthful firebrands and turn them into tomorrow's comfortable bureaucrats. But there are some who have stayed the course and defended revolutionary socialist politics through a lifetime of political activity. Eileen Gersh is one of them. Dave Shepherd spoke to her at her home in Hackney, East London.

The 'transitional programme': a programme for our times

Fifty years ago Leon Trotsky, together with a number of groups of revolutionaries from different parts of the world, founded the Fourth International. The new world party of socialist revolution was committed to defending the programme of bolshevism and marxism against the class collaboration of both the Third (Communist) International, dominated by Stalin, and the Second International of the reformist social democratic parties.

In the Soviet Union the infamous Moscow trials were taking place. Trotsky, the main defendant along with other leaders of the October revolution, was preposterously accused of crimes against the working class. The ruling bureaucracy represented by Stalin was determined to liquidate physically the last vestiges of bolshevism within the Communist Party and the workers' movement.

But despite the horrors of the Stalin purges and the blatant political betrayals, the objective

conditions for rebuilding a movement for international socialism were not the most favourable. On the contrary, by 1938 the consequence of stalinist policy was a legacy of working class defeats. This eroded working class combativity and was laying the basis for the second world war.

Trotsky had rightly declared the Third (Communist) International to be dead from the point of view of marxism – the victim of Stalin's policy of 'socialism in one country'. Its policies were dictated not by the necessities of the class struggle but by the exigencies of the foreign policy of the bureaucracy.

In Germany a revolutionary proletariat had been divided, weakened and betrayed by its communist and social democratic leaders and was suffering under the rule of a triumphant fascism which destroyed even its basic class organisations.

In Spain the revolution had already suffered a serious setback in 1936 with the formation of the Popular Front and the resulting suppression of independent working class politics. By 1938 the civil war was drawing to an

agonising close; the sacrifices of the workers and peasants were not enough to overcome the misleadership of their traditional parties.

It was under these conditions that Leon Trotsky and the International Left Opposition reaffirmed their conviction in the ultimate triumph of the proletarian revolution and announced a programme not only to meet the tasks of the day, but one that synthesised the lessons of the workers' movement for the whole imperialist epoch – *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*: the 'transitional programme'.

The central core of the transitional programme is that only an independent working class in alliance with the oppressed can liberate humanity from the horrors of capitalist war, exploitation, hunger, racism and all forms of oppression; and that the objective material conditions for such a liberation have historically matured in our epoch – the epoch of wars and revolutions.

This simple marxist idea is opposed to all those ideas and

continued on page 17

**"this central
idea of class
independence
is based on
the whole
history of
the
twentieth
century"**

'I was there': an eye-witness report

CHARLIE missed the first day of the Congress, when the discussion took place on the Transitional Programme, but was present on the second when the vote to found the Fourth International took place. Three people, including two of Deutcher's supporters from Poland, out of 21 present voted against. They felt it was not an auspicious time to found a new international in a period of defeats for the class. The previous three internationals had been founded at times of great working class struggle and upsurge, whereas in 1938 world war was looming, the Left Opposition was small and isolated and the task facing revolutionaries seemed a truly daunting one. Charlie's view was, and remains so today, that there was no alternative. The Second and Third Internationals were dead as far as the international working class and revolutionary socialism were concerned and it was therefore necessary to take this step.

He was twenty-four, and enjoyed meeting all those people who had just been names to him, especially James P. Cannon. He had been initiated in the trotskyist movement through reading Trotsky's articles in the *Militant* at the time Cannon and Shackman were the editors. He recalls 'Shackman was a remarkable writer and personality, despite what happened to him afterwards. He was fluent in French, although they told be his French grammar was atrocious, I didn't notice, he chaired the meeting translating from French to German, and so I was very impressed'.

Charlie attended the Congress at the request of the South African trotskyists with whom he had been involved, although by this time he had moved to England. He reported back to meetings when he returned to England and was greeted enthusiastically. Then he went on to spend six months working for the International in France, turning duplicator handles, before spending the war in Italy where he helped to found a sec-

tion.

Charlie is appalled when he looks back at the complete lack of security around the Congress. Everyone sat around in cafes talking, including with the man who eventually assassinated Trosky. Charlie took several snapshots of him, and was taken out for a meal at Maxims at his expense. This looseness seemed doubly inappropriate when it was discovered that Clement, who had been the acting secretary had been murdered. All the organisation went through his hands and he disappeared about a week before the conference. Eventually a letter turned up from him, saying that he was disillusioned with revolutionary politics, and was going off to Spain to fight in the civil war. Of course the letter was a forgery as Trotsky argued immediately: his headless body was found floating in the Seine.

The fact that this was a period of abject defeats was the reason, he thinks, that so many people at that conference fell by the wayside. People who were at that conference, like Max Shachman, who was chairing most of the meetings, Pablo from Greece, and the others, and Pierre Rousset's father, David, who eventually became a Gaullist MP, could not stand the periods of retreats, especially after the second world war, when the stalinist emerged as a much more powerful and long lasting force than had been anticipated.

Stalinism was incapable of developing marxist thought. Everything was dictated by Moscow, had to be rubber stamped as bearing the correct line. Millions died in the Soviet Union without ever coming to trial, amongst them thousands of supporters of the Fourth International. And it is the case that all the innovative thinking, which has tried to use the Marxist method to analyse contemporary reality, or to deal with issues like feminism that have been manifested in new ways, have come from trotskyists or other non-

stalinist traditions

Charlie confesses that the question of women's role in revolutionary politics was not consciously discussed or considered in those days. Despite the debates raised by Kollontai, and the massive ferment around the German women's movement in the 1920's, Trotskyists in Britain and internationally did not seem concerned to ensure that women were won to revolutionary politics, or played a key role when they were recruited. Even during the war, when the position of women in the workforce was changing dramatically and because of that women's position in the home, the significance of this did not occur to the trotskyists. Internally too, the situation was appalling, with very few women involved in any of the leading bodies.

Perhaps the most exhilarating experience for Charlie came after the Congress itself. 'We were so optimistic about the future, that we founded a youth international, and we set up an international executive committee, to which I was elected'. At that time we had youth sections in America, France, the Netherlands, Britain and Belgium. The French youth played the decisive role in this. There was a remarkable French comrade, Hicks, a school teacher, who eventually died in a German concentration camp, after organising marxist there. There were a number of comrades from America, the Youth alliance, Maggie Gould and others. As there has never been another conference, Charlie, at 75, is still a member of this Youth executive.

Charlie reminds us 'Trotsky his in diary in exile decided that he had no right to commit suicide because he was the living link between the Leninist past and future. My view then and now is that if we have accomplished nothing else in the international, we have continued to serve as a link between the revolutionary policies of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and the next and present generations'.

Theresa Conway visited Charlie van Geldren at his home in Cambridge and spoke with him about his memories of the founding congress of the Fourth International



Eileen Gersh & other students peel potatoes for hunger march
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OXFORD MAIL

programmes, however radical they may appear on the surface, which result in the working class looking to any sector of the ruling class for support in its historic struggle.

This central idea of class independence is based on, and subsequently confirmed by, the whole history of the twentieth century. It may seem elementary, but it lies at the heart of all the differences between revolutionary marxism and social democracy (whether left or right variants) and stalinism. Their practice and programmes are based on compromise, collaboration and integration with the bourgeoisie or sections of the bourgeoisie and its state institutions.

The issue of class independence is also one of the fundamental divides between revolutionary marxism and populist or national liberation movements in the dependent countries, whose programmes have been more or less influenced by their ideas about alliances with 'progressive', 'democratic' and 'anti-imperialist' sectors of the local ruling class.

Since 1938 history has shown us that old-fashioned class collaboration and 'popular frontism' can take on many guises which may fool the unwary and lead the workers and oppressed into terrible defeats. In the post-war period Greece, Indonesia and Portugal spring to mind. In all these cases mass revolutionary movements went down to defeat due, in part, to the adoption of 'popular frontist' policies. And there are many other examples of class col-

laboration which have resulted in demobilisation and defeat for the working class.

Some have challenged the marxist principle of class independence by pointing to the post-war revolutionary overturns of capitalism in the underdeveloped countries: revolutions which were not led by trotskysts. But whatever programme was formally adhered to, the leaderships of all these revolutions rejected *in practice* any intermediate 'stage' of alliance with the bourgeoisie, or a section of the bourgeoisie, and broke with the ruling class and its state.

In Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and Vietnam, very different kinds of leadership with inadequate programmes, sometimes derived from the stalinist movement of which, with the exception of the Castro leadership in Cuba, they were a part, were nonetheless able to break with the capitalists and the 'popular frontist' strategies pursued by the traditional parties.

These post-war revolutionary overturns were not only opposed by Moscow—even the revolutionary marxists were sometimes confused by political developments which did not seem to take a classical form. This resulted in opportunist or sectarian errors. Many trotskysts debated whether capitalism had in fact been overthrown in, for example, countries like Yugoslavia or Cuba.

This reflected the fact that in the post-war period the international class struggle developed in a quite different way to that which the trotskysts expected in the late 1930s. Despite this, the key to un-

derstanding the post-war overturns is to be found in the transitional programme.

In the section entitled 'Workers and Farmers' Government', the transitional programme explains that revolutionary marxists must call on all those leaderships, old and new, who base themselves on the workers and peasants, and who claim to speak in their name, to: 'break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the

workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the programme of the 'workers' and farmers' government'.

Although the exact wording of the slogan can vary (for example, a governmental slogan which rested on an alliance with the peasantry or farmers in Britain today would be anachronistic!), the method adopted here is applicable to both the imperialist countries and the semi-colonial world.

'Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organisations possible?' asks Trotsky in the transitional programme. 'Past experience shows... that this is to say the least highly improbable. However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc), the petty-bourgeois parties including the stalinists may go further than they wish along the road to break with the bourgeoisie.' 'However,' he continues, 'there is no need to indulge in guesswork. The agitation around the slogan of a workers'-farmers' government preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value'.

The post-war revolutions have confirmed in real life that the stalinist and, in the case of the Cuban July 26th movement,

"the key to understanding the post-war overturns is to be found in the transitional programme."

"post-war revolutionary overturns were opposed by Moscow..."

"Trotsky did not expect Mao's Red Army to come to anything."

petty-bourgeois nationalist movements, can, in 'exceptional circumstances', go further than they intended along the road to break with the bourgeoisie. This confirms what was in Trotsky's day only a 'theoretical possibility'.

While the Castro leadership in 1959 represented a new type of non-stalinist force, the Mao leadership in China had its roots firmly in the stalinist tradition. In the 1930s Trotsky did not expect Mao's Red Army to come to anything.

However, momentous conditions – revolutionary war against the Japanese invasion and the nationalist Guomindang armies, huge revolutionary pressures from the workers and peasants, economic catastrophe, the inability of imperialism to intervene at the end of the world war and so on – allowed the Mao leadership to make a decisive break with the bourgeoisie. All the other openings (some of which were tried) were progressively closed off to it.

The Cuban leadership attempted to establish a national bourgeois-democratic regime after the revolutionary overthrow of the hated dictator Batista, but the sabotage and hostility of the national capitalists in alliance with US imperialism, which organised a blockade of Cuba, forced the Castro leadership to make a fundamental choice: to break with the bourgeois ministers in the government and embark on an anti-capitalist revolution, or to capitulate to imperialist pressure. The momentous choice they made marks one of the great moments in working class history.

Unlike the Chinese or Yugoslavian CPs, the Cuban July 26th movement did not have its roots in stalinism or social democracy. This is an important factor which, despite the subsequent development of the Cuban Communist Party under Castro and an increasing subordination to Moscow, has marked the political evolution of the Castro leadership till this day.

Other factors which led to a revolutionary outcome in Cuba, apart from the quality and in-



Mao: forced to break with the bourgeoisie

tegrity of the leadership, include the escalating mobilisations of the workers in Havana and on the plantations, the weakness and corruption of the national bourgeoisie and its subordination to US interests, the incredible blunders of American imperialism, and the willingness of Khrushchev's Kremlin leadership – for its own reasons – to lend economic and military support.

None of these individual elements in and of themselves could have made an anti-capitalist revolution possible, but they came together and pointed to the only way way forward. The Castro movement was not weighed down with stalinist or social democratic prejudices, but neither, as a pragmatic and empirical movement, was it a marxist party with a coherent programme of proletarian revolution and socialist democracy.

Such a leadership cannot provide a programme nor act as a model for revolutionaries in our epoch, although the experience of the Cuban revolution can clarify the marxist programme and deepen our understanding of the revolutionary process.

The question that some marxists have raised in relation to these post-war revolutionary breakthroughs is whether or not we can talk about 'exceptions' to a general rule. However distorted or bureaucratised these revolutions were – and they have all marked by a lack of institutionalised working class power – maybe we have been a lit-

tle sectarian towards them? Should we not reassess our attitude towards some political movements whose programme and origins lay within the stalinist or populist traditions?

This discourse has led to a variety of answers, and most of them end up challenging the validity of key aspects of the transitional programme – on questions of class independence, the popular front and the united front and on the theory of permanent revolution.

Another component of the transitional programme which is as fundamental as class independence from the bourgeoisie, is the equally strategic question of class unity. The united front which is proposed is counterposed to all kinds of 'popular fronts' or 'people's fronts' with bourgeois parties as advocated by stalinist parties.

The tactic of the united front as originally formulated by the early Comintern under Lenin and Trotsky, was much more than a political manoeuvre or a literary technique to 'expose' the refusal of reformist bureaucrats to fight. It was always a policy for defending and advancing the interests of the working class by seeking to unite its mass organisations and the non-aligned workers in a common struggle against the bourgeoisie. The two inseparable tenets of this tactic are united action for any genuine step forward and the organisational and political independence of the revolutionary party.

"The tactic of the united front... was always a policy for defending and advancing the interests of the working class..."

Conditions do not exist in contemporary Britain for this 'classical' form of the united front because of the existence of a mass unitary labour movement. It is nevertheless essential that the marxist left seeks, wherever possible, unity in action against the bosses. In other countries in Europe such as France, for example, where two mass workers' parties and trade union federations exist, the issue of class unity and the united front against the bourgeoisie retains its full force, including at the governmental level.

Translated into today's conditions in Britain, the workers' government slogan, an expression of a united front approach, would be: 'For a Labour government that breaks with the bosses and defends the workers', or a variant of this (the content given to any slogan is the crucial thing). In France it could be: 'For a Communist Party-Socialist Party government which defends the workers'. In response to the present Rocard government which represents a coalition between the SP and a part of the right (and not the CP), marxists could call for: 'A government of the SP and CP without bourgeois ministers'.

The united front tactic is necessary because of the divisions created within the working class. Unity in action is necessary not only within the walls of a single factory or industry, but also for such national political battles as the struggle against imperialist war, the fight against nuclear weapons and NATO.

This tactic also flows out of the need for marxist currents, which are not recognised as the leadership of the workers' movement, to prove to the masses that they are ready to wage a common battle with anyone, so long as it is a step, however small, along the historic road of the proletariat towards its expropriation of capital.

Perhaps the best-known aspect of the transitional programme is its advocacy of a 'system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final



Spanish workers betrayed by Stalin

conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.'

Such an approach is counterposed to the traditional social democratic method of pursuing only a 'minimum' programme of reforms within capitalism, while leaving the 'maximum' programme of socialist transformation to May day speeches and the distant future. The reformist 'minimum' programme provides no bridge to the maximum socialist programme – the expropriation of the capitalist and so on. Reformist leaders are scared to death of such an idea.

Yet in a period of capitalist crisis like the one we face today, there can be no prospect of systematic social reforms, or the raising of the living standards of the broad masses of people; every serious demand – even 'minimum' demands – has a tendency to reach beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and the bourgeois state. Here lies the origins of the profound crisis of 'Labourism'. The British Labour Party cannot find a reformist policy which is acceptable to the ruling class, and as a consequence the bureaucracy, scared of socialist solutions, is being dragged to the right.

'The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow... (but it) does not discard the programme of the old "minimal"

demands... it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, "minimal" demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of capitalism – and this occurs at each step – the FI advances a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very basis of the bourgeois regime.'

The document adopted in 1938 discusses a whole array of such demands, from the *sliding scale of wages* (to protect the real value of wages against inflation through automatic increases), and the *sliding scale of hours*, to the *expropriation of the monopolies and the banks and workers' control*.

The transitional programme argues that revolutionaries must relate particularly to the most oppressed layers of the working class, especially women and youth. 'Opportunist organisations by their very nature concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignore both the youth and the woman worker.' One could also add the black worker... 'The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows

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Kinnock's Labour Party: loyal to the market

WAYNE EDGINGTON

“the transitional programme insists that revolutionaries should seek support ‘among the most exploited layers of the working class; consequently among women workers’”

to the woman as a wage-earner and as a housewife.’ It insists that revolutionaries ‘should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class; consequently among the women workers’.

Despite correct points in relation to social layers who experience a double oppression under capitalism, this section of the transitional programme appears to us today the most underdeveloped. The continued integration of women into the workforce during and after the second world war and therefore into society at large, created the conditions for the emergence of the modern women’s liberation movement which has greatly enriched our understanding of women’s oppression and an understanding of the centrality of the liberation of women for working class politics.

The 1938 programme includes more sections than we have space to discuss here. There are sections, for example, on the struggle against imperialism and war, combined and uneven development in the backward countries, and permanent revolution.

It is a document which represents the distilled experience of a hundred years and more of the international class struggle. It is one of those texts which when reread always results in profitable new insights into the complex

problems of socialist strategy. In particular, the opening section which focuses on the proletariat and its leadership, or more correctly the crisis of working class leadership, rings particularly true today.

In Britain the crisis of leadership could not be more clear. Virtually the whole Labour and trade union leadership has shifted its ground to the right and now subscribes to so-called ‘new realism’ – in reality, old-fashioned class collaboration under a new name. Even after the defeat of the miners’ strike, the willingness of section after section of the class to move into struggle (albeit defensive struggle) is obvious. But on every occasion these workers have come up against a national leadership that will not lead a fight.

The same story is repeated in many parts of the globe, sometimes leading to catastrophic consequences. ‘In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines.’

In the advanced capitalist countries it is the leaderships of the traditional workers’ organisations which act as a barrier to socialist advance. ‘The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of

decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organisations’, explains the transitional programme.

But to challenge these leaderships, the revolutionary marxists must reject sectarianism. In the section entitled ‘Against Sectarianism, the text explains that ‘under the influence of the betrayal by the historic organisations of the proletariat, certain sectarian moods and groupings of various kinds arise... At their base lies a refusal to struggle for partial and transitional demands, ie for the elementary interests and needs of the working masses, as they are today... They propose turning their backs on the old trade unions... They remain indifferent to the inner struggle within the reformist organisations – as if one could win the masses without intervening in their daily strife!’

It’s a pity that so many self-proclaimed revolutionaries in Britain have not taken this advice, and have found themselves on the sidelines of so much strife in the labour movement in recent years.

Dave Packer

All quotes are from *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, New Park publications.



