

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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next

**Thatcherism
and the
'designer' left**

**Inside Supplement
on Revolution in
Central America**

Socialist Outlook

No. 12 February 1989

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LETTERS



Young guerrilla fighters in El Salvador

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The Crunch of '89

SIXTY YEARS AFTER the traumas of the Wall Street Crash, a new American president takes office amid growing trepidation. Capitalist leaders' fears over the colossal US budget deficit are again rising to crisis levels.

If George Bush does nothing, confidence could be undermined: but if he takes any firm action to correct the US economic crisis, this, combined with the already mounting pressure towards trade war between the USA and the European Community, could have massive knock-on effects throughout the world.

All this could rapidly multiply the problems faced by Chancellor Nigel Lawson as the British consumer credit gravy train runs out of steam, exposing how hollow has been the much acclaimed 'boom'. After skidding unconvincingly through trade deficits and rising inflation at the end of 1988, Lawson, still claiming to be in control, lurched into the New Year with yet another rise in mortgage interest rates, again clobbering many of the recent recruits to Thatcher's 'property owning democracy'.

For many mortgage-paying workers there could be worse to come. The new rise in bank interest rates and the widespread expectation of a recessionary period beginning this year is likely to put many more jobs again under threat. However dire remain the politics of the TUC and Labour leaders, there seems no escape from a new sharpening of the class struggle in 1989, combining battles in defence of democratic rights and against reactionary Tory social policies with a new wave of trade union struggles, as workers are forced either to fight in defence of their jobs and living standards, or sacrifice them on the altar of capitalist 'viability'.

Soaring costs of housing run alongside a new, dramatic end to the period of relatively low general inflation, which will also have brutal effects on millions of unemployed, low-paid claimants, and pensioners, who have already been left trailing far behind the living standards of more prosperous sections of employed workers. The new wave of inflation will prompt more workers to look not only for larger wage increases this year, but also for policies to protect their standard of living in more lasting fashion. While the employers seek to use inflation to whittle down the real level of wages, the union leaders have for too long allowed the problems and concerns of the employers to set the framework for pay negotiations, when the starting point should be the defence of working class living standards.

Union conferences and negotiating committees should adopt the policy of protecting all basic wage increases against inflation through the fight for *cost of living clauses* in all wage agreements, ensuring regular increases to keep pace with the rise in price of goods, housing and services. Many will be looking enviously towards the Ford workers, whose strike was settled on a deal that now gives them an increase of 2 percent above the current level of inflation. Though the 2 percent figure could have been larger, given the strength of the strike, the settlement protects their living standards at a time when many are under attack, and points a way forward.

Alongside pay battles this year will come a new wave of speed-up, redundancies and closures as the recession and high interest rates once again begin to force employers to attack jobs to safeguard and increase their profits. Few unions other than the miners have ever seriously challenged the notion that the employer has the 'right' to make a firm 'viable' even at the expense of the jobs and wages of the workforce and the destruction of the communities involved. Of course cynics find it fashionable to scoff after the event at the setbacks suffered since by the NUM: but the scale of the job losses in the pits has completely vindicated the warnings and stand taken by Ar-

thur Scargill, and remind us of the need for the whole movement to mobilise in defence of jobs.

Instead, some unions have retreated even further since the miners' strike, and embraced the defeatist politics of 'new realism', according to which it is supposedly in the workers' own interests for unions to collaborate with employers in single-union, no-strike deals, redundancies and speed-up in order to maximise profitability, and make each firm 'competitive' – at the expense of its workforce. The extreme version of this is the 'business unionism' of the EETPU, which sees strikebreaking and the destruction of other unions as the way to secure its relations with the employers.

In reality, every concession made to the employers simply fuels their appetite for more, convincing them that the unions are a soft touch. Each concession also undermines union strength elsewhere, since it forces other employers to remain 'competitive' by forcing down wages and imposing similar speed-up on their workforce.

Nine years of Thatcherism have already left a sorry trail of devastated, demoralised, dwindling communities wrecked by previous closures of coal, steel, shipbuilding, textile and engineering plants. The lessons must be learned, and the fight redoubled to defend existing jobs through a policy of strike action and occupations demanding *work-sharing without loss of pay*, uniting in mass action to break out of the straitjacket of anti-union laws.

As the major employers regroup and restructure in order to contend with the coming recession, huge mergers and takeovers are again on the agenda: the comings and goings on the future of GEC are simply the latest examples. Labour leaders have offered nothing but mealy-mouthed, nationalistic protests against a possible 'foreign' takeover of the major 'British' defence firm, and demanding the Monopolies Commission (that old friend of the working class!) step in to see fair play.

Instead the trade unions in GEC and elsewhere should be demanding the full *opening of the books* of the firms and banks involved, to reveal their back-room connections, the scale of exploitation that has accumulated GEC's £1.3 billion cash balance, and the case for *expropriating* the whole lot. Taking a leaf out of the Tory book in the aftermath of the collapse of the Barlow Clowes firm of speculators, such expropriation of major industry should (as with the renationalisation of privatised industries) be *without compensation*.

In short, the worsening of the crisis of capitalism in 1989 cries out for a *socialist* response, based not on Kinnock-style pipedreams of reforming and patching up the system (which are increasingly based on attempting to work within the anarchy of the free market), but upon defence of the independent interests of the working class.

It is perhaps ironic that the sharpening of the conflict in the workplaces, and the renewed Tory offensive on other issues, including the Poll Tax and the new White Paper on the NHS, should be met by a Labour Party cutting its campaigning work and grass-roots conferences while the dead weight of top-level Walworth Road bureaucracy is left intact.

Nothing could more clearly underline the key, bitter lesson of the last ten years: activists must get organised at local level to build class struggle resistance to the employers' offensive and campaigns in defence of democratic rights, and not wait for national officials to come up with the goods. At the same time, political initiatives such as the Chesterfield movement's local and national conferences and policy groups, offer a wide spectrum of socialists a forum to debate openly the kind of programme and policies that must be fought for in the organised labour movement in the struggles to come.

The last bastions?

THE GOVERNMENT announced its health service review when public concern about waiting lists, hospital closures and staff shortages was at a peak last year.

The ministerial group assembled (with strong Treasury representation) for the secret review quickly focussed not on funding – the fundamental problem – but on restructuring the service.

The (leaked) recommendations of that review are not designed to improve health services, but are about chipping away at the edges of one of the great bastions of the welfare state and opening up a vast new 'market' to private capital.

Key amongst the Tories' proposals (due for publication by the end of January) are likely to be:

- pilot projects for an 'internal market' in the NHS. This means health authorities will buy and sell services between each other – or from the private sector. It is likely

to lead to hospitals (particularly the prestigious London teaching hospitals) specialising in more 'marketable' services and to patients having to travel to obtain treatment;

- GPs to hold budgets for buying services for their patients. The scheme is sketchy – but given that the likely purpose is to use the system to limit spending, patients again are likely suffer;

- hospitals will be able to 'opt-out' from local health authorities – like schools or housing estates.

Only with hospitals there's no indication that consultation (in however loaded a way), will be a condition. Hospital managers and top doctors are most likely to pursue such options to create 'self-governing' hospitals where the potential for profits are highest – i.e. in the larger teaching or specialist hospitals. Patients, local communities and health workers are unlikely to get a say. The measures, if adopted, would turn the clock back fifty years. Local accountability, and very probably

the full range of services currently available locally (especially less profitable ones like long-term geriatric and psychiatric care), would disappear;

- 'taking the politics out of health care'. This means getting rid of local authority reps who currently sit on health authorities, and cutting the size and powers of regional health authorities, which the government is trying to turn into business-style boards of management.

- tax relief will be made available to elderly people buying private health insurance. Not many older people can get it (only the young and healthy need apply), or seem to want it at the moment. This measure is chiefly significant as a signal of the Government's intention to encourage more people to take out private cover and is only the beginning of that process.

Although perhaps not as regressive as had been feared, these proposals are a dangerous first step in the direction of fundamentally



TUC demo for NHS last March: what now?

Poll Tax campaign at critical stage

THE MOVEMENT against the poll tax is now at a critical stage. In many areas in England and Wales the campaign is continuing to develop and beginning to sink roots in the local labour movement, while in Scotland mobilisations are continuing.

The 10 December conference in Newcastle organised by the Socialist Conference, provided a useful opportunity for militants to exchange ideas and experiences.

The next three months are crucial in building a campaign. However, two vital ingredients are missing – a united campaign and a national focus. The call, issued by both Newcastle and the Oxford conference that proceeded it, for the TUC and Labour Party to organise a mass demonstration on 8 April needs to be followed through with resolutions at every level of the labour movement. But equally important, so does the call for an authoritative national conference of anti-poll tax activists which can speak on behalf of the whole movement.

Both conferences supported

such a call, but with differences about its composition and emphasis. The Oxford resolution stresses the involvement of local poll tax groups, whereas Newcastle underlined the need to involve trade unionists.

In fact, a movement which can defeat the tax must draw in all those organising at different levels. Trade union action, based on non-cooperation with and obstruction of the tax, will be vital. In this context, the conference called by Lambeth NALGO on 18 April, which seeks to bring together those fighting the tax in that union will be vital. Fighting for councils not to implement the tax at every stage is a further essential strand of our strategy. But neither of these can be achieved without building community support around obstruction of the register and non-payment. It is only such a mass movement which can give trade unionists and councillors the confidence to act.

In this context, the deletion of the call for 'Committees of 100' as part of a mass non-payment campaign from the resolution presented to Newcastle represents

a significant weakness. Comrades from the SWP argued that these committees, and non-payment itself represent a diversion from the real issues. It was not possible for those who supported the original draft to explain how non-payment, when used collectively, can be a powerful tool for the movement and to differentiate our approach from those who have used it to divert from the fight for action by councils and trade unions.

It is necessary to remember that the campaign we have to wage will be a long term one, which will have to gain and retain momentum over several years. So, for example, the fact that most councils are currently co-operating with the tax does not mean that local campaigns should not continue to demand that they obstruct it.

It may be possible to build up a relationship of forces which can convince them of the need to do this, for example when it becomes clearer what implementation will mean in terms of local support for Labour. It may be possible to convince trade unionists who currently only see the implications of the tax on their own pockets not to co-

operate with passing information to poll tax units on civil liberties grounds as well as because of the effect on their workloads.

While it remains vital to continue the debate over non-payment, the attitude of forces on the right of the campaign is far more pernicious. The ILP (Independent Labour Publications) attempted to play a very destructive role in Newcastle, arguing that a national demonstration was the only issue. Subsequently they have denounced the Newcastle initiative and with the support of the Communist Party, tried to block co-operation between Oxford and Newcastle.