Capitalism wreaks havoc on the environment

REFLEX

Marxism on green terrain

With Margaret Thatcher pronouncing herself the newest and most surprising convert to the cause of 'Green' politics, should marxists shy away from the political fight to defend our living and working environment? In this article, reprinted from *New Zealand Monthly Review*, JURRIAN BENDIAN argues that, on the contrary, only marxist analysis offers an explanation and a solution to the ecological crisis.

ACCORDING to a persistent myth, Marx was an uncritical admirer of capitalist technology and applauded all economic growth unreservedly. He is also supposed to have viewed technological development as a 'neutral' process unaffected by social forces.

By accepting Victorian concepts such as the 'conquest of nature', so the argument goes, he fell victim to the industrialist ideologies of his time. As a result, marxists are congenitally unable to account for ecological problems in a critical and scientific way. The pursuit of 'production for production's sake' and serious ecological problems in the so-called socialist countries are often cited as evidence for this view.

In reality, almost the exact opposite is true. By identifying labour as the central nexus between society and nature, Marx's theory of value made possible a balanced view of the relationship

between them for the first time.

The liberating potential of economic growth

For Marx, the supreme goal of humanity is humanity itself, and not some or another super-human principle like 'economic growth', 'inevitable progress', 'the meaning of history' or 'cosmic consciousness'. If our species has a goal, it is the maximum realisation of its potential; human wealth is wealth in human relations.

For that reason marxism attaches great importance to economic growth, and rejects 'zero growth society' as a reactionary utopia. Without a solid material infrastructure, the kind of 'rich social individuality' and individual freedom central to the marxist vision of socialism cannot develop.

The communism of poverty stunts human beings, traps them in the environment in which they happen to be born, and deprives them of the means to develop their knowledge and needs to the full. The real issue is not *whether* economic growth is desirable, but what *kind*.

Increasing the productivity of human labour (which is what economic growth boils down to) creates the possibility of a twofold liberation: liberation of people from coercion by nature and liberation from coercion by society. In human history, this liberation has taken place in an uneven and contradictory way.

In the measure that freedom from natural constraints was attained, social coercion took its place – a paradox which has preoccupied philosophers through the ages.

The gist of the marxist explanation of this paradox can be summarised as follows: when labour productivity increases to the point where a large and permanent surplus product exists, a section of society can be freed from the necessity to produce means of subsistence. This paves the way for a division between mental and manual labour.

Increasing specialisation allows artisans, engineers, scientists and technicians to devote themselves full time to finding ways to economise labour and raise its productivity. But so long as the social surplus product remains insufficient in quantity and quality, it cannot be shared in an egalitarian way. Class divisions and social inequality are inevitable.

Along with a growing division of productive labour, we consequently also see the emergence of slave-drivers, professional soldiers, tax collectors, ruling classes who appropriated the surplus product, ideologists justifying this exploitation, and all the other phenomena of social alienation bound up with class society.

Marxism accordingly formulates the liberating potential of economic growth as follows: when a sufficient level of material wealth has been attained, the divisions between producers and managers, mental and manual labour, ruling class and working class, and between town and country are no longer inevitable or necessary. All individuals can at that point be progressively freed from the compulsion to perform exhausting, demeaning and boring work.

The rule of the majority by a minority can then be replaced by a system in which all citizens have the time and opportunity to participate in managing society's affairs.

Marx's main thesis was that, by giving a tremendous boost to human productivity, capitalism would make this a realistic prospect for the first time. But it never occurred to him to see economic growth as anything more than a means to an end. Nor did he envisage the communism of abundance, which modern technology makes possible, as the automatic outgrowth of this technology.

In fact, Marx concludes his analysis of machinery with the statement that 'capitalist production... only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker.' (*Capital*, Vol 1, Penguin,

p. 638).

From the moment that a high level of labour productivity has been reached, the critical obstacle for human progress becomes primarily a social, and not a technological one: the radical transformation of the social structure and social consciousness, a socialist revolution. Because – as Marx puts it elsewhere:

'In the development of the productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being which, under the existing relations, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money)...' (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow ed. p. 60).

It was part and parcel of Marx's critique of capitalism that this mode of production is unable to achieve the maximum – let alone the optimum – development of the productive forces. A system based on private property and profit-maximisation also means tremendous waste of material and human resources.

A growing mass of unproductive labour; mass unemployment and mass starvation; over-production crises; imperialist wars and the 'development of underdevelopment'; a permanent arms economy; the deliberate destruction of agrarian 'surplus' – all this shows clearly that capitalist growth is light years away from what science and technology would make possible within the framework of a rationally planned economy.

Capitalism makes profitability the primary criterion of investment decisions. But profit only quantifies in money that which has a price and abstracts from everything that hasn't. It expresses the aim of realising a maximum difference between production costs and income of private firms, without regard for the effects on the community as a whole.

This has very peculiar results. For example, increasing private profits can reduce the total national income – a saving of (say) £1 million achieved through rationalisation and

redundancies can cause a loss of £2 million to the national economy (unemployment benefits and reduced aggregate demand, taking into account the 'multiplier effect').

Bourgeois cost-benefit analyses which impute an imaginary price to social and environmental costs (so-called 'externalities') rest on the assumption that human life is but a means to profit-maximisation.

On the other side, the laws of the market do not balance 'supply' and human physical or psychological demand: they only balance supply and 'effective demand' – disposable purchasing power. Effective consumer demand – itself distributed very unequally under capitalism – does not necessarily match human or social needs at all.

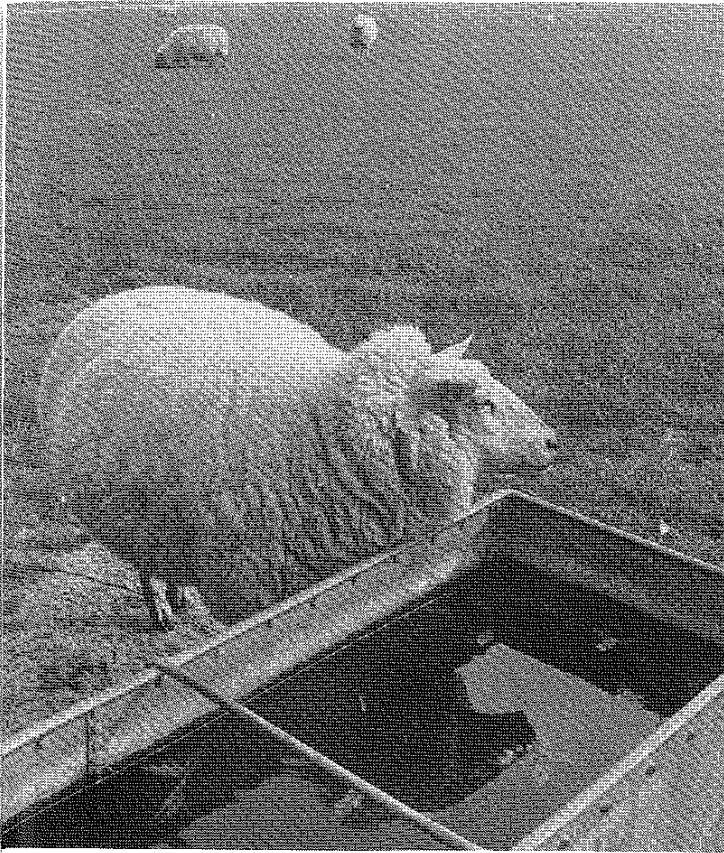
The building industry (say) can suffer a slump, because the market for luxury apartments has caved in, while tens of thousands of low-income families live in sub-standard rented accommodation. Effective demand is also subject to irrational influences from advertising and fashions, which are far more powerful than any 'environmental ethic' propagated by nature lovers.

Market society necessarily remains imprisoned in bourgeois



No safe space to play

A. MOORE/REFLEX



How contaminated was your dinner?

C.GUARITA/REFLEX

ideological prejudices because its very structure gives preference to individual over collective expenditures.

Pollution and market forces

There is an obvious connection between this general Marxist critique of market economy and environmental pollution. Market economy (of which capitalism is merely the most developed form) tends to plunder natural resources insofar as they have no price or a very low price.

Where land is expensive, because its fertility has been produced by millions of labour hours, commercialised agriculture treats it with great respect. But where the price is low or nominal, it creates monstrous waste and irreparable damage (erosion, deforestation and so on; nineteenth century New Zealand offers particularly graphic illustrations).

Rivers that remain public property and have no price are turned into factory sewers. Clean air, again without price, is fouled up by chimney smoke and exhaust gases. And so on, ad nauseam.

Another result of the logic of market economy is the strictly limited time-frame in which the investment decisions are made. A private firm strives for maximum profits in a limited period.

This creates a logic of 'apres nous le deluge'. [Loosely, 'who cares what happens later', ed.]

When the invested capital has been written off, and profits realised and productively or unproductively consumed, the reproduction cycle of capitalism is closed. But nature makes demands which do not recognise the laws of profit or effective demand, such as recycling waste products and restoring the ecological balance. Often it becomes clear only decades after a particular production process is introduced that its social costs outweigh by far the private wealth it generated.

Apologists for capitalist 'market forces' will often agree that

the system has inbuilt tendencies towards eco-destruction. But, they argue, these can be reduced to a minimum through state intervention. This is a poor argument.

It is exactly in the period from the 1930s, when state intervention in the west increased massively, that the biggest increases in environmental pollution have occurred. Capitalist politics follows capitalist economics.

The concept of the state as a 'neutral instrument' is a technocratic fantasy. In a capitalist society the state is a means for organising the common affairs of the capitalists.

Legal penalties and prohibitions compatible with these common affairs are typically put in place only after production processes and products have proved harmful. Typically this means after the damage has been done. And when the choice is between the ecologically or socially harmful production and unemployment, most workers will not willingly vote themselves out of a job.

These points indicate straight away why a socialist planned economy is in principle superior to a market economy from an ecological standpoint. It guarantees full employment and allows for resource allocation according to 'non-economic' criteria.

On the basis of democratically-centralised planning, the social costs and benefits flowing from alternative investment plans can be assessed in advance. The long-term effects for society and the biosphere can be taken into account.

This is possible because we are no longer dealing with thousands of competing private company budgets which remain 'business secrets' but with a single social budget which allocates resources on the basis of public and democratic discussion.

Technology and market forces

The famous report of the Club of Rome (1972) singled out three main ecological threats to uncontrolled growth: pollution; depletion of natural resources; and over-population. The flaw in these and subsequent alarmist documents is their narrowly bourgeois vision.

All their extrapolations are based on currently existing tendencies. They set out from the premise that our contemporary technology and society are the only possible ones. Writers like Barry Commoner have exposed the mythical nature of this assumption.

The technology developed by capitalist civilisation is not inherently and inevitably directed towards eco-destruction. Major technological innovations in some instances reduce overall pollution (replacement of fossil fuels by electric power, and so on).

The progress of the exact sciences has created a wide range of technological alternatives. Some options were chosen over others without proper regard for the environmental consequences, because the deciding criterion was the profitability of private firms.

Whoever concretely studies the causes of the rapid escalation of industrial pollution since the second world war will not blame 'technology' as such but the choice of particular technologies which, in retrospect, appears totally irresponsible. For example, is the motor car as we know it today the only possible or most efficient form of transport? Given the invention of public transport and cars powered by electricity, gas and steam, the answer is clearly no.

If Henry Ford & co had not conspired with the oil trusts, if the state had not funded or subsidised the building of motorways, then we would in all probability have ended up with a very different transport system.

Pollution in the post-capitalist world

The Chernobyl disaster has highlighted once again the fact that environmental pollution is very real in the so-called socialist countries. The environmental despoilation workers have to cope

with there has been detailed by writers like Komarov and Smil.

Does this undermine the viability of socialism in the classical marxist sense? It depends. Many self-styled 'marxist-leninists' are committed to defending post-capitalist countries, and the bureaucracies that rule them, through thick and thin as 'beacons of socialism'. They obviously have a major ideological problem on their hands.

If indeed socialism has been built in a single country – the USSR, China, East Germany or whatever – how can 'socialist pollution' and 'socialist eco-destruction' there be explained away?

On the other hand, those marxists who stick with Marx's and Lenin's internationalist concept of socialism – a global society based on workers' self-management and a form of political democracy superior to bourgeois-parliamentary democracy – do not have the problem.

We are at liberty to see so-called socialist societies for what they are – transitional formations, bureaucratised workers' states. We can analyse their achievements and shortcomings using exactly the same critical standards and scientific methods that Marx used to analyse capitalist society.

Whoever analyses ecological problems in the post-capitalist world in an historical and materialist way will quickly arrive at the conclusion that these problems stem mainly from the interplay of three factors.

The first and most obvious one is backwardness. For reasons which Marx and Engels did not foresee, the socialist and world revolution gained its initial victories in backward countries ('backward' as measured by the average level of labour productivity, infant mortality rates and other indices of material culture). This has had very grave consequences for attempts at socialist construction in these countries, not least of which is a heavy reliance on capitalist industrial technologies.

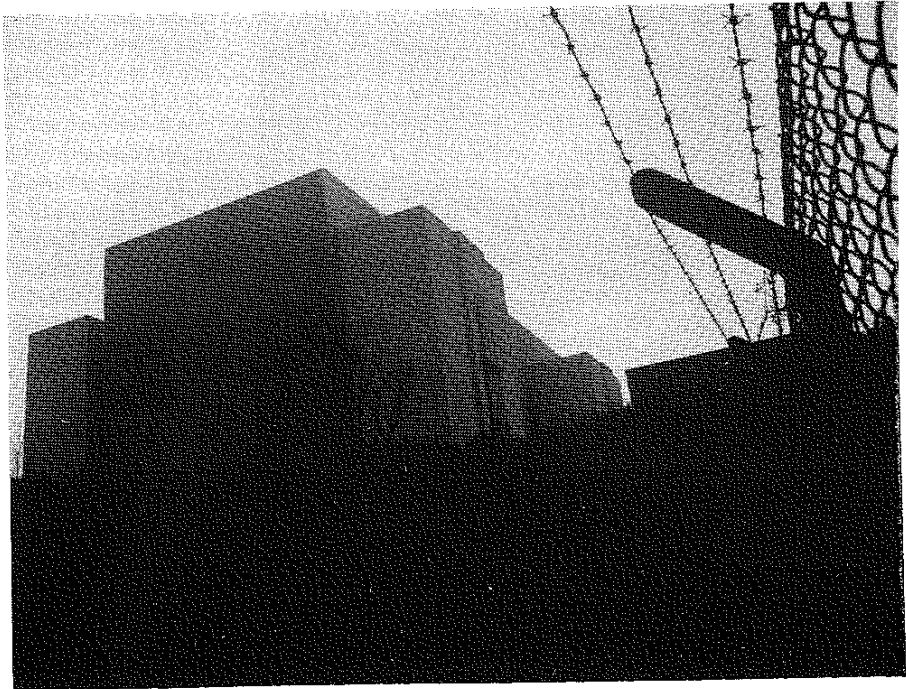
Secondly, although the market (in marxist jargon the 'law of value'), no longer dominates the allocation of resources there, it still exerts a major influence on economic life – both in the sense that price mechanisms, profit criteria and commodity production have only been partially abolished, and in the sense of the pressures and constraints exerted by the capitalist world market (and, more generally, imperialism).

Finally, a host of ecologically insane planning decisions can be blamed directly on bureaucratically-centralised planning and the special interests of the ruling bureaucratic castes in the so-called socialist countries. When the environmental impact of different planning options is not given due consideration, it cannot be publicly discussed, or indeed remains a 'state secret', mother nature and ordinary working people are bound to suffer.

Some conclusions

The 'greens' have often criticised marxists and socialists for ignoring ecological issues. A lot of this criticism is justified. But to blame this neglect on Marx or marxism is mistaken and wrong-headed.

The marxist analysis of capitalism and class society provides a comprehensive, systemic explanation of the global ecological crisis, which is refreshingly free from moralism and mysticism.



C. GUARITA/REFLEX

To hold marxism responsible for environmental despoliation in the post-capitalist world is a bit like condemning modern medicine and calling for a return to institutionalised quackery – on the ground that so many patients could not be cured over the last 70 years due to inadequate medical treatment (admittedly official marxist-leninist ideology has much in common with institutionalised quackery – as many Soviet and Chinese marxists will nowadays agree).

The salient points to be made are that socialism cannot be built on rubbish heaps, and that ecological problems cannot wait until the revolution. By implication, socialists cannot afford to leave green politics to the 'greens'.

The guerrilla warfare of environmentalists against capitalist polluters and eco-vandals is admirable and often heroic. But unless it is integrated into a socialist programme it remains limited to resistance. And unless it is linked to a broader anti-capitalist struggle and strategy, the battle for a healthy living and working environment gets bogged down in liberal-technocratic quangos and parliamentary cretinism.

The chief political weakness of green parties is their lack of clarity about what social agency can bring about the radical social-structural changes which the ecological crisis demands. This lack of clarity flows from a deficient analysis of the social system which continues to dominate the globe.

That system is capitalism, and if we analyse its history, the answer to the political question is clear: only the working class has the power and inclination to do away with capitalism and the ability to replace it with an ecologically viable alternative.

That is why a red-green programme is needed which is rooted in the labour movement. The clearer the environmental crimes of the 'more market' society are demonstrated, and the more an ecological consciousness grows among ordinary working people, the more the awareness of the need for revolutionary social change will gain ground.

Footnote

This article was originally published in *New Zealand Monthly Review*, PO Box 13-483, Armagh, Christchurch, New Zealand.

'Policy review' junks the old trotskyism

The politics of *Socialist Organiser* have changed considerably over the last few years, and the issue of 15 September contains the latest major leap.

Socialist Organiser's leading supporters appear to have reached a hiatus over their previous characterisation of the Soviet Union as a 'degenerated workers' state'. A recent editorial, 'Reassessing the Eastern Bloc', promises a full discussion on the issue – but adds ominously 'some of us think that some term like "bureaucratic collectivism" is the best approximation. Others would prefer "state capitalism"'. It appears that 'old orthodoxy' has been found guilty before trial – leaving only sentence to be pronounced.

A central feature of trotskyism since the 1930s has been its analysis of the Soviet Union as a 'degenerated workers' state'. This means that while the property relations arising from the socialist revolution of 1917 remain (i.e. a nationalised and planned economy and a state monopoly of foreign trade), under Stalin the bureaucracy usurped power and smashed workers' democracy.

As a consequence, Trotsky and his followers called for *political revolution* in the USSR against the bureaucracy, while at the same time defending the gains of the October revolution against imperialism, independently of and against the bureaucracy.

After the second world war two main views existed on the social transformation of eastern Europe after the Soviet victory over German imperialism. The majority view adopted by the third Congress of the Fourth International in 1951 was that the USSR remained a degenerated workers' state and the 'Peoples Democracies' in eastern Europe were deformed workers' states – i.e. states with the same property relations as the USSR, but which had had a stalinist state structure imposed upon them rather than arising from the degeneration of a working-class revolution as in the USSR.