They have tried to impose undemocratic structures – which effectively deny a voice to trade unionists – onto any future conference against the poll tax, and have sought to make the committee which came out of Oxford – which should be a working body – into something more grandiose and bureaucratic. Their main aim in this is to exclude the hard left, by arguing that it is not possible to contain such wide political disagreements in one campaign and

undermining the structure of a tax-funded, free-to-users and locally comprehensive service. One minister 'closely involved' with the review has warned that this will be the last chance for the NHS to survive in its present form under a Conservative government.

Hot on the heels of the leaked health review, came Kenneth Baker's speech to an education conference at Lancaster University which promised an 'expansion' in higher education: but only on an American model, with business (as well as students themselves) coming up with the cash.

Defence of our health service and free education clearly demand an immediate campaign by trade unionists, community organisations, Labour parties and students: if this is not forthcoming, Thatcher could be given another easy ride in her efforts to roll back the frontiers of the welfare state.

Jane Wells

therefore to posture as the real leadership of poll tax activists.

We must continue to argue against such manoeuvres. A united national conference against the poll tax must be organised as a priority involving delegates from poll tax groups, trade unions, Labour Parties, student unions and so on, and has ample opportunity to discuss and debate out various tactics. Any attempt to exclude one section of the movement, to argue that one group holds the key to it all will result in a failure to set up an authoritative campaign.

The campaign in Scotland has been severely weakened by political disagreements leading to a myriad of structures with virtually no communication let alone co-ordination between them.

As registration draws closer in England and Wales (even though it may be delayed), and the demand for payment in Scotland, such sectarianism will only result in the derailment of the campaign and loss of the opportunity to sink Thatcher's flagship.

Theresa Conway



Mick Gosling (centre) with Dagenham militants opposing any sell-out of the last pay strike

Victimisation at Fords

WITH THE sacking last November of Mick Gosling, the chair of the biggest TGWU branch at Fords Dagenham, Ford management have thrown down a major challenge to the trade unions in their British plants.

Gosling was taken in front of management on Friday 18 November and sacked on the basis of a series of trumped up charges – being absent from his job at a meeting on Ireland, inciting unconstitutional stoppages and falsifying his application form when he started work at Fords ten years ago.

These charges were promptly refuted by the trade union delegation who pointed out that most of them were downright lies. Management offered to withdraw the sacking if he signed a statement that this was a final warning against which there would be no appeal – which meant that he could be instantly dismissed at management's discretion. He quite rightly refused to sign such a document which would have put him in an impossible position and create an unacceptable precedent. Since that time he has remained suspended on pay awaiting the disciplinary procedure.

Ford, however, are no more interested in the facts of the matter than Michael Edwardes was interested in the details when he sacked Derek Robinson in British Leyland in November 1979, with disastrous results for the trade union movement. The car employers have a history of such victimisations.

Robinson was sacked for writing his views in a publication of the shop stewards combine committee, in order to discipline the shop stewards organisation as a whole.

Bob Cullen, TGWU deputy convenor at Ausin Rover in Cowley, was sacked two years ago for something which happened when he was not even there. Management eventually accepted that this was the case but refused to reinstate him just the same.

Now they have coldly decided to make a move against the Ford unions following the militancy displayed in the strike early last year.

They know that the role played by the militant 1/1107 branch was decisive in that strike. They were the best organised, gave full information to their members and were the only major section of the Ford trade unions which campaigned effectively against the sell-out. The PTA, which the 1/1107 branch covers voted against the sell-out and for the continuation of the strike.

Since the strike the branch has campaigned against the conditions accepted in the deal. In particular, they produced material exposing the dangers in Ford's 'quality circles' and 'group leader' schemes. With the election of Steve Riley, the secretary of the 1/1107 branch, to the National Executive of the TGWU last year, they made an impact on the trade unions at national level – helping to push the TGWU to the left.

The defence of Mick Gosling therefore, is a matter of the defence of the trade union movement at

Ford.

Not surprisingly, Mick Gosling was sacked just before Christmas to wrong-foot the unions. Now management are dragging out the procedures to make it even more difficult for the unions to respond. It is now two months since Mick Gosling was sacked and his appeal has been adjourned.

The quicker there is a decision for the rank and file to respond to the better. Derek Robinson had massive support at the time of his sacking – yet three months later when AEU leader Terry Duffy put the issue to a mass meeting the call for action was heavily defeated.

It looks like being three months before a decision is taken in this case as well.

Ford management have announced that the Sierra is to be taken from Dagenham and moved to Belgium – leaving Dagenham as a one model plant. No doubt this is another reprisal for the militant action last year. The workforce must know that management claims of only a 'small' job loss are meaningless. Once the plant is a one model plant, job losses are ultimately inevitable.

This does not make it any easier to defend Mick Gosling, but it does make it even more urgent.

If Ford workers are going to defend their jobs they are going to need a strong trade union movement – and that means taking on Fords and defending Mick Gosling.

Alan Thornett

Women for Socialism has its first national conference on February 25-26

Socialist feminism: into the nineties

NEARLY A DECADE of Thatcher's attacks, often specifically aimed at reversing the gains made by women in the 1970s, have revealed a glaring need for a socialist feminist organisation. *Socialist Feminism into the Nineties*, bringing together women from all parts of the labour movement, from campaigns and from the solidarity movement, will be the first such conference for nearly ten years.

Not that Women for Socialism should substitute itself for the separate spheres of struggle which women are engaged in. Like the socialist feminist current of the 1970s, which played an important role in co-ordinating and organising - against attacks on abortion rights and for the right to work - so today, an autonomous women's movement, with a socialist framework, is needed to link up the different aspects of women's struggles.

And there is no shortage of battles. Women have been especially hard hit by the changes in employment deliberately engineered by this government - flexible working practices, part-time and low-paid jobs, temporary work. Amongst the unemployed, women have again been singled out (along with young people), hit hardest by such new rules as availability to work.

Women are fighting on a range of other issues too. Black women fighting deportation; women fighting in defence of democratic rights - the right to control our own fertility, to determine our own sexuality; women fighting trade union battles - like the nurses and the teachers, and disputes like P&O, all showing the continuing

capacity of women to defend their hard won positions.

At such a time, the Kinnock leadership spends more time undermining and attacking women than fighting for our rights: destroying the effectiveness of the Labour Party Women's Conference; not inviting the Labour Party Women's Sections to the Policy Review discussion on women, and determined to present the Labour Party as 'more concerned with the family' than the Tories. Nor is the trade union leadership any better. Terrified of Thatcher, they are incapable of defending women members.

Women for Socialism, with about 300 members, was formed out of the first Chesterfield Conference. It is an autonomous organisation, in line with the Socialist Conference policy on the autonomy of oppressed groups. Like that organisation, it relates both to the demands of the class struggle and to policy development, and will play an important role in keeping women's demands on the table. If Women for Socialism is able to play a co-ordinating role, linking together the struggles as they break out, giving leadership and showing a way forward by developing policy demands which relate to the struggles, then it will be an important asset.

Over the last decade radical feminist ideas have made the running on a number of issues. Many women, previously active in the women's movement, reoriented their work towards the labour movement in 1979/80, joining the Bennite left in the Labour Party and the unions. The focus of attention for many shifted away from single issue campaigns towards

trying to change policy and practices in the wider labour movement, and there have been some successes.

However, this left the way clear for radical feminism to take the lead on questions like violence against women and the peace camps. With the decline of the Labour left, especially after the defeat of the Miners' strike in 1985, women activists in the Labour Party have become isolated, demoralised, sometimes fighting to defend gains made by women's committees on local councils while the council itself was making cuts in housing, education, or social services - all areas where women are vulnerable.

On some questions, this dominance of radical feminist thinking has influenced feminists in the labour movement too. Their analysis of 'pornography is the theory and rape is the practice', led local Labour authorities, on the instigation of their Women's or Equal Rights committees, to ban films such as Pasolini's 'Salo' as pornographic. In so doing they fell into the pitfall of censorship, which, since the arrival of Section 28, is now seen more clearly as a trap set by the radical right.

The peace camps too, especially at Greenham, were strongly influenced by radical feminism. As CND and the peace movement declined, partly floundering on the rocks of the Communist Party's endless search for a cross-class

'popular front', their ideas came to dominate completely, leading to the attractively simple, but wrong slogan of 'Take the toys from the boys', a slogan which evacuates class from the issue of nuclear weapons. When the Cruise missiles were eventually installed at Greenham, this lack of class analysis left the movement without a way forward.

Sometimes radical feminist ideas have even been deliberately and cynically marshalled to argue for a feminist orientation away from the labour movement, such as in the pernicious writings and speeches of Bea Campbell, whose politics exemplify the Communist Party's popular frontism.

Women for Socialism must learn from some of these problems, just as we must make the socialist feminist current this time more representative - of black women and working class women. It has made a good start, anti-imperialism is to be an important component, building on some of the links made by the Sisterhood & Solidarity conference held in June 1987. Women against Pit Closures as well as a number of Labour Party Women's Sections are affiliated.

We should build on these links. In a situation where neither the Labour Party nor the trade unions are doing anything for women, Women for Socialism has an important role to play.

Jane Kelly.



Supporting the conference: Women Against Pit Closures

Martin Shakeshaft/ITL

Viraj Mendis deportation presages new crackdown

THE GOVERNMENT HAS sent a clear message to all those opposing immigration and nationality laws. The Home Office will not compromise on a tough implementation of these laws.

Both the deportation and the way it was carried out are intended to scare to the black community and the churches, temples and mosques, considering giving sanctuary to those facing deportation.

The government wants to teach all anti-racists a lesson. That is why the police smashed their way into the church, more than a week after Viraj had formally applied to go to Denmark, when he was still awaiting a reply from the Danish authorities. This is also why they decided to send him back to Sri Lanka, despite the fact that the state of Bremen in West Germany had agreed to take him, and other countries were still considering their response.

It is becoming clear that Immigration officials planned to follow this action with a swoop on other 'illegal' immigrants, and had decided that it was necessary to get rid of Viraj first. They have been building up information for some time about people's whereabouts and have special squad of police officers, whose sole responsibility is this work.

The government will pay a political price for their actions -



Adam Hinton/Relex

Viraj Mendis: a lesson for all those opposing immigration laws

support for Viraj's right to stay in Britain is still strong. Many people are outraged at the way the police broke into the sanctuary and cannot accept that the Home Office could not send him to a third country.

For months, civil war conditions in Sri Lanka have been seen on the news. The right-wing JVP have killed hundreds, if not thousands, of people who they believe have made concessions to Tamil separatism. Viraj could well be on their death list because of his

well-known support for Tamil self-determination.

The Foreign Office in the last few months has warned tourists and business people not to go to Sri Lanka because of the political violence. There is evidence that at least two Tamils, forcibly returned from Britain last year, have been arrested more than once and say that they were mistreated in prison.