Adherents of the view that the class nature of these states was either a capitalist class atop a statified economy or a new kind of ruling class left the Fourth International, and most took a neutralist position during the Korean war. Some subsequently attempted to retain a revolutionary perspective *despite* their views on the USSR; others drifted to the right or even ultra-right.

There are two main aspects to these debates – first, as to the class nature of these states and



how they came about, and secondly (but closely connected) what the programme and tasks of revolutionaries should be in relation to them. While nearly all those who claim to be trotskyists have agreed on their characterisation of the class nature of these states, they have had very different views on the nature of their transformation and the tasks which follow from it.

On some occasions sections of the movement have failed to defend workers' rights, or even fellow trotskyists, in their eagerness to support stalinist or nationalist-led revolutions, but *SO* extrapolate backwards from these important differences to argue that the characterisation of the states themselves is wrong.

Such theoretical methods led to *SO's* lurch to the right, causing it to rupture in 1984. Those of us who opposed this degeneration were involved in the establishment of *Socialist Viewpoint*, and later *Socialist Outlook*, and the fortnightly *Labour Briefing*.

We wrote at the time, 'with the cancer of sectarianism established, further decline and degeneration must be the immediate prospect'. The *SO* editorial board after the split had a freer hand to follow its own path.

The first victim of their 'policy review' was to deny the progressive nature of many strug-

gles against imperialism and practically abandon the principle of national self-determination. *SO* must be the only trotskyist group in the world to have addressed an open letter to a revolutionary nationalist leader (Gerry Adams) calling on an armed resistance movement (the IRA) to lay down its guns.

SO argues rightly that the world has changed since 1916; but far from developing upon Lenin, they throw the movement back to Kautskyism. They claim in this article that post-war capitalism has been capable of a generalised expansion of productive forces and that the workers' movement is organically developing with it.

From this they draw the conclusion that to the extent that bourgeois democracies (or even capitalist police-states such as South Korea) allow more openings for working class organisation and democratic rights they are more 'progressive' than the workers' states, which are historical anachronisms. Logically this could infer that we are no longer in a period when successful working class revolution is possible, if we ever were. This is the evolutionary socialism of the Second International complete with its Eurocentric arrogance.

The final question that needs to be asked is: why the change of line? *SO* gives no reason why the change should be necessary *at this time*. In fact, 'orthodox trotskyist' theory deals with the current battles within the Soviet bureaucracy better than any 'new class' theory can.

The reality is that the change has more to do with the organisational dynamics of *SO* than with the dynamic of world history. The anti-sovietism which has increasingly crept into *SO's* material is finally being consummated with a change of line on the workers' states which sets the seal on the break with trotskyism implicit in their politics for several years.

Groupings which develop a line and perspective to satisfy their own organisational requirements rather than the class struggle are called *sects*.

Socialist Organiser is at this time a rightward-moving one. Its supporters should understand the significance of this debate and be warned about the method and political direction in which they are being led.

Mick Woods

Pete Firmin

Red November

This November is the seventieth anniversary of the German socialist revolution of 1918. Here PHIL HEARSE tells the story of the German workers' struggle, and analyses the lessons for the socialist movement today.

IT IS A notorious myth that there has never been a socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist west. There has. In November 1918, 70 years ago this month, the German workers rose up and created soviet power – the power of elected workers' councils – all over Germany.

For several months, until early 1919, it was touch and go whether this developing German revolution would win out. Its eventual defeat, compounded by further defeats in the 1920s, paved the way for Hitler's rise to power, the second world war, and ensured the isolation of the young workers' state in Russia. It was a pivotal event in twentieth century history.

The November 1918 uprising came at the end of more than a year of increasing turmoil in Germany, as the defeat of the German army at the front became obvious and the privations of the workers at home became unbearable.

In April 1917 there were mass strikes against food price increases, and then in January 1918 came a mass political strike against the annexations being demanded by the German government at the Brest Litovsk peace negotiations with the Soviet government. Fifty thousand workers were sent to the front as a reprisal.

The world war had led to a split in the mass German workers' party, the SDP (Social Democrats). The anti-war left wing had been expelled in January 1917, and in April of that year formed the Independent Social Democrats (USPD). This party had hundreds of thousands of members, in the main revolutionary-minded workers. The Spartakusbund of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht was the extreme left wing of the USPD, but only had a few thousand followers.

At the end of September 1918, with the German armies on the point of collapse, the General Staff officers visited the Kaiser, and demanded the handing over of power to a 'democratic' government (led by Prince Max von Baden) – as the only way to prevent 'anarchy'.

But before this government could be stabilised, the sailors of the Kiel naval base mutinied on November 4. To prevent the sailors being crushed, the USPD leaders in Kiel decided to seize power in the town. That evening a Workers and Sailors Council was formed to administer the local area. The signal for

revolution had been given.

In the following days the revolution spread all along the northern coast. Hamburg rose on 5 November; Bremen, Altona, Rendsburg and Lockstedt on the 6th; Cologne, Munich, Hanover and Braunschweig on the 7th. In each of these places, workers and soldiers councils declared themselves the legitimate power.

The focus of events now moved to the capital, Berlin. The key forces here were the USPD left wing, led by Spartacists Liebknecht and Meyer, and the powerful revolutionary shop stewards movement, the non-party *Obleute*.

The *Obleute* decided to wait for 11 November to act, but Liebknecht pre-empted them



Liebknecht rallies the workers

with a call for action on the 8th. The indecision about the date was immaterial: the workers rose on the 9th. Thousands rushed to the Reichstag, the parliament building. It was now that the right wing leaders of the 'old party' – the Social Democrats (SPD) intervened, and a fatal blow was struck against the revolution.

As the workers besieged the Reichstag, at 2pm one of the two main SPD leaders, Scheidemann, rushed out and 'proclaimed' a republic – and his support for the workers. The SPD was taking the leadership of the movement in order to head it off. At 4pm Karl Liebknecht arrived at the Reichstag to proclaim the *socialist* republic – but some of his thunder had already been stolen by the SPD leaders.

Now the question of *government* – who was to lead the revolution – was posed. The SPD, led by Ebert and Scheidemann, proposed a

coalition SPD-USPD government based on

- all power to the workers' councils;
- socialisation of industry.

Their proposal was for three ministers from each party. After painful indecision, the USPD accepted this proposal. Counter-revolution had been brought into the heart of the leadership of the revolution. Instead of taking all power themselves, the USPD allowed a government to be formed which, with three SPD and two from the right wing of the USPD, gave effective control to the SPD.

It was a fateful mistake. The SPD leadership, which had collaborated with the war, now presented itself as 'revolutionary'. SPD leaders joined the workers councils everywhere and in many places took the leadership of them. In a revolution, the worst social democratic traitors can become 'revolutionaries' – for the moment.

Although a separate 'revolutionary executive' of seven SPD, seven USPD and seven soldiers was set up, this was a only a pressure group on the six-person government, led by Ebert, which held the real power. Because of SPD prevarication, by December no moves in favour of the workers, for example socialisation of industry, had in fact been taken. The bourgeois state and economy were still intact.

A crucial conflict now developed between the SPD leaders and the left. A national congress of workers' and soldiers' deputies was due to be held in Berlin on December 30-31. The SPD leaders decided to propose the election of a 'constituent assembly'. This body was clearly going to be counterposed to the power of the workers' councils – in effect it would be a bourgeois parliament which would be used to crush the councils.

While the Spartacist left demanded all power to the councils, the USPD leaders wavered. At the congress itself, which the SPD packed with its supporters and to which Luxemburg and Liebknecht were unable to gain admittance, some USPD delegates voted *both* for the resolutions in favour of 'all power to the councils' *and* for national elections to a constituent assembly. In consequence Ebert and Scheidemann won the day. National elections were called: the 'democratic counter-revolution' was under way.

Political events were moving rapidly. Frustrated by the government's paralysis, the USPD withdrew from the government on 29 December, leaving the SPD in power alone.

The Spartacist left of the USPD, exasperated by the compromises of the party leadership, left the party, to declare an independent Communist Party (together with the ultra-left IKD based in the north of the country). The masses, especially in Berlin, were growing more and more embittered by the government's betrayal of their struggle.

Capitalising on their victory at the congress of workers councils, the SPD leaders now moved to provoke the left and inflict a further defeat on it. On 4 January 1919, the Berlin police chief, a USPD member called Eichhorn, was dismissed. The workers in Berlin saw the sacking as a direct attack on them – because Eichhorn was a supporter of the revolution.

Eichhorn's dismissal was met by demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of workers, many of them armed. In this situation, sections of the USPD, Spartacists and revolutionary shop stewards decided to try to seize power. A 'revolutionary committee' was set up which appealed for the workers to rise up in armed revolt and overthrow the government.

Although Spartacist leaders like Liebknecht signed the appeal, it was not sanctioned by the party Central Committee. Rosa Luxemburg, in particular, opposed the move as an ultra-left adventure.

Revolutionary insurrection is not to be undertaken lightly. The revolutionaries in Berlin were intoxicated by the sight of tens of thousands of armed workers demanding that the government be got rid of. But they over-estimated the relationship of forces. The workers outside Berlin were not yet ready for armed insurrection.

The Bolshevik leader Karl Radek – secretly in Germany co-ordinating with the Spartacists – was firmly against the uprising. He compared it to the Russian 'July days' in 1917, when sec-



Rising of the (armed) proletariat

tions of the Petrograd workers wanted an uprising, but the Bolsheviks opposed them. 'We led the masses into a retreat then,' said Radek, 'and we were much stronger than you are today.'

The Berlin 'revolutionary committee' made a second fatal mistake: it dithered. While SPD leaders Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann plotted with the army generals to crush the uprising, the revolutionary committee allowed itself to be drawn into 'negotiations' with Ebert. Once a revolution has been called, then it has to be fought out to the finish – not stopped for negotiations. Luxemburg, although an opponent of the action, demanded that it be carried out to the end, once it had been launched.

It was one of her last actions: on January 15 she and Karl Liebknecht were arrested. Instead of being taken to prison, they were taken to the Eden Hotel, headquarters of the infamous Garde-Kavallerie Schutzen Division, one of the few regiments still fiercely loyal to the old Imperial regime. Luxemburg and Liebknecht had their skulls smashed in by rifle butts while 'trying to escape'.

The January uprising initiated civil war. Fifty thousand workers lost their lives in the struggle. It was March before the workers uprising was quenched throughout Germany. The crushing of the uprising by the army's bullets signalled the end of the revolution, and the establishment of a bourgeois republic.

What lessons are to be drawn from the experience of Red November? The biggest error was that of the USPD in allow-

ing the SPD leadership to muscle in on the November uprising and form a joint government. But the majority of the Spartacist left in the USPD was consistently ultra-left, despite the efforts of leaders like Rosa Luxemburg and Paul Levi. Splitting the USPD in the middle of the revolutionary upsurge was arguably premature – perhaps it would have been better for the revolutionary marxist leaders to remain in the USPD and try to win it over from the left. The January uprising was certainly premature; indeed it was fatal.

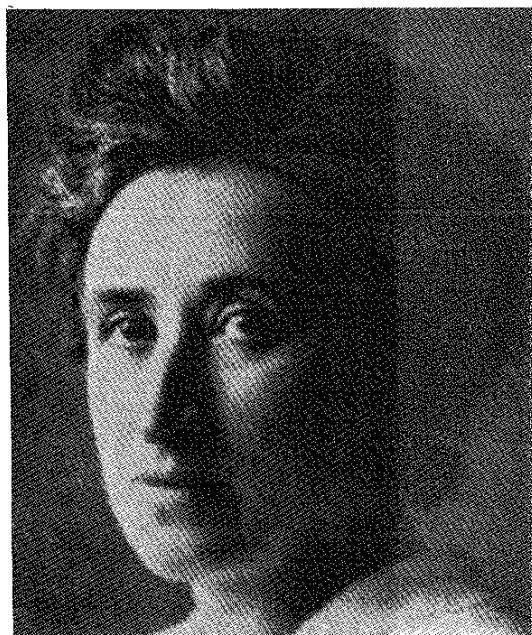
The German workers went into the November revolution led by the old SPD, a reformist party, and the USPD – a centrist party divided between a semi-revolutionary left, and a non-revolutionary right wing.

The mass revolutionary party of the German workers was to be created only *after* the 1918-19 revolution – the German Communist Party (KPD), formed after the split of the USPD in 1920, (the left going over to the Spartacists to form the KPD, and the right going back to the SPD).

The defeat of the 1918-19 revolution showed that social democracy, when the crunch comes, will side with the brutal repression of the workers, rather than with socialist revolution. It was the vivid demonstration of this fact which split the USPD and created a revolutionary Communist party of hundreds of thousands.

Further reading:

- Communism in Germany under the Weimar Republic*, Ben Fowkes, Macmillan, 1984.
- The Lost Revolution*, Chris Harman, Bookmarks, 1982.
- Fascism in Germany* (vol. 1), Robert Black (Robin Blick), Steyne Press.



Rosa: murdered as the revolution was crushed

Tories stick to the 'soft' targets

HARRY SLOAN comments on the antics of the Tory Party conference in Brighton

Like a Kenyan front-runner in a 10,000 metres race, Tory leaders found it hard to avoid complacency at this year's party conference. Yet they managed to keep their eye on some ticklish tactical problems.

So much ground had already been conceded to them by the shambolic collapse of the old SDP-Liberal Alliance and by the Labour conference capitulation to the politics of individualism, that there seemed little left to do but pick off some predictable easy targets, wave a few familiar populist banners, keep quiet on the more outrageous measures already in the pipeline, and gloat – with the aid of copious quantities of food and booze.

It was the Labour conference above all which set the scene for another Tory victory whoop – culminating in nearly ten minutes of calculated hysteria in the annual standing ovation for Thatcher's speech.

Thatcher herself poked fun at Neil Kinnock's conversion to the virtues of the market economy:

'For half an hour or so it seemed he had seen the light and would shortly be calling his memoirs "I Did it Her Way". Whatever happened to socialism?'

The Blackpool events have clearly convinced Thatcher even more firmly that few of the sweeping changes from her period of government are likely to be reversed by a Labour government, even in the event of one being elected.

The main thrust of the Tory political 'revolution' – the systematic privatisation of the state sector, demolition of the welfare state, throwing an ever-increasing burden onto the individual and the family unit, is now largely unchallenged.

With no significant opposition worthy of the name within the Tory party itself, there were no real battles for Thatcher to fight this year.

The nearest to a serious difference of opinion was over the state of the economy, where Nigel Lawson's calculations have gone so seriously wrong. Soaring interest rates have clobbered precisely those relatively prosperous, employed, mortgage-paying families that Thatcher has sought to cultivate as an electoral base. Last spring's tax cuts have been wiped out, leaving all but the super-rich worse off.

Amid evidence that the credit-led consumer

boom has also produced a growing balance of payments crisis, while inflation is touching the 6 per cent mark, innocent observers might have expected Lawson to suffer a rough ride rather than bask in a standing ovation. Instead the criticism was largely confined to fringe meeting mutterings from a handful of largely irrelevant has-beens, including John Biffen and Leon Brittan.

One conspicuous retreat however was on what had once been expected to be a radical review of the national health service following months of secret cabinet-level discussions.

Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke made the focal point of his speech the announcement of a partial climbdown in the form of an extra £138m towards the cost of the nurses' pay regrading.

This proved to be a handy diversion from the impending battle over the imposition of hefty charges for optical and dental checks, and from a much more spectacular climbdown, when Clarke went on to claim that 'we never had the slightest intention of privatising the health service'.

This came in stark contrast to the threats of swift and far-reaching changes in the NHS that were made by Thatcher herself earlier this year, and also to the tub-thumping bravado with which Cecil Parkinson insisted that the Tories would privatise the coal industry if re-elected for a fourth term.

Every Tory delegate loves to hate Arthur Scargill and the miners: but, despite strenuous efforts by right wing think-tanks, few see the NHS as an easy target. Thatcher has judged that it is still too popular to undergo the full treatment.

Meanwhile Kenneth Baker kept quiet about his plans to impose new charges on students,



Thatcher: leading her revolution.

sticking to the safer ground of threatening schoolkids with basins full of religious and pro-imperialist propaganda (on 'Britain's influence for good throughout the empire in the 18th and 19th centuries').

Easy populist jibes were also aimed at British Rail (threatened with privatisation), the unemployed, single parent families, and of course criminals (whom delegates, as usual wanted to hang, if not disembowel).

Yet ministers were careful not to raise the profile of much less popular measures – such as the Poll Tax, and the Housing Bill.

The Thatcher offensive has been ruthless but always sufficiently astute in picking off sections one by one, and driving careful wedges between the interest groups under the Tory hammer. This conference underlined the same leadership approach: while delegates indulged in profit-taking and self-congratulation, the party of capital was laying plans to carry on into the 1990s.

Only a revitalised labour movement that turns back to the collective, class politics of socialism and involves itself in working class struggles can offer a serious challenge to the Thatcher juggernaut. So long as Kinnock and new realism rule the roost at Walworth Road, the Tories will keep on laughing from Brighton all the way to the bank.



Repression of Salvadorean workers has increased dramatically.

El Salvador: the next revolution?

El Salvador: Testament of Terror

Joe Fish and Cristina Sganga, Zed Books, 1988, £6.95.

Reviewed by
MARIA ASTORGA

FROM THE TITLE of this book, you might expect it to be written for human rights minded liberals who support 'the people' of El Salvador but shy away from the word 'revolution'. *Testament of Terror* is certainly not like that. Informatively written, interspersed with quotes and individual stories, it succeeds – like few other books – in bringing to the reader the reality of a revolutionary war under a military dictatorship, even one disguised by a civilian president.

Written before the most recent elections it deals with the then Christian Democrat government and the hopes it raised in 1984 both for the people of El Salvador and for the US

government which believed it had found the right democratic façade. Now all has collapsed, the masks have slipped and the extreme right-wing has retaken control it had never totally lost.

This book provides a worthwhile analysis of the level of repression under Duarte: on the one hand a more selective repression of popular movement leaders, and on the other hand the indiscriminate bombings of a number of areas with no other purpose than to spread terror.

The country is now on the brink of irreparable destruction: 'Out of a total population in El Salvador of around 5.5 million, almost 70,000 non-combatant civilians have so far been assassinated; 7,000 more have 'disappeared': one million are estimated to have fled the country, and some 700,000 are internal refugees, displaced from their homes by the violence; in addition, there are at present more than 1,000 political prisoners. This means that one-third of the entire population has suffered directly as a result

of the policies of this and previous governments in the conduct of the war.

'A state of siege has been in force for six years (longer than the Constitution itself). Arbitrary arrest and confessions extracted by "extra-judicial inquisition" (in practice, torture) are legalised in the penal code.

'Sixty per cent of the population live in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty; sixty per cent too are un- or under-employed; twenty per cent of the schools lie abandoned. Servicing the external debt accounts for more than half the country's foreign exchange earnings, inflation has compounded since the war began in 1979, and while wage levels are stagnant, the cost of living has tripled in the same period.'