While the Sri Lankan government itself is unlikely to move against Mendis, because of the publicity this would get while they are trying to clean up their image and pretend that violence is on the ebb. However, the position of the Home Office that he, and others are not in danger is a bare-faced - and conscious - lie.

In a last minute attempt to stop the deportation, Labour MPs tried to raise the debate in the House of Commons. Bill Morris, Deputy General Secretary TGWU, went to Gatwick to try to get his members not to prepare the plane on which Viraj was to leave.

All this is, of course, too little and too late, but it gives a glimpse of what the labour movement could do if it mobilised against deportations.

About 50 people get deported from Britain every week. Industrial action in the airports and high profile campaigns against the immigration and nationality laws could prevent many of these happening. It is necessary, especially if the crackdown happens, to mobilise all of those who have been involved in Viraj's campaign, all of those angry at his deportation, against all of these cases.

Manchester NALGO has decided to organise a national conference on immigration and nationality in order to take the issue into the labour movement.

The conference is organised jointly with Francis and Moji's Defence Campaign and the Black members group in Manchester NALGO. It will take place on Saturday 15th April with workshops and plenums in Manchester Town Hall and the Mechanics Institute. In the current situation, it is vital that this event is seriously built and well-attended.

Finn Jensen

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The Russian 'threat' and the German danger

AN EDITORIAL in *The Times* of January 20 warned the top people of Britain about 'The German Danger'. January 20 1989, not, as we might have thought, 1939. But things get curiously. Not only have we slipped back 50 years, but *The Times* points the finger at the agent of the German menace. We follow the finger and find - the reassuring, silver-haired figure of the USSR's Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze.

Shevardnadze, it seems, in alliance with a certain Mikhail Gorbachev, has been plotting to divide the Western alliance by means of unilateral cuts in Soviet armed forces. Rupert Murdoch's sleuths have followed his trail.

At the United Nations in December, Gorbachev announced his intention of reducing the size of the Soviet army by 500,000 men, and removing divisions and tanks from eastern Europe. Later in Moscow he spelled out his plans to a small group of international conspirators, amongst whom we can name former French President Giscard d'Estaing, former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, and a certain Henry Kissinger (any leads on him?).

There was to be a 14.2 percent cut in the military budget and a 19.5 percent reduction in spending on armaments and military hardware.

The western European connection is in the hands of Shevardnadze. In Paris, at the international conference on chemical weapons, he stated that the Soviet Union would begin unilaterally to destroy its own chemical arsenal; then in Vienna, at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, he explained that when the Soviet divisions left East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia they would dismantle their short-range nuclear missiles as well as some nuclear-capable artillery pieces.

What has all this to do with the 'German Danger?' The danger to which *The Times* refers is the danger that public opinion in West Germany will now mobilise



'I quite like that Gorbachev, how about you lot?' - Is W. Germany's Kohl imperialism's weak link?

against plans to replace NATO's 88 obsolete Lance missile launchers located in West Germany. Such a mobilisation is made more likely by the fact that the Soviet Union is removing those short range nuclear missiles which are targeted on West Germany.

As the *Wall Street Journal* explains: 'Although (West German) Chancellor Kohl shares some American views, he dithers: opinion polls make clear there is doveishness afoot among his voters'. (9/1/89)

Nor is it only West Germany: 'Our main problem is to rationalise our behaviour in the defence area,' means Dutch prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, while confusion reigns among the British public, who, according to opinion polls, no longer consider the Soviet Union a threat.

Urgent measures are required. Reagan's Secretary of State George Schultz, assisted by Britain's Geoffrey Howe, although unable to engage western public opinion in a full-scale conventional battle in Vienna, was still able to stage an effective guer-

rilla action around the question of human rights. Schultz pointed to events in nearby Czechoslovakia, where police were smashing up demonstrations on the anniversary of the death of Jan Palach (who burned himself to death in protest at the invasion of his country by Gorbachev's predecessor Brezhnev) and at the situation in Bulgaria and Romania.

Schultz especially emphasised the continued presence of the Berlin wall - a theme taken up by *The Times*, which recommended the wall as the issue on which the West German government could face down the peace movement.

However these were just interim measures. For one thing, Shevardnadze has been talking about removing the wall, sending a shiver of curiosity down the spines of western diplomats. More fundamentally, the German danger is supplemented by the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Polish and other dangers - and too much loose talk about human rights could have nasty consequences. Schultz was careful to exempt those Eastern

bloc countries which have gone furthest in accepting the western economic model from his criticism on human rights.

All over Gorbachev's patch people want to be able to read, watch or listen to what they like, say what they like and go where they like. But they ask for more! They seem to believe that they deserve the economic wherewithal to do all these things, not understanding that the German banks have to be paid back first.

Mark Frankland from *The Observer* reports on the views of a Hungarian worker who 'would not agree that he or anyone else should make sacrifices to help right the economy. "Why?" he asked. "It's the government, not us, who made this mess".'

What if workers in the west began to take a similar line? What if the German left - supported by other satanic forces throughout Europe and the USA - should propose to the peoples of eastern Europe a peaceful and democratic solution to the historic divisions which are the legacy of historic crimes? Perhaps they might even come up with a programme of mutual economic benefit, and lift the burden of debt to West German banks from the shoulders of eastern Europe.

This is the 'German danger' in its full-blown form - a real threat to German imperialism and thus to imperialism as a whole. However it is also a danger for Gorbachev. If there were any prospect of a reconciliation between the Germans and the other peoples of eastern Europe, the justification for the maintenance of the huge military establishment of the Warsaw Pact would disappear. There would be no argument in favour of keeping the Baltic States or the Ukraine within the boundaries of a Russian dominated Soviet Union.

No wonder both the US and British capitalist governments have agreed to go to Moscow in 1991, to discuss with Gorbachev how they can more adequately control us, and ensure that demands for peace and human rights do not get out of hand.

Colin Meade

Yugoslavia: who will take charge?

AS HIS NEW year's resolution, Yugoslavia's Branko Mikulic decided to stop pretending to govern the country. On December 31, 1988, he and his government resigned, and Mikulic denounced Yugoslavia's fragmented political system, which had made it impossible to arrive at decisions.

The six republics and two autonomous regions of the Federation pay little attention to the central government, while the system of economic 'self-management' baffles everybody.

For three weeks, nobody else could be found to take the place of Mikulic, whose ability to win support for austerity policies was undermined by revelations that he owns no less than five luxurious houses, including one in London.

Now he has been succeeded as Prime Minister by Ante Markovic, described by *The Guardian* as a 'reformist politician with a reputation of being a successful industrial manager.'

Meanwhile the economic crisis gets worse. Yugoslavia has a foreign debt of 23 billion dollars, inflation of 250 percent, and 20 percent unemployment - in the poorest regions as high as 60 percent - while it is estimated that living standards have fallen by 40

percent since 1982.

The ruling Yugoslav bureaucracy's answer has been austerity and the removal of obstacles to the operation of market forces. In opposition to these policies, millions of workers have taken to the streets. Slogans such as 'Down with the socialist bourgeoisie' and 'Let the leaders stand in line for bread' have been heard.

In Montenegro and Vojvodina the whole party and state leaderships have resigned in the face of huge protests lasting whole days and nights, while one of the immediate causes of Mikulic's resignation was the threat of a general strike in Croatia against proposals to reduce social security.

This workers' opposition, however, has so far been kept within the political framework of the bureaucracy by Slobodan Milosevic, the head of the Serbian party, who has placed himself at the head of the movement, and directed it down a nationalist channel.

In line with Milosevic's 'Greater Serbia' policy, many of the workers' mobilisations have supported his calls for tougher measures against the alleged Al-



Photo: Reflex

Serbian party boss Slobodan Milosevic

banian extremists in the Serbian province of Kosovo, where Albanians are in the majority.

Milosevic is hoping that he will be carried to the top positions in the country's party and state by a Serb nationalist working class. There he will form a strong government, centralised around Serbia, and prove himself to be the man who can get things done by forcing through the bureaucracy's pro market economic programme, which he has supported. At this point the 'West' will find that Milosevic is not the demagogue they thought, but a serious man with whom it is possible to do business.

However there are serious obstacles strewn across Milosevic's career path. His Serbian centralist programme will arouse tremendous resistance from the other nations in Yugoslavia, while the workers' mobilisations against increasing poverty may turn out to be a genie which cannot easily be stuffed back into the bottle.

Another possible agency for the restoration of law and order is the army, an all-Yugoslav institution with its own party organisation. Army circles have played the leading role in attacks on democratic and nationalist activists in Slovenia, where independent groups and single issue movements have flourished in the last few years.

Despite considerable success in resisting centralist attacks, the Slovenian movement does not seem to have an all-Yugoslav outlook, which may render it dangerously isolated as the crisis continues.

Everything depends on the emergence of a political current which has the courage to fight for full democracy, full respect for the rights of all the nationalities, including the non-Slav Albanians, in the Federation, and places the concrete needs of the population above the attractions either of 'the West' or of anti-Western romantic nationalism.

On this front, it seems that everything remains to be done. The collapse of bureaucratic 'socialism' has led Yugoslavia's intellectuals back into dependence on the 'dominant ideas of the dominant class', a belief in the magic powers of the free market, and 57 or more varieties of nationalist and religious obscurantism.

A real factor in the Yugoslav crisis will be our own readiness to offer solidarity and engage in serious discussion of fundamentals with anybody in Yugoslavia who comes out for democracy and national equality against all the authoritarian solutions to the *pre-revolutionary* crisis of the Yugoslav state.

Colin Meade

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Inside NUS

A revival of student militancy?

Campus militancy was once a major force on the British political landscape. The massive student mobilisations of the affluent late 1960s inspired many political activists from all backgrounds, as well as providing a training ground for many of the forces of today's far left.

In the 1980s it is a somewhat different story. Students over the last few years have been noted rather more for their apathy than their militancy, despite being better organised than other sections of youth.

Since the Thatcher government came to office in 1979 there has been a dramatic fall in the value of student grants – down by a staggering 23 per cent in real terms. There has also been an erosion in everything from tutorial standards to cuts in housing benefits.

The explanation for students' relative passivity is to be found in the politics of the objective situation and the leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS). 'New realism' has blended with the culture of individual achievement endemic in higher educational institutions to form a mass – though sub-conscious – quasi-Thatcherite view of the world. For many, the world outside the textbook is too ugly and threatening to be confronted.

However the Tory attacks on education have steadily increased, aimed at re-structuring the whole educational system to meet the needs of private capital and the new developments in high technology – at the expense of the 'arts' and other non-technical disciplines.

This restructuring has also led to massive cuts in the funding of polytechnics, huge debts in universities, and many cost-cutting mergers of colleges.

Resistance from the NUS has been minimal. The atmosphere of apathy and influence of the 'textbook cocoon' have assisted the NUS leadership's policy of 'passive protest'. Concretely, this has meant negotiations with government boards on how best to make cuts without doing too much damage; campaigns of letter-writing to MPs; and a conscious plan to ensure the minimum involvement of the 1.25 million members of NUS.

None of this is surprising from an NUS executive dominated by the pro-Kinnock faction of the 'Democratic Left' (DL), who have controlled NUS through the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) – resorting to any means necessary to contain opposition. Con-



Carlos Quinteria/Reflex

Until recently, student militancy had ebbed

trary to their verbal commitment to democracy and their libertarian demagoguery, the Kinnockites have fended off challenges from the left by measures which have nothing to do with democracy – such as ruling 'out of order' at NOLS conferences whose delegations from colleges controlled by the left. The Kinnockite faction shares a leadership block with supporters of the Communist Party, and the ideology of *Marxism Today* dominates the politics of the leadership, due to the political weakness of the Democratic Left.

The revelation of the Tory plans for student loans last November upset the uneasy balance of the last couple of years, signalling an explosive escalation of the government's attacks on students. From 1990, all social security and housing benefits for students will cease. Grants will be frozen, and increases in costs will be covered by bank loans, with repayments spread over a period of years. The price – even of success, let alone exam failures – will be thousands of pounds of debt, affecting all students apart from the very rich. It will particularly hit working class students and those from less privileged sections of society, especially women and black students, many of whom will simply not be able to afford to take their places.

The release of the loans White Paper was met with massive resistance nationally. A wave of activity drew whole new layers of students into struggle and transformed the atmosphere from one of passivity to one of outrage in student unions across the country. An estimated 50,000 took to the streets on the day of action in mid November: every major city saw a sizable student demonstration against loans. The NUS leadership were forced to transform what they hoped would be a peaceful and low-key lobby of parliament into a mass demonstration which

even at the last minute attracted some 30,000. The demand to 'step up the action' echoed with increasing vigour from the organised left, as all eyes focussed on the December NUS conference.

The December 1988 conference in Blackpool was, as expected, a heated affair. The violent clash of ideas left many delegates bemused. Most were shocked and confused by the conduct of both the leadership and the opposition, as an endless barrage of procedural wranglings maintained crisis conditions throughout the three days, with only the odd pause for breath.

The elements of the situation were two-fold: firstly there was the new background of struggle; but in contrast

came the DL/Communist Party plan to restructure NUS. These proposals included a few positive aspects to cover up more negative ones (most notably the complete abolition of the winter conference itself, rendering the NUS leadership even less accountable, and consolidating even further bureaucratic control).

The leadership's attempt to move NUS rightwards clashed head-on with the effects of the anti-loans struggles, creating an atmosphere of confrontation.

NUS leadership still managed to maintain control over the conference. The explosion of anger reached theatrical levels on a few occasions, including a number of occupations of the platform. However it is hard to believe that the leadership's dismal politics and performance – as shown by their blunders and misleadership over the November 24 demonstration, and their hopelessly bankrupt strategy of 'changing the minds of Tory MPs' – was enough to maintain their domination. At such times it is almost impossible for the right wing to make gains; but such crises do not guarantee any automatic ascendancy for the left, which now must look afresh at the forces and the *alliances* which help maintain the leadership's grip.

On closer examination of the factional warfare at conference, some clearly related phenomena are revealed. One occupation of the platform – by the Scottish students, after the leadership's soft line on opposition to the Poll Tax had been passed – was greeted by the leadership closing down the conference for the rest of the day. Yet an earlier 'women's' occupation of the platform appeared to be wanly greeted by the leadership, and ended with a statement against 'intimidation' of women by 'left factions'.

Later there was a lesbian and gay statement against the 'homophobia' of 'left factions'; and a delegate who spoke on behalf of overseas students ended his speech by insisting that 'left factions will not tell us what to think or do'. Finally a special round of applause for President Maeve Sherlock from the women at the conference was proposed by a Communist party member on the executive.

All these episodes say something about the leadership's political alliances, based on stooges and patronage, and designed to project the pro-Kinnock DL/CP block as champions of the oppressed. This 'big lie' has been used with great effect as a weapon against the left, showing possibly the clearest reflection of the opportunist politics of *Marxism Today* - a direct counterposition between the struggles of the oppressed and the class struggle.

This type of political block can only be built on the weakness of the left on such questions, as seen in *Militant's* line that 'liberation campaigns are a diversion from the class struggle', the SWP view that 'only working class women are oppressed', and the crude *Socialist Organiser* theory of 'femocracy' which asserts

that a whole bureaucratic caste of women defends itself purely by alleging 'sexism' against all men who politically oppose them.

This latter is important because the Socialist Students in NOLS (SSiN) grouping, dominated by *Socialist Organiser*, has been the traditional opposition to the Democratic Left and the present DL/CP block in NUS. This is by virtue of SSiN's past leadership of various important campaigns around welfare issues, and their representation on the NUS executive.

However SSiN has failed to confront the key political problems in NUS, and their 'theory' of femocracy has avoided or blacked any real debate with feminists in NUS. Worse, SSiN have, on occasion, when it seemed to their advantage, resorted to some of the bureaucratic methods used by the DL/CP.

It is unclear whether SSiN's recent opportunist meanderings are related to *Socialist Organiser's* 'programmatic review', or a simple capitulation to electoralism. One of the worst examples of this was their alliance last year with the pro-zionist Union of Jewish Students - the significance of which they have attempted to downplay.

SSiN's claim to represent the Labour left in NOLS has declining credibility, and its future is as yet unclear; but its decline certainly merits discussion by socialists as part of the general debate on the way forward for the student movement. SSiN will have to stand on their political record in such a debate.

What is needed in NUS is a formation of 'consistent socialists' with sufficient influence to bring about a major shake-up in consciousness and political perception, and to develop the necessary alliances, consistent with class struggle politics, and consistent with the struggles of the oppressed.

This implies an internationalist political outlook of the sort that *Socialist Organiser* have so clearly lacked.

Socialist Outlook supporters in the colleges are engaged in a project with such an aim around the new left student bulletin *Direction 89*. Whatever the rest of the academic year brings, 1989 is sure to be a stormy year of debate and activity for all socialist students.

Trevor Wongsam

Fighting Section 28 Not in front of the children?

Socialist Outlook has covered the campaign against Section 28, which prevents local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality', and specifically outlaws teaching that homosexuality is 'acceptable as a family relationship'. In this article, JAMIE GOUGH considers the nature of the prejudice that Section 28 both uses and promotes, and the implications for constructing a socialist society.

Section 28 is being used to weaken or prevent local authorities from taking action to combat discrimination against all lesbians and gay men. But the excuse for doing this, and the focus of the attack, has been the issue of the 'corruption' of youth: that the 'teaching of homosexuality' in schools would lead to school students growing up lesbian or gay. This infringes the right of children to scientific knowledge about their sexuality, and leads to discrimination against lesbians and gay men working with children and young people.

The focus of the campaign against the Section has correctly been to emphasise the infr-

ingement of democratic rights that it involves. But there have been divisions about how to argue for these rights, and particularly how to reply to the 'corruption' argument. Some, including this magazine, have argued that there is no question of 'corruption' since lesbian and gay sexuality is equally valid to heterosexuality. Others, notably the Labour Party leadership, have not argued this, out of reluctance to challenge the prejudice that lesbian and gay sexuality is, in some sense, bad. These forces have fallen back on the argument that young people cannot be taught to be homosexual since it is genetic, or is established at a very early age. This argument has even been used by some sections of the lesbian and gay movement. In a TV programme made by the

editor of a national lesbian and gay newspaper we were informed by 'a psychiatrist' that corruption is impossible because sexual identity is fixed by the age of four.

From birth?

This defensive line of argument simply does not hold water. If people's sexual desires are genetically determined, why has there been such an enormous variation in them between different historical societies not just in sexual behaviour (which can be attributed to circumstances) but in evident sexual desires? In previous societies, and in much of the world today, though there may be a notion that people can be sexually attracted more to one sex than another, there is not the idea that people are ex-



Andrew Ward/Report

clusively attracted to one sex, that this is associated with a particular type of personality and a particular way of life. The idea of *sexual identities*, that individuals have an inherent sexuality, including attraction to a particular sex, and that other important things follow from this, is a modern one.

Sexual identity arises from circumstances peculiar to capitalist and post-capitalist societies. People have some possibilities for living outside of the family, and so it becomes possible to live a 'lesbian life' or a 'gay life', a life which flows from your sexual desires. But the difference between heterosexual life and lesbian or gay ('homosexual') life still remains crucial, because the heterosexual family remains the norm, and especially remains the 'proper' place to bring up children. Thus whereas formerly sexual desires might be judged good or bad but didn't have major consequences, in modern times the sex that you desire tends to define *the whole way that you lead your life*, whether you are inside or outside the heterosexual family 'norm'.

Of course, this only happens partially: many people with homosexual desires marry. But for many people their sexual desires lead to a particular way of life. Sexual desire thus becomes a much more important feature of people's personality, so that one can talk about people having 'sexual identities'.

None of this tells us how and why some people in present day society grow up heterosexual and others homosexual. It merely shows that this difference is not a biological one, but is socially created. It is therefore quite possible that positive images policies can result in more people growing up lesbian or gay. This is especially so because the institutions which shape sexuality - marriage, the family, gender roles - are now in crisis. Sexuality is unstable. The right wing fear of 'corruption' has a real element of truth. Biology cannot be used as a defence of 'teaching homosexuality' in schools. *We have to directly answer the charge that homosexuality is an inferior sexuality.*

Equally valid?

There are three areas in which lesbians and gay men are thought to be inferior. Firstly, our *sexual acts* are thought of as unnatural. 'Unnatural' boils down to 'can't create children'. This is hardly a major social problem in the modern world, though not having children is important to *individuals*.

Secondly, lesbians and gay men are thought of as having the *wrong gender* - lesbians as masculine, gay men as feminine. In modern times, since sexual desire has assumed important consequences, a central part of being a 'proper' woman is desiring men, and an important part of being a 'proper' man is desiring women; if you don't, you're not properly feminine or masculine. This gender implication of sexuality is bound up with the existence of sexual identities. As long as there are sexual identities, with one (the heterosexual) considered 'right', and as long as there is a gender system, there will be this association of lesbians and gay men with deviant gender.

Thirdly, and crucially, being lesbian or gay is considered a misfortune 'because you can't have children'. Now, of course, lesbians and

gay men can and do have children. But in present day society this is difficult. It is difficult for directly social and economic reasons - marriage, with its economic dependencies and its predetermined division of labour, provides a predictable framework for caring for children. But a large part of the difficulty is that society considers it dangerous for children to be exposed to lesbian and gay sexuality. Section 28 expresses this prohibition for lesbians and gay men working for local authorities; but it applies even more strongly to lesbians and gay men being parents. Thus lesbians and gay men and children living together usually experience hostility from neighbours, from schools; and, most sharply, the courts regard lesbians and gay men as unfit parents and often prevent us and our children living together. It is ironic that while society tells us that we are deviants 'because you cannot have children', the courts tell us that we cannot have children 'because you are deviants'.

The stigma of 'childlessness'

It is therefore *true* that lesbians and gay men, especially ones who are open about our sexuality, are less likely to live with children than heterosexuals are. The separation of lesbians and gay men from children is therefore not simply a *result* of our 'deviant' sexual identity, but is *part* of that identity: our separation from children shows our 'misfortune', and is a reason for preventing children growing up lesbian or gay. To a considerable extent, *being or not being allowed to be with children is part of what defines heterosexuals and homosexuals.*

We have a vicious circle:...there are heterosexual, lesbian and gay identities, and the latter are 'bad'...children can grow up into lesbian or gay individuals, and this is 'bad'...children must be prevented from growing up lesbian or gay...lesbians and gay men are prevented from living with and being with children...

Why do people see childlessness as such a disaster? The relationships that an adult can have with a child, are to some extent *inherently* different from those that she or he can have with other adults just by virtue of age; this would be so in a socialist society too. But the

reasons that people value parenthood are also to a large degree specific to class and capitalist societies. People want children to look after them in their old age. Inheritance, not just of property, but of skill, and increasingly of 'lifestyle' and 'personality' is important: people want to be perpetuated in another person. Finally, bearing and rearing children is a form of creativity and productiveness. For working people, alienated from our paid work, raising children is an area of control. In a sense, all these historically specific reasons involve *alienation* for the child, since they tend to construct relationships between adults and children on the basis of considerations which are alien to the child.

A socialist society would enable these alienating reasons for 'having' children to wither away. Old people would not be economically dependent on their children; unequal wealth and skill would not be there to be inherited; and creativity within production as a whole would not require compensation through dictatorial creativity with children. This would open the possibility of *real choice* as to whether or not to bear and live with children. The withering away of the notion of compulsory parenthood would then be part of the withering away of the heterosexual and homosexual identities.

But there is another reason that 'childlessness' is considered a disaster. The central feature of the institution of the family is that children, within certain legal limits, belong to their parents. They have, or are supposed to have, a different relationship to their biological parents from all other adults, and of course they have no choice over who these parents are. In a socialist society, children would have the right, and to the greatest extent possible the means, to choose which adults they live with. There would not be such pressure on adults to live in couples when living with children. Children would need adults who were committed to them. But the sharp distinction between 'parents' and 'non-parents' would be much eroded. This would further weaken the heterosexual/homosexual distinction.

The fears people have about 'corruption' cannot be side-stepped by saying that lesbians and gay men are born not made. Nor is it simply a matter of combating 'ignorance', inherited prejudice, or even ruling class propaganda. These fears arise from the conditions under which people live their lives: the biological family as the predominant means of child rearing and the gender system connected to it. The social distinctions and real divisions between heterosexuals and homosexuals, between 'fit' and 'unfit' parents, between parents and non-parents, are *logically necessary* parts of how the gender and family systems are reproduced. To create alternatives to the family and gender systems as part of creating socialism will mean eroding each of these distinctions and the way in which they reinforce each other.

Issues of childhood and parenthood are explosive. But in defending positive policies in schools and combating right-wing ideas about 'corruption' we need to find ways of speaking about, and enabling others to speak about, all these issues.

Palestine National Council: Backtracking on programme



Yasser Arafat

The continued uprising on the West Bank and Gaza Strip has put forward the objective of full and unconditional sovereignty for the Palestinian people as an immediate demand.

However, the Palestinian National Council's last meeting held in December, and which was considered to be the council of the uprising, adopted resolutions controversial among Palestinian political organisations and activists.

This meeting addressed itself to two audiences. On the one hand, it appealed to immediate aspirations for an independent and sovereign state by adopting the declaration of a state of independence.

On the other hand, it addressed the American administration's long demanded condition for recognizing the PLO by accepting UN Resolutions 242 and 338. These resolutions had always been rejected by all Palestinian organisations, and had radicalised political opinion against the Arab regimes who

accepted them in 1967 and the early 1970s.

The reasons for rejecting 242 and 338 still clearly apply today. For they ignore and exclude any national rights for the Palestinian people. They call for recognition and acceptance of the Israeli state, while over a million Palestinians who were expelled from their homes and homeland in 1948 have no right to return. Their status is recognised only as 'refugees'.

Later in a press conference Yasser Arafat, PLO head, went further in explicitly accepting the two-state solution.

This last PNC meeting is no doubt one of the most important turning points in the history of the PLO. It changes the original PLO political platform of liberation of Palestine and seeking a democratic secular state.

It ends the PLO's continuous previous rejection of 242 and 338 as a framework for solving the Palestinian national problem.

How this PNC meeting and the PLO present

policy will affect the struggle in the immediate and long term future is discussed below in two articles.

The first is by Michel Warschawsky, a leading member of the Revolutionary Communist League in the Israeli state, an organisation affiliated to the Fourth International.

The second is an interview with Beshir Khuri, member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who was deported from the West Bank in January 1988 by the Israeli authorities, accusing him of being a leading figure in the uprising.

Sana Samer

The following two articles have been translated by *Socialist Outlook* and edited slightly for reasons of space.

A new balance of forces

Thirteen months of the popular uprising have successfully created a new balance of forces between the Israeli state and the Palestinian national movement, which may eventually lead to a break in the post-1967 log jam.

For this to happen, the PLO leadership should target a set of concrete political objectives which may be achieved in the medium term (as a result of this new relationship of forces). Nobody in the occupied territories believes that the popular uprising on its own is sufficient to drive out the Israeli army and the settlers. But most people see the intifadah as leverage for permanent pressure on Israeli society as well as on international public opinion, that may lead to negotiations.

The PLO leadership outside Palestine were given two tasks by the leaders of the intifadah: to draw up a political agenda for the popular struggle; and to preserve at any cost the unity between the different political currents within the PLO, without which the uprising would run into serious danger.

At the meeting in Algiers, under the combined pressures of the imperialist states, the Arab bourgeoisie and the Soviet Union, the PNC strived to keep close to its mandate. The main political resolution accepted the principle of the partition of Palestine, and through acknowledging UN resolutions 242 and 338, recognised the Israeli state in its pre-1967 borders. The PLO further declared its readiness to

negotiate with Israel, through an international conference, a concrete peace formula.

Despite open differences, especially on the question of resolutions 242 and 338, the political currents within the PLO kept to their word and maintained unity at all costs, remaining seated on the leadership bodies.

The real aim of the Algiers PNC was to find a way to get through to Washington, underlined by the perception that only US imperialism can roll back Israel's intransigence and push them to negotiate withdrawal from the occupied territories. Washington did not miss this opportunity, and after further clarification – in particular on the question of terrorism – was ready to take on board the Algiers resolutions as a turning point in order to justify a U-turn in its policy of not dealing with the PLO.

The US decision to reopen official talks – not negotiations – with the PLO has thrown the Israeli ruling class into a panic. The Palestinian masses saw it as a resounding victory. Nevertheless the real intention of the US remains to prise out further concessions from the PLO leadership. As soon as Yasser Arafat denounced terrorism, the US administration was quick to request an end to every form of armed struggle, and even demanded the winding up of the intifadah.

There has been no sign that the PLO leaders intend to put a stop to the uprising, bearing in mind that Arafat relies on it for ammunition to pursue his manoeuvres. The leadership outside

Palestine have limited powers to impose anything on the popular movement inside.

While recognising the necessity for certain concessions to allow negotiations to take place, there are real dangers at every stage of Arafat's diplomacy. Washington will relentlessly squeeze the PLO for more concessions, including a request for Arafat to assert himself by squashing his opponents, no matter what the cost, even if it were a new civil war within the Palestinian national movement.

Currents within the leadership of Fatah and the PLO have declared their readiness to accept the compromises necessary to satisfy the US as well as the Arab bourgeois regimes. The PNC resolutions leave an important gap between the immediate need to end the occupation and achieve Palestinian sovereignty on the West Bank and Gaza, and the achievement of full self-determination for the Palestinian people.

While it is correct, under the short and medium term relationship of forces, to separate the immediate aim from the long term strategic objectives, and to accept as transitory the partition of Palestine and the principle of negotiations with the Zionist government, it remains dangerous and perhaps counter-productive to concede the long-term objectives of the struggle of the Palestinian people.

Either the Palestinian leaders want effectively to confine the outcome of the struggle to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza (in which case they must be ready for a civil war that would make the Zionist occupation seem like a picnic); or else the leadership fully realise that the establishment of

a state on the West Bank and Gaza can only resolve part of the Palestinian national question. If this latter is the case, they are mistaken in misleading international public opinion, and public opinion in Israel in particular.

To declare, as the PNC did in Algiers, that resolution 242 was accepted jointly with all the other UN resolutions dealing with the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right to return is not adequate. What is

needed is a series of concrete proposals making a bridge between the immediate objectives of the diplomatic offensive and the long-term objectives for the Palestinian people to achieve national self-determination.

Two major tasks remain central. The popular uprising must be strengthened; the popular committees are the only bodies capable of resisting a sell-out. International solidarity must play an important role in minimising the im-

mense pressures piled onto the PLO by the imperialist powers and the Arab bourgeoisie, seeking a break in the struggle for liberation.

The Revolutionary Communist League calls for a concerted effort to pressurise governments in imperialist countries to recognise the new Palestinian state unconditionally, and demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied territories.

Michel Warschawsky

The strength of the intifadah is unity

BESHIR KHAIRI spoke to *Socialist Outlook*

What do you think the last Palestine National Council (PNC) achieved, and what are its implications for the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip?

The last PNC was the council of the intifadah, and its preparation centred on how to support it. Two main issues were raised. First, the resolutions concerning the uprising, which were adopted unanimously, emphasised the importance of unity, the continuity and escalation of the intifadah, and the armed struggle. The second point on the agenda dealt with three issues: the declaration of independence and the declaration of a state – both unanimously passed – while the third point, the political communiqué, and particularly its reference to UN resolutions 242 and 338, was the subject of major disagreement.

The opposition achieved 46 votes against and ten abstentions. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was the main core of the opposition. However, while opposing, it also raised the slogan of national unity.

The PFLP has always believed that if there were important disagreements it should withdraw from the PLO Executive Committee, while remaining in all other PLO institutions.

By staying inside the Executive we are supporting national unity, but this in no way means that we are ready to cover up our differences. On the contrary, we see that in this very important period of our people's struggle it is more necessary to uphold our convictions.

How do you analyse what happened at the PNC meeting with regard to the policy of Arafat and the right wing?

Arafat's speech in front of the UN conference in Geneva was coherent with the PNC meeting. Later at the press conference he introduced some points which I consider to be contradictory. First, regarding the right of the Israeli state to exist, there was nothing that referred to it as such in the PNC resolutions. Second, the question of terrorism as explained by Arafat at the PNC meeting was correct and very different from what he stated at the press conference.

We as a liberation movement do not practice terrorism, and as a people we have been and still are victims of terrorism. On the other hand the USA has carried out terrorist acts against world-wide liberation movements, and the imperialist stooge in the region, the Zionist state, commits daily terrorist acts against our people

and the Arab peoples, and has been engaged in international terrorism.

Third, the form in which resolutions 242 and 338 were introduced by Arafat to the press conference was different from that of the PNC, which associated them with the right to self-determination and other UN resolutions.

The PFLP was very keen that unity should be a number one question, and in fact made a compromise in order to maintain it. But how do you explain the 'unity until victory' slogan while the right wing is going its own way? Do you see a breaking point somewhere, and will there be a time when this unity is threatened by the way the leadership is going politically?

We do not understand unity as a means for keeping us silent. What we see is a dialectic of unity and struggle. There is no struggle without unity and we struggle through unity.

The strength of the intifadah is its unity – a unity that goes beyond mere coordination of the different political organisations in the struggle. It is important now not to shake this internal unity, and we think any cleavage in the external unity will be reflected in the struggle inside. The course of the intifadah is towards continuity and escalation, and its development to partial and then general insurrection.

In the same context we look towards increasing the involvement of the 850,000 Palestinians subjected in 1948, including those living under occupation for 20 or 40 years, those under the repression of the Arab regimes, or in the diaspora. We must think not only of short term objectives but of longer-term strategic ones, in which the main framework of our struggle is the institutions of the PLO.

Can you tell us something about the leadership of the uprising and the character of the change of consciousness that has taken place, and the role of the working class?

The Israeli authorities have worked essentially to annex the Palestinian economy to the Zionist one. The Palestinian workforce in Zionist factories, farms and settlements includes around 120,000 workers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition there are 40-60,000 workers without permits. It was clear to the leadership of the intifadah that to stop this large workforce from working an alternative should be created – but this was yet to be prepared.

However there were other ways of crippling the Israeli economy, including the organisation of the labour force and several days of general



Palestinian resistance to Israeli attack

strikes. Today an increasing number of workers refuse to work in settlements, farms or factories. The leadership of the uprising is popularising the need for cooperatives and a return to the land.

The burgeoning home economy is the key to the growing conscious support for creating alternatives to dependence on employment in Israeli farms and factories, and helps with the boycott of Israeli produce. A new consciousness has developed on this new material basis of people's power.

The case of the United National Leadership is another striking example. As soon as a leader is jailed or deported, a dozen others spring up to replace him or her. A new morality of the uprising has also developed. Wedding ceremonies and funerals become national occasions; there is conscious solidarity, a conscious commitment to being a Palestinian, to the love of the land, and a readiness to sacrifice. Each and every citizen has a role to play in the intifadah.

What is the role of the Soviet Union and other international parties in solving the regional problems? What about the stand of Syria and Libya, which despite expectations played no role during or after the PNC?

Regardless of our political attitude towards the superpowers (for us the US is the head of the imperialist camp, while the USSR is a friend and ally) the Palestinian national question is a problem for the Palestinians to solve. This means that our choice of a solution is not a Soviet choice, nor American indeed, but our choice. No solution could be imposed on us while we still retain our leadership and independence.

As for the Arab regimes, they either conspired against the Palestinian national problem, or were silent or gave inadequate support that did not measure up to the uprising and the sacrifices of our people. Libya gives some material support, and Iraq adopted families of martyrs and wounded, but this is not enough.

The Arab Gulf states paid billions of dollars to support Iraq's war, while they pay only crumbs to the Palestinians. As we are paying in blood to defend Arab dignity and land, we have the right for oil money to be directed towards the uprising.



Piers Covendish/Reflex



Revolution and Counter-revolution in Central America

In mid-January, President Bush reiterated his support to the right-wing guerrilla movement of Angola at a time when the Cuban troops are withdrawing. Bush was also involved in the Irangate scandal, and has always been a hawk on the question of Central America.

Should we expect any change in American policy on Central America after Reagan, or any evolution in a region that for long has looked to be on the brink of being submerged either by revolutionary tides or by floods of repression?

For the millions of poor people living in the isthmus, life remains very hard and the future very grim. Most countries face repression, torture or murder in varying degrees, from terrifying death squads. To struggle in those circumstances represents a much greater act of courage and faith than in our 'democratic' countries. Hunger and poverty do their deadly work, even more slowly and more painfully; there is no hope of any

peaceful end to massive injustices and inequalities. Those in power would destroy everything before they give it up, as Somoza did in Nicaragua in 1979.

In Nicaragua, the revolutionary process born on the 19th July 1979 has been crippled by natural disasters (the most recent being the dramatic hurricane of October 1988) and brought to its knees by the US 'destabilisation'. This has failed militarily to overthrow the Sandinista government but has had some success in destroying the fragile and dependent economy, now in absolute chaos.

The economic problems of the other countries, kept afloat only by millions of US dollars, are reflected in increasing political polarisation. In El Salvador, the 'acceptable' face of Christian Democracy has crumbled, and has opened space for the only alternative: the fascist ARENA party, likely to win the next elections, and posing a dilemma for George Bush. However the Salvadoran revolutionary forces of the FMLN are quite optimistic that victory is possible, as is

detailed in the article.

The army is also in power in Guatemala, though not so openly, since it can still hide behind a civilian president; however he cannot disguise the huge problems of a terribly impoverished population and the strength of the revolutionary movement.

Central America raises many issues about revolution, revolutionary leaderships, their problems and ability to win in the face of a massive military and repressive machinery set against them. It raises fundamental but often ignored questions, such as women's liberation or the struggles and participation of indigenous peoples.

It offers living examples to apply and understand revolutionary theory, showing the complexity of real life, in which political weaknesses can cost thousands of lives. Above all, it demonstrates the value of Marxist faith in the oppressed to take control of their destiny and move towards socialism rather than barbarity.

Maria Astorga

"Central America raises many issues about revolution and revolutionary leaderships"



FSLN banner: is it really the 'party of the workers'?

Nicaragua 10 years on

Which way for the revolution?

As the Nicaraguan Revolution reaches the end of its first decade a series of questions about its nature still remain in the balance. The revolution remains a profoundly contradictory phenomenon which by its bare facts is able to supply evidence for both those who see it as a socialist revolution and those who doubt the intentions of the ruling Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional (FSLN).

This can be shown at an economic level by two examples where the direction of Sandinista policies has allowed the development of two contradictory class tendencies.

In the first case, in February 1988 the FSLN implemented a series of economic reforms which have led to a decline in the living standards of most workers and peasants. Food guarantees that had previously been universal were withdrawn for all but government workers, whilst the prices of basic grains were no longer controlled and left to the so-called laws of supply and demand. The past few years had seen a disappearance of the 'popular stores' which had guaranteed a decent supply of all basic goods to everyone

— especially in the poor neighbourhoods (barrios). The long term closure of the stores, in addition to the more recent economic changes, have had the effect of encouraging and strengthening the petty-bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie and the capitalist market place.

The motive for this policy was to end the shortages that were developing in the supplies of basic grains, and to legalise what was an enormous black market. Included in this move was a more populist change in the currency rate which, by being introduced overnight, ambushed thousands of speculators and, because there was a limit set on the amount to be exchanged, denied the internal supporters of the US-backed anti-government 'contra' forces all the funds they had built up in old currency.

Initially, these reforms were very popular because of the short term effect on the speculators, but this turned out to be a side issue compared to what followed. The freeing up of prices did encourage the peasants to grow more, the shortages in supply were overcome; but only at the price of a collapse in the incomes of urban workers and many of the poorer peasantry, who have no surplus to sell, and lost ground to the general inflationary effects which the reform halted only tem-

porarily. The average Nicaraguan, by the end of July, could barely afford to eat, and while queues had all but disappeared, begging began to reappear on the streets as a result. At the same time, during the ninth anniversary celebrations, Daniel Ortega announced that the revolution was now socialist in character.

The second example occurred at the beginning of July 1988. The FSLN decided to nationalise the San Antonio Sugar Processing Complex; not only the plant itself but a railway line and thousands of hectares of land, including virtually the whole town of San Antonio which was the property of the family that owned the plant. This was the largest private enterprise in the whole country, and its land was part owned by the technicians who ran the plant.

The company was known for its liberal patron-client relationships with its workers in terms of work conditions, food guarantees, wages and housing. There was fierce debate amongst the workers at the plant about whether or not the nationalisation was a good idea. The Frente explained that despite help from MIDINRA (the department responsible for agriculture) the complex had failed to come up to expected production levels and that it felt a creeping decapitalisation

"The average Nicaraguan, by the end of July, could barely afford to eat, and while queues had all but disappeared, begging began to reappear on the streets"

was in progress. Since the plant was the largest private company in Nicaragua its nationalisation was a real warning to the bourgeoisie, but one that was not based on the social struggles of the oppressed.

How we read these apparently contradictory events depends on our overall analysis of the regime. One might suggest that the Frente's long term commitment to the mixed economy produced both the price reform and the nationalisation. The price reform because the dominant bloc in the Frente was not prepared to see the elimination of the mixed economy and wanted to support market conditions in the agricultural sector; the nationalisation because it is not unusual for anti-imperialist petty-bourgeois regimes to carry out wholesale nationalisations in various sectors to guarantee the overall reproduction of the mixed economy. This analysis would put the Frente clearly in the historical tradition of the 'third way', the revolution in the lineage of Mexico rather than Cuba.

Another view is that the nationalisation is another calculated step in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the socialisation of the economy. Price reforms in themselves do not indicate the anti-working class nature of the regime itself given the economic difficulties that it is facing. The Frente have decided to expropriate the part of the economy they feel able to run in a period of war, leaving the petty-bourgeois sector to accumulate and stimulate the economy in the style of the Bolshevik New Economic Policy after the Russian Revolution.

It is not possible to reduce the question to one of economics. Nationalisation is no more indicative of a socialist state or government than the introduction of market mechanisms is an indication of a leadership of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois intent. In the early transitional period of a socialist regime the economic question is crucial but not determinate; the question of who holds political power and how is key.

The FSLN argues that the will of the popular majority in Nicaragua is represented through the National Assembly and that the revolution is a pluralist revolution. Some defend this analysis by claiming that Nicaragua is a pluralist socialist democracy in its early stages. All parties have equal access to the media and have the right to argue for their point of view. This ignores the fact that in Nicaragua one party has a monopoly of control of the state and the armed forces which underpin it. The police force is an explicitly *Sandinista* police force and the army is explicitly a *Sandinista* army.



Piers Cavendish/Reflex

A regime of sacrifice: young women under arms to fight the contras

In every area of the state machinery and in every mass organisation the Frente has a monopoly of power. The National Assembly is simply a Constitutional Assembly which the revolutionaries created because of their expected overwhelming dominance within it, and because of the political space this would give them in national and international politics.

This situation does not indicate that the working class and its allies hold power in Nicaragua; it does indicate is that perhaps the FSLN hold power on their behalf. The overthrow of Somoza was a rapid affair and the workers and peasants had little experience of self organisation. They were thrown into a situation where they had immense responsibilities with little practical experience. This problem implied a massive cultural revolution in order that the oppressed could begin to run their own lives. Part of this process was the literacy campaign. Yet just as the process was gaining hold, the revolution was faced by a massive counter-revolutionary war which has lasted for the last seven years and has effectively drained the resources and the revolutionary elan of the people. This should not be underestimated.

Economic hardship and war have acted to demobilise the oppressed and to centralise power and resources into the machinery of the FSLN. Many of the local *Sandinista* Defence Committees (CDSs) whilst functioning are attended mainly by Frente militants; many workers and peasants are occupied by keeping their heads above water because of the price increases. The everyday struggle to survive in Nicaragua makes it difficult for the op-

pressed to take part and construct a revolutionary democracy when factory-based proletarians are conspicuous by their absence and the building blocks of the revolution are peasants, artisans, workers in small shops, street sellers and agricultural proletarians.

The worker peasant alliance as the basis of socialist democracy does not exist as an urban-rural axis but as a rural-rural axis, outside the urban centres of power. Where there are proletarians they do not hold power; but, on occasion, they participate in it. This problem is reflected at a mass political level where there is now a tendency to distinguish between the Frente and the revolution. An opinion poll conducted by *Envia*, a magazine supportive of the revolution, found that while over 80% in Managua support the revolution, 67% did not support any party with 30% supporting the Frente and 3% supporting all fourteen opposition parties put together. While this is by no means a serious problem for the FSLN *per se*, it does pose real problems for the formation of a mass participatory socialist democracy.

At both economic and political levels there are significant problems for the revolution, the resolution of which will depend to a great degree on the character of the leadership and its relationship to the revolutionary bloc on which the seizure of power was based. Either the revolution remains in a lengthy transition period or the revolutionary dynamic has been lost and a populist project is about to enter a period of severe crisis either via a reabsorption into the world capitalist system or a qualitative break to the

"The economic question is crucial but not determinate; the key question is who holds political power and how."

"Where there are proletarians they do not hold power; but on occasion, they participate in it."

left. The evidence available over the last year suggests that either of these scenarios are an arguable possibility.

The Sandinista leadership is in no sense a coherent revolutionary marxist leadership (There are Marxists, Christians, radical social democrats and radical nationalists in the FSLN and who is dominant is not at all clear). The overthrow of the old Somoza dictatorship in 1979 was not a definitive socialist revolution, but an anti-oligarchic revolution led by the united front of forces within the FSLN attached to mass organisations. The project of the Frente has been to hold that bloc together while opposing the counter-revolutionary war.

This bloc itself has contradictory tendencies within it (from landless peasant, unemployed worker, street seller and market vendor to so-called 'patriotic bourgeoisie' which the FSLN has insisted is a part of its project) which at the overthrow either supported the FSLN or accepted its leadership against Somoza. It is these contradictions within the FSLN and the anti-oligarchic bloc, combined with the contradictory tendencies in the economy, alongside the electoralist nature of popular power in Nicaragua (which has witnessed a substantial demobilisation in recent years) that suggest a further break is required to assure the socialist character of the revolution.

With the defeat of the contras almost certain, the counter-revolution will become an internal affair backed by the Central Intelligence Agency and the United States state department. The FSLN will have to depend on the self organisation and mass mobilisation of the most oppressed and those in whose historic interests a planned and socialised economy and society will operate. This will imply a transfer of power from the Frente to the workers, poor peasantry and other oppressed layers via organs of socialist democracy of the type most appropriate to the Nicaraguan situation.

It is this next step forward which will be the qualitative break required and could induce a rupture in the anti-oligarchic revolutionary bloc which may be reflected inside the Frente Sandinista itself. While not recognising the latter point, Orlando Nunez, a leading revolutionary socialist in the FSLN, outlines such an approach in his book *'Democracia y Revolucion en las Americas'*. The strategy is to develop a Popular Assembly of Mass Organisations alongside the National Assembly. There is no discussion of how these two structures would operate together but any new assembly of such a kind would be a step for-



Sandinista soldiers: the army has been reconstructed

ward to the development of a real socialist democracy. It has also been mooted that the CDSs may become instruments for discussing more than purely local problems – they may start to consider issues of universal importance. These two developments would, in time, negate the role of the bourgeoisie as a political and economic force and reduce the importance of the National Assembly while instituting organs of class rule. This would change the physiology of the Nicaraguan Revolution and imply a definitive and qualitative growing over of the anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchic revolution into a permanent revolution of a socialist character.

It is in a strategy of this type that the hope of the revolution lies. The ability of the FSLN to mobilise the workers and peasants in times of crisis has been reaffirmed during the events that led up to the hurricane and the reconstruction project that has followed it; but further mobilisations and qualitative advances can only be assured if the mass base of the FSLN do not suffer further hardship at the hands of the Frente's economic policy.

The FSLN can no longer allow the free market and so-called liberated prices to do any more damage to the poor and oppressed. They must eliminate these seedbeds of capitalism before they eliminate the political power and organisational will of the oppressed. This would imply, at a minimum, re-introducing food guarantees for the poor, eliminating the big landowners that still exist and turning their land over to the landless for the production of basic grains. This would counter supply problems if it were combined with an acceleration of the programme of shifting cotton production over to basic grain production in the Pacific Coastal areas. The massive investment given to the cotton bourgeoisie could then finance the

development of basic consumption goods industries (and some capital goods industries) to encourage proletarianisation and the production of wage goods to exchange with the peasantry.

Two things are clear. The revolution of 1979 clearly deprived the bourgeoisie and its allies of political power. Secondly while the FSLN claim that it is the people who hold power in Nicaragua, it is in fact the FSLN and its armed wing which hold the reins of the state machine and policy making processes, which have included incorporating the 'patriotic bourgeoisie' and other forces hostile to a socialist project into the revolutionary bloc. It is true that Nicaraguan society went through an exceptional revolutionary crisis which threw together forces and developed a leadership of incredible breadth and depth in opposition to the dictatorship.

These forces were coherent enough under the leadership of the FSLN to destroy the oligarchy and to have some alternative anti imperialist vision of a just society of producers; but this did not, and does not, imply that the revolutionary socialist alternative had or has hegemony within the revolutionary bloc.

It is this contradictory political reality that is reflected throughout the economy, politics and society in Nicaragua today and leads to the conclusion that the international and national balance of forces alongside the counter-revolutionary war and the politically mixed nature of the Frente leadership has produced in Nicaragua an extended period of what Trotsky believed would be an exceptional circumstance – a workers' and farmers' government which has still to make the definitive break towards the socialist revolution.

Will MacMahon

"The FSLN will have to depend on the self organisation and mass mobilisation of the most oppressed and those in whose historic interests a planned and socialised economy and society will operate."

11th May 1988 and its consequences

A very Guatemalan coup

The capitalist world only talks about events that suit its ideological purposes or make money. The ongoing massacres of poor peasants or military coups that matter in the political destiny of the oppressed are not worth reporting.

Despite its failure, the attempted coup of the 11th May in Guatemala was significant as it marked a turning point in the policy of the Christian Democratic government of President Cerezo, the failure of its counter-insurgency project and the culmination of deep divisions inside the ruling class and the army. Since then, mobilisations of the popular movement and repression have been on the increase.

Last to eat, first to die

Guatemala, the country of beautiful Maya ruins and colourful Indian dresses, is one of the worst to live in. It ranks only third in Latin America for the quality of life. Between 40 and 55% (depending on the estimates) of its population are 'extremely poor' and up to 86% live below the poverty line. It has the worst infant mortality rate and the worst literacy rate of Central America, one of the poorest health records and the most unequal land distribution of Latin America. Life expectancy is very low, in particular among the Indians who represent some 50 to 70% of the population. Over 60% of the 2 million adults available for work are completely unemployed. In this intensely racist society, pure-blood Indians are compared to plants and animals whilst the ladinos, the mixed-blood people, dominate society. There are 22 Indian communities all over the country, and all speak a different idiom. This can make communication difficult, as Rigoberta Menchú reported in her per-

sonal testimony, 'I... Rigoberta Menchú'. She explained that hunger and poverty are another form of killing in parallel to direct repression.

Guatemala has a strong agro-export sector (based on coffee, cotton and sugar) to the detriment of production for local consumption and in which wages are extremely low, a fairly strong industry – both controlled by a limited number of families.

8% of Guatemalans control 90% of the land. Cotton production, the most labour intensive, crashed recently due to falling world prices. The private sector did not invest much in the last few years with the recession in the industrial countries and the fear of political instability in the region. Instead, the profits made have been sent abroad or lavishly spent by the tiny ruling class. Prices of staple food, however, keep on increasing: maize and beans trebled in 1985 alone.

Guatemala Ltd

Three intertwined groups control the country and make huge profits. The oligarchy, the Guatemalan ladinos elite which started in the last century when coffee became a major produce, has since moved onto industry and other agro-exports. They generate three-quarters of the country's foreign exchange.

The armed forces have always played a much more important role in Guatemala than elsewhere in Central America, because they did not keep to the subordinate role of defending the interests of the ruling class but have developed their economic base, with some generals becoming millionaires. The Bank of the Army is the 7th largest in the country. The specific nature of the military in the country has prompted some authors to name it 'Garrison State' or 'Garrison Guatemala'.



Decisive elements in the 'garrison state'

The US multinationals and banks are often linked to the traditional families and the army. In 1985, there were 483 branches or subsidiary of US transnationals including 90 of the top 500 US companies. They far outweigh the national industrial capital.

Insurgency and counter-insurgency

Discontent and revolts are natural given the gross inequalities of the situation. Repression has reached unbelievable heights in Guatemala, until the early 80's when major blows were inflicted to the guerrilla organisations. The Guatemalan guerrillas are, with their 20-year history, the oldest insurgent movement on the continent. The various organisations (ERP, ORPA, FAR and PGT) regrouped in the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in February 1982 and, despite their defeat in the massive army counter-offensive of 1981-82, have reemerged as a vigorous political and military force to be included in any solution to the internal crisis.

The counter-insurgency project was designed in 1982 to 'defeat strategically' the URNG by military means, by international isolation and by social measures to lessen the existing contradictions. Part of the measures consisted in militarising the villages by forcing all men to enrol in civil patrols. Numerous villages were destroyed with their inhabitants resettled in model villages mixed with Indians of different communities to destroy the collective sense of solidarity and force them to learn Spanish, the only common language.

"the worst infant mortality rate, the worst literacy rate, one of the poorest health records and the most unequal land distribution of Latin America..."

Never a threat to the system

In January 1986, for the first time after 32 years of unbroken military rule, the civilian president, Vinicio Cerezo, took office. The result was praised by the US Administration as the 'final step in the reestablishment of democracy'. It was of course part of their strategy to isolate the 'totalitarian' Nicaragua. Rigoberta Menchú said: 'Vinicio Cerezo has kept a space for himself with the military because he has never been, and never will be, a threat to the system. That is why he is the President.' Cerezo came to power with a very watered down programme that still included a policy of 'active neutrality' in the regional conflict and a stance against the military overthrow of the Sandinista government as advocated by Washington. His efforts won him support from the international community after years of isolation because of the appalling human rights record of Guatemala. Cerezo had dropped all idea of agrarian reform and wanted to restructure the economy using International Monetary Fund schemes.

These measures required some political opening and led to confrontation between different groups of the oligarchy and the military at the time of the 1987 Peace Plan initiated by President Arias of Costa Rica in an attempt to bring peace to the whole region.

Peace and power

The Esquipulas agreements forced the Guatemalan president to open space for a dialogue with its opposition, as was requested by Nicaragua to the delight of the US strategists. This was totally rejected by the oligarchy which wanted to eradicate the revolutionary movement. The group of the 'Officers of the Mountain' appeared as a major pressure group within the army which forced a unilateral break of the talks. Then came a number of defeats in Cerezo's attempts to win international recognition. As a result, the US aid approved for Guatemala was reduced and the 'neutrality' ended.

The bad and the ugly

In 1976 when the US government cut military aid to the country, some officers were trained in Taiwan army political centre and others in American centres. Israel became the major suppliers of military arms and equipment. This resulted in 2 very different conceptions in counter-insurgency.

One sector of the army is led by the Defence Minister Gramajo who calls for respect of the institutional processes. It is supported by the members of the oligarchy involved in exportation,

commercialisation industry and financing.

The other faction led by the 'Officers of the Mountain' is opposed to dialogue with the URNG, to the agrarian reform, to the return of the International Red Cross, to the presence of the Soviet and Cuban press correspondents (who have had to leave since), and wants the dismissal of Gramajo and the maintaining of the civil self-defence patrol. They are supported by the agro-exporters involved in coffee and cattle production. For them, the government should be totally subordinated to the military and they show little concern for the potential loss of international aid and

Labour and Popular Action - formed at the end of 1987 as a response to the government's policies on electricity, salaries, prices, human rights violations, the right to organise and the return of the land to the peasants) because of the threat of general strike. He signed the union's demands, hence acknowledging their legitimacy and opening political space for their participation. The oligarchy reacted strongly against it, in particular given the political nature of the agreement which included the legalisation of the CUC (Committee for Peasant Unity) considered a 'violent faction on the fringes of the law'. The government was also obliged to create conditions

The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) was formed on February 8 1982 by the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), the Organisation of the People in Arms (ORPA), and the directorate of the Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT). The unity process was consolidated in May 1985 with the formation of the general command of the URNG. In the last six years the URNG has extended its insurgent activities to eight of the twenty-two departments in Guatemala in a territory of three million inhabitants, equal to almost half the entire population. The unity process has allowed the development of a sole guerilla front operating in the central plains.

(From *Barricada Internacional*, 8.9.88)

legitimacy that this could entail. They believe that 'war is war' and are gaining ground. They are behind the 11th May attempted coup.

At the end of 1987 the army launched a campaign which was to be 'the final battle against the insurgency'. 6,000 troops were sent into the Quiché department. The expedition ended without even an official report. According to the URNG, the army suffered some 500 casualties in 60 days of confrontation. At the same time, various plots or rumours of coups in the capital prompted several moves of troops around the country and large military operations had to be suspended because of fears of uprising against the government. The guerrillas were able to strike at the army and extend its operation to nearly half the country. The intensification of the armed conflict failed to meet the army's objective. With its demand for a political dialogue, the URNG took the initiative. Defence Minister Gramajo tried to justify this by stating: 'The radicals within the army say that dialogue constitutes a political defeat. To my mind, rather, the dialogue is a ratification of the military victory over the URNG. Dialogue is a euphemism we use to speak of surrender'.

Agreements and disagreements

There was no surrender however. In April, President Cerezo signed an agreement with the UASP (Unity of

for the repatriation of refugees living in Mexico and to support the demand of the GAM (Mutual Support Group) to form a commission about the disappeared.

Then came the visit of the RUOG (United Representation of the Guatemalan Opposition). Originally the government wanted to use the visit for its own aims and publicise it widely. When it was accepted by the RUOG members, it then tried to prevent it. 2 of the 4 delegates were arrested and released the day of their arrival. The visit backfired on Cerezo. It was one of the main reasons for the coup.

The coup failed. Cerezo and Gramajo are still in control. For the moment. Since the coup, the death squads have grown. At the end of August, more than half a million Guatemalans went on strike as the government has not honoured its promises. The aims of the Cerezo government have all failed and Cerezo is losing more and more credibility. The URNG is getting stronger. The main problem remains the army, as it has been for many years in what some have called Garrison Guatemala. The Guatemalans still talk about 'the coup' because it signalled the end of the Christian Democrat adventure and a new stage for the revolutionary movement.

Maria Astorga

"In September 1988 a new organisation of women was formed: the Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows. Known as CONAVIGUA, it adopted the following slogan 'for the dignity and unity of women, we are present in the struggle of the people'."

El Salvador The end is in sight

In 1989 eyes should be turned to El Salvador. In the view of the FMLN armed liberation front, after nine years of civil war, 'the end is at last in sight'. This view is an optimistic one, but not unrealistic. The FMLN paint three scenarios for 1989: a negotiated political settlement to the war, a popular insurrection, or an escalation of the war.

So what has changed in El Salvador? How can you tell when a volcano is about to erupt? It is important to understand the degree of social injustice, poverty and oppression that are the roots of the present civil war. The human rights abuses, the total absence of national sovereignty and the large scale economic crisis then follow from the government's insistence on continuing the war.

The FMLN has been referred to by US observers as having the largest guerrilla army ever in Latin America. They are vastly more powerful than the Nicaraguan or Cuban insurgents on the eve of their revolutions. However they have to be. They are fighting an army that has been rebuilt from top to bottom with massive training and aid from the US. At \$2 million a day, US aid is equivalent to 105% of the Salvadoran budget. El Salvador has reached the record dependence of South Vietnam during the height of the Vietnam war.

The Salvadoran army simply cannot handle any more hardware or aid. They cannot expand the number of combatants as much as they wish even by pulling youth out of cinema queues. Their methods of forced recruitment produce an unreliable, discontented and demoralised army. The FMLN will rely on a level of disintegration and defection from the armed forces to carry through an insurrection.

Even against this highly trained army, the FMLN constantly takes the initiative. Their list of military actions is impressive. They can take almost any town temporarily and make regular attacks on fortified army barracks including recently in San Sal-

vador.

Everyone recognises that the FMLN cannot be defeated in the near future, not this century. Nor, however, can they defeat the armed forces and a possible US intervention on a purely military level. If the people choose to rise up against a US puppet state they have an extremely capable army to lead them.

The mass movement has grown significantly over the last three years. Militant trade unions have been built through strikes and demonstrations. These unions formed the National Unity of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) which has further sparked the development of other mass organisations. The UNTS has become something more than a trade union organisation, and includes peasants, the universities, human rights groups, women's and youth groups.

The UNTS takes a different approach from the trade union movement in the late 1970's. People are facing various problems that have a common link, falling living standards, fewer jobs, rising prices, higher taxes and a reduction in welfare, health and education provision. All of these can be identified with the government's special economic package which demanded austerity as a military requirement to fight the FMLN.

Salvadorans are being asked to make these sacrifices for a war they do not support. They want peace, and they have been won to the demands of the FMLN and the 'political' wing, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), the UNTS and the catholic church for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict. Human and civil rights are massively abused with government complicity. The people are becoming increasingly aware that the war is being carried out under instructions from Washington, as well as



Salvadoran workers launch UNTS

noting the high levels of US interference at other levels, notably within the trade union movement itself.

The UNTS has brought together the issues of national sovereignty, human and civil rights, living standards and peace. These are all issues connected to the war and to Washington, so the solution is a national political one. The UNTS works to pose a common solution and way of fighting. Unity, self organisation, collective resources for the use of all, national sovereignty and democracy.

Top of the list is a negotiated political settlement to the war. By this they do not mean a deal negotiated between the FMLN/FDR and the government, but a national debate and agreement which involves all the mass organisations. This process has already begun as the Catholic church, the universities and the UNTS have met in forums and conferences to put forward their analysis of the country and potential solutions for discussion.

This creates a very powerful situation. These forums are not soviets, or forms of dual power, for they have no power. However these forms of mass organisation have enormous potential, for they exist in the midst of a revolutionary civil war, despite every attempt by the government and US to demobilise them.

The anti-insurgency programme of the US has failed most clearly in its attempt to produce a stable and respectable government. The Christian Democratic party, the PDC has failed in its mission. Its leader President Napoleon Duarte is dying of political

"Militant trade unions have been built through strikes and demos"

cancer as well as of the real thing. The party has been exposed as corrupt and has broken down into factions squabbling about who is to take over from Duarte. Their base has gone over either to UNTS or to the far right ARENA party, breeding ground of the death squads.

The ruling class does not know how to deal with the economic, political and military crisis. A growing faction within the ARENA party is in favour of the total war solution. They figure that killing 50-100,000 people in one go would stop the mass movement and revolutionary potential in its tracks. At present the death squads have been told to keep the death toll to tens rather than hundreds per month. The figures for 1987 were a dozen dead bodies dumped per month, increasing four-fold for 1988.

With the collapse of the political centre, the US has had to improve relations with ARENA, and with its new leader Christiani who has replaced the notorious d'Aubisson. It is trying to paint ARENA as a reasonable party committed to human rights. But this does not remove