Testament of Terror is a very readable background to the present events. 'In the old days, the armed forces ran the country for the benefit of the oligarchy; now the Christian Democratic Party runs the country for the benefit of the Reagan administration... Duarte's own role in this strategy is twofold: he opens the door politically for the military to obtain the aid it needs from the United States, and he plays the main managerial role in the counter-insurgency project.'

This is why the US is embarrassed by Duarte's political collapse. It is harder for them to justify support to a crude

military dictatorship which criticises the 'low intensity warfare' strategy implemented by the States for not effective enough to rid the country of its revolutionary movement.

The so-called '1966 promotion', made up of officers who graduated in that year and who are particularly ferocious right-wingers, has managed to take control of most of the commanding posts of the army and promise 'total war' against the population, expecting some 100,000 dead in six months.

Though the US could easily prevent this by simply imposing an economic embargo (as they did for Nicaragua in May 1985), they do not act for lack of a decent alternative acceptable to Congress.

The main weakness of the book lies in its lack of analysis of the revolutionary and popular organisations. It is regrettable as there are very few recent books on El Salvador. Nevertheless *Testament of Terror* covers in less than 150 pages all the key elements to understanding on El Salvador. It is undoubtedly a harrowing documentary, but well worth reading.

This is a turning point for a country which might well be the place of the next revolution, because 'the workers and the poor and humble must take the initiative because we don't want to go on living with this war which is draining our blood.'

Whale Nation
Heathercote Williams,
Jonathon Cape, £8.95,
pbk.

Reviewed by
COLIN SMITH

'From space, the planet is blue.

From space, the planet is the territory
Not of humans, but of the whale.'

WITH THIS antidote to the hubris of *Homo sapiens* Heathercote Williams sets the tone for this unusual book. It is part celebratory poem, part a stunning photographic album, and part scientific and historical anthology about the natural history of cetaceans – whales, dolphins, and porpoises – and the catastrophic degradations they have suffered at the hands and harpoons of the international whaling industry.

Although Aristotle wrote sympathetically of dolphins over two thousand years ago and

whale hunting has been a major enterprise for nearly two hundred years relatively little scientific knowledge of whales and their related species was garnered until after the second world war. They are still creatures of intriguing mystery in many ways but researchers have revealed them to be animals of possibly high intelligence (their brains appear to rival ours in relative size and complexity) with an array of subtle and often spectacular sexual and social rituals, a voice that not only can mimic human speech but may allow them to communicate with each other over a range of hundreds of underwater miles and with a talent for altruism towards others of their species and even towards people.

In addition, baleen whales (those that feed by filtering seawater through the huge curtains of whalebone they have instead of teeth) play a major rôle in maintaining the balance of the oceans' ecosystem.

Whales have existed for about fifty million years but it has taken the whaling fleets of both

capitalist and workers' states little over fifty years to slaughter many species to the brink of extinction and although there is now supposed to be a moratorium on commercial whaling, hundreds are still being killed in the name of 'scientific research'.

The point of all this carnage was that most of the larger species of whales were swimming storehouses of fuel and raw materials for manufacturing industry. Except in Japan where whales and dolphin meat have long been eaten as delicacies, food for human consumption has never been the major goal of the whale hunter. Whale oil was the oil and petrol of the nineteenth century and whalebone the forerunner of modern plastics. But every part of a carcass was used to supply industries as diverse as button and bomb making, photography and pharmaceuticals, soaps and sausage skins and even today sperm oil is used as a lubricant in missiles and spacecraft.

This infamous history of ruthless exploitation and slaughter is the reason why saving the whale has long been a

cause célèbre of the conservation and environmental movements. The whale has become a symbol as it is in William's clear, vivid and very accessible book, of the unexploitative against the continuing depredations of industry both capitalist and bureaucratic.

Williams might be overly romantic at times and he offers nothing in the way of a solution but it is the sad fact that one of the myriad failures of social democratic politics is that the labour movement cannot creditably claim to be the natural home, which it should be, for anyone seriously wanting to do something about environmental issues and even the revolutionary left has yet to show it is really concerned with these problems.

It would not be right to be catastrophic about the environment but it might be good to read Heathercote Williams' book and ponder the ominous aphorisms of the pre-war Viennese satirist Karl Kraus quoted by Williams elsewhere 'Progress is society's pyrrhic victory over nature'.

The Lowest of the Low
Gunter Wallraff;
translated by Martin
Chalmers, introduction
by A Sivanandan.
Methuen, 1988. £4.99.

Reviewed by
JANE KELLY

IN THE early nineteenth century women and children worked in intolerable conditions in coal mines: later, legislation banned the more barbaric practices of British capitalism in its pursuit of profit. In twentieth century Germany foreign workers – *gastarbeiter* – (mostly Turks, but also Italians, Yugoslavs, Poles) are performing dangerous, filthy and exhausting jobs for a pittance. The situation bears comparison with the early nineteenth century.

Gunter Wallraff's book and film *The Lowest of the Low* documents the experience of such workers by means of hidden video cameras and recording equipment. Assuming the identity of a Turkish worker, Ali Wallraff (his name now used as a verb in Swedish meaning – to investigate), he spent two years experiencing first hand the life of an immigrant contract worker fulfilling jobs no German would

touch.

Working shifts of 10 or 12 hours and double shifts of up to 22 hours, he clears toxic metal dust from steel mills, and cleans coking plants and nuclear power plants – exposed in the process to carcinogenic waste and radiation. Such Turkish workers have no rights, little pay and no choice as to the hours they are forced to work.

Meanwhile the contractors make fortunes by providing internationally-known industrial firms with workers who are invisible. They are offered no protective clothing despite working in situations which are lethal. Indeed on one occasion Ali is forced to hand over his own safety helmet to a German worker who had forgotten to bring his to work.

Exposed to swirling toxic dust, sometimes so thick that he couldn't see his own hands held up to his face, in extremes of intense heat and cold, long arduous hours and constant racist abuse, the immigrant workers, not surprisingly, suffer from severe bronchial and lung problems, exhaustion and depression.

Wallraff exposes a devastating situation which he finally tests to the limit. He sets up the contractor – Adler – by getting friends to impersonate safety

officers from a nearby nuclear plant looking for eight reliable workers to clean out a blocked pipe. The workers are to be exposed to radiation '30 times the allowable annual dose'. Adler agrees: he will provide human labour which he treats as completely expendable – plenty more where that came from. He further agrees to use men who must return immediately to Turkey. Any 'complications' such as radiation sickness must not be connected to the nuclear plant.

The film, shown on Channel 4 in October, uses coverage shot secretly from a camera concealed inside a bag. We see workers trying to deal with the contractor who constantly underpays and swindles them; the horrifying work itself; the racism endured by the immigrants and finally the nuclear deal agreed by Adler.

Combined with this secret black and white footage accompanied by recorded conversations, are coloured images of Wallraff/Ali as commentator talking direct to the camera, describing his experiences and also images of the daily lives of immigrants, for example the tearful farewell as one of them boards the coach to return to Turkey.

What Wallraff/Ali exposes is the underbelly, the hidden exploitation which is part and

parcel of the capitalist system. And racism, as Sivanandan correctly points out in the introduction, 'keeps it from the light of day'. It is this racism that divides the Turks from the rest of the German working class. The Turks do work which few Germans would do, in conditions which few would accept, for wages which few could survive on. But these conditions and wages are used to drive down wages in general with contract labour often being introduced to replace full-time employees to avoid all those expensive rights like safety equipment, sick pay, medical insurance and weekends off!

The book and film expose such practices in Germany: but we should not assume that such things are confined to that country. Nor should we be complacent about the future here. The Tory plan to increase the profitability of capital by increased flexibility at work, by lowering safety standards and by the introduction of Employment Training, most likely to become compulsory, along with their ability to further divide the working class by the propagation of racism and sexism, means that Thatcher's much vaunted 'return to Victorian values' could also mean a return to Victorian working conditions here.



'I only see them in the doctor's waiting room...'

Women's periodicals...

Reviewed by
BARBARA GREEN

AT THE dentist, on the tube, in the bath. At some time or other we have all been tempted by the gloss, the endless articles about orgasms, the dreadful recipes and of course the 'problem pages' of women's magazines.

But it was for a serious purpose – an article in *Socialist Outlook* – that I recently bought a selection of them from my local newsagent: *Bella*, *Best*, *Riva* (now collapsed), *New Woman*, *Options*, *Woman*. And I threw in a copy of *Everywoman* and *Spare Rib* to assuage my guilt.

There is something unnerving about sitting yourself down at one time with so many of these magazines. Pictures of the 'perfect' woman grinning at you from every front cover – I found myself comparing the women (to each other, not to myself, I hasten to add!) The most striking thing about them apart from the fact they nearly all are white, is their remarkable teeth – I can honestly say I don't know anyone with teeth like them!

On a quick flick through, the magazines (apart from *Everywoman* and *Spare Rib*) are

all fairly similar, though definitely aimed at different 'kinds' of women.

There are articles about fertility, shopping, fashion, knitting pets and husbands, combined with hundreds more pictures of women who must spend every spare minute and penny at the dentists!

At least women these days do not have to choose only between *Woman's Own* and *Cosmopolitan*: the choice is vast. However the competition is already taking its toll: the first victim is *Riva*, clearly intended as your 'beauty and brains' business women's read, with enthusiastic articles about the channel tunnel (after it's built, we'll be able to buy houses in northern France and still commute to the 'city'!). There is nauseating crap written by a selection of 'new men' about what makes them tick; adverts for £600 coats, a leaflet for the Oxfam credit card, and recipes for 'fresh radish, orange and chicory salad'. I ask you! I did not like *Riva*, but I don't think they were trying to build their circulation on embittered feminist local government workers like me.

I turned downmarket for my next read: *Bella*. This one is a real hoot, aimed primarily at the slightly 'older' woman, but hoping to attract old and young

'housewives'. Again we have recipes, but they are more about how to make a stick of celery satisfy your hunger when you actually want a pound of spuds.

Bella is very concerned about our weight. They have a crusade about 'fat Fergie'. Week in, week out, pictures about 'fat Fergie', who, according to *Bella* is not only fat but also ugly. She is not only fat and ugly, but also irresponsible – leaving her new-born brat in Britain with various nannies while she hops off to wear hideous dresses and shake the hands of the Australian masses.

The message is clear: if you 'let yourself' get fat, you will become ugly and irresponsible mothers too. Then, as night follows day, your hubby will disappear with his secretary who (at this moment at least) is not fat! Subtlety is not *Bella's* strong point.

Another 'must' for the traditional woman's magazine is the handy hints section, written by keen and generous readers. Ask yourself, what kind of woman spends her time and energy sending in this little tibia: 'If you hang a load of conkers in your wardrobe you will never be troubled by moths again'. What?? How did the unnamed reader discover this earth-shattering fact?

Life would not be the same without the problem page. Even in the traditional magazines, sex dominates. Sex with husband, male lover, male next-door-neighbour, brother-in-law, male doctor, and so on and so forth. They have even begun to tackle what to do if you find out husband is gay or a transvestite. Everything except sex between women. Either lesbians do not have problems, or lesbianism is still too risky to be discussed or even recognised.

You don't get all this rubbish in magazines like *Spare Rib* or *Everywoman*; but as most of us will admit (though often only in private) they are a touch turgid and can be a little too 'worthy' in the way they deal with aspects of our lives.

OK, so there is not a lot to laugh about in most women's lives – the Tories have seen to that. But there is a huge gap in the market. An entertaining feminist magazine may not be able to match the circulation of *Options*, but it would at least allow women who are actively involved in politics to *relax* and have a good read!

If there are any rich feminists interested in backing such a magazine, I volunteer to be the 'agony sister'.



Children of the Arbat
Anatoli Rybakov,
Century Hutchinson,
£12.95

Reviewed by
JANE WELLS

ANATOLI Rybakov was a Russian Jew, born in 1911, exiled to Siberia in 1932 for 'assisting in counter revolutionary activity'; released in 1935 but forced to travel from village to village looking for work since he was banned from settling in the big cities. He enlisted to fight with the Red Army in the second world war in 1941. His first novel, published in 1950, won the Stalin prize for literature.

Children of the Arbat,

Rybakov's twelfth book, is an uncompromisingly anti-stalinist novel. It centres on a group of young friends from Moscow's intellectual and artistic district, the Arbat, leaving school in 1934.

The semi-autobiographical hero is Sasha, a loyal Young Communist, who falls victim to one of Stalin's early purges. Its descriptions of this period of Stalin's terror are unequivocal.

For more than twenty years Rybakov's manuscript lay on the shelf, its publication thwarted by the authorities. Rybakov, has consistently turned down offers from Western publishers, insisting instead that his book should be made available first to Russian readers. 'My people and my country need this novel... until we have eliminated the

consequences of Stalinism in the psychology of our people we cannot move forward. If we say we wish to live honestly and truthfully, then we must be truthful about the past. We cannot bring up our children on lies', says Rybakov.

Not until glasnost did it finally appear.

Children of the Arbat is no dry, pedantic political tract. The fact that copies of the Soviet literary magazine in which the first extracts were serialised were soon fetching fifty times their cover price is a tribute to its readability as well as its politics.

Rybakov examines a broad sweep of everyday and political Soviet life. How you get a job in the Soviet Union – and how you get a good job. How families

Black in a white world

Assata – an autobiography
Assata Shakur, Zed Press, £7.95

**Reviewed by
 CERYSE FEAR**

'IN 1857 the US supreme court ruled that Blacks were only three-fifths of a man and had no rights that Whites were bound to respect. Today, more than one hundred and twenty five years later, we still earn less than three-fifths of what white people earn'. These sentences – on page 243 – are really the crux of *Assata*: the story of Assata Shakur's upbringing in the USA, her 'throwing off' of the whiteness and white culture with which she has been forcibly imbued, and her struggle, together with other black revolutionaries from the Black Panther Party, against the awesome, evil power of the American state.

'Black revolutionaries do not drop from the moon,' she writes. 'We are created by our conditions. Shaped by our oppression. We are being manufactured in droves in the ghetto streets. ... they are turning out thousands of us ... Brothers and sisters from all walks of life ... who are tired of suffering passively are joining our ranks.' Experience teaches you about oppression what books and theories never will.

The beauty of this book is that it does not spit and snarl

revolutionary commands from every other page. Assata just relates the story of her life in between recounting the barbarity of American justice. This is the story of a black woman living at the raw butt-end of racism.

She writes painfully about what it feels like for a black child to be brought up in white, racist America. She describes the great con familiar to a lot of us, of what 'white' education really is – how they work hard to discredit and to wipe out our blackness from our souls. And, of course, the never-ending lies of the history lesson. 'We had been completely brainwashed, and we didn't even know it; we accepted white value systems and we accepted the white man's view of ourselves.'

This book re-awakens the trauma of what it is for black people, particularly women, to break out of a white culture in which we've been ensnared since long before the time of our conception, and to rebuild a personality, a life, a faith, a value system that is black – knowing full well that from the moment of so doing we will lock horns with everything and everybody in a white-defined world.

I have to quote again:

'Every day out in the streets I remind myself that Black people in America are oppressed. *It's necessary that I do that.* People get used to anything. The less you think about your oppression the more your tolerance for it grows. After a while, people just think oppression is the normal

state of things. But to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a Slave.'

She writes also of the familiar problems of revolutionary organisation (or perhaps disorganisation?). She herself, while preferring Ho Chi Minh, Kim Il Sung, Che or Fidel, ended up having to read Marx and Lenin to understand some of the speeches made by her comrades in the Panthers. her comment: 'As far as I was concerned they were two dudes who had made contributions to revolutionary struggle too great to be ignored'.

There are sharp criticisms of the BPP: they had no systematic approach to political education (I experienced acute feelings of *deja-vu*); criticism and self-criticism were not encouraged; comrades had strange titles (Huey Newton, the then leader of the Black Panthers, titled himself a Supreme Commander, and then changed it to Supreme Servant!)

Well, read it for yourself. The point is she makes a criticism, justifies it from concrete examples, and suggests a different approach. This is the point at which comrades developed a hearing impediment.

She describes the massive attacks on the BPP from the US government. There were incessant raids on BPP premises by the police and the FBI – their calling card was usually a spray of bullets. Assata herself never had her phone disconnected for non-payment of bills, and soon she stopped receiving bills at all –

courtesy of the FBI!

There were many times during my reading of this book when I unconsciously fantasised that here in Britain we live in the last of the western liberal democracies. Bullshit! Every time I thought this, I consciously put the book down, and thought back (mostly a few months, and rarely a few years) to identical atrocities against black people over here.

She writes about her relationship with her lover and her agonising decision to bring yet another wretched black child into the world, while she was still in prison. The hell of her pregnancy, the appalling health care for black prisoners and the ultimate pain of her four year-old daughter rejecting her – hitting her and screaming 'you are not my mother' – are painful to read. The story of Assata's mis-trial and imprisonment on false charges will sicken.

I'm afraid that the least emotion stirred in me by this book was hope, despite Assata's closing declaration: 'There was no doubt about it, our people would one day be free. The cowboys and bandits didn't own the world.'

I cannot do justice to this book. It blew my mind. This woman explained a lot to me – very simply – with love, with pride, with strength and courage, and with bitterness and pain, about being black in a white world.

It is simply the most meaningful book I have ever read.

live. What young people's affairs are like. What the first generation of Soviet, as opposed to Russian, youth discussed. How political intrigues – from the lowest to the highest level of the party – developed, and, in Sasha's case, how they can get mixed up together. He also examines the effects of stalinism on individual bureaucrats, high and low, and of the self-censorship and self-delusion of their victims. Stalin himself is a central character, and the most convincing in the novel. Rybakov traces the private thoughts and theses of a man consciously building a regime, and his own position, on fear, and wraps his construction of Stalin's character around real historical events.

Characters and stories fit more easily into fictional form than do history lessons or undigested marxist dialectics. That's not altogether a bad thing. You know it's a story. When it's good it can be interesting, compelling even, and if it's very good it can shed new light on an aspect of life you perhaps hadn't thought much about before, and can make you think twice.

Rybakov is well placed to consider the effect stalinism can have on people who live and work the system – their everyday dilemmas, their reactions, their relationships with people. He has done it well, too, using a strong story line (a mixture of historical saga with the more mundane concerns of the soap opera), to pull you along through the book.

He also poses some difficult questions for marxists: is there a logic, or dynamic of people and power which make bureaucratisation almost inevitable in any workers state? What's to stop the local committee for the defence of the revolution or whatever, becoming little more than a KGB neighbourhood watch scheme?

As Rybakov pointed out, the psychological consequences of stalinism have to be eliminated from Soviet life. Presumably that's part of his aim in *Children of the Arbat*, and books like this can play their part.

It's a long book, and, in hardback, expensive. But wait till it's out in paperback – it's well worth a read.

Correction

We inadvertently left out the name of the publisher of a book reviewed in our last issue. The book was Tom Nairn's 'The Enchanted Glass' and the publisher is Radius. The book costs £7.95.

Socialist Outlook welcomes readers letters on any topic, preferably of not more than 400 words in length.



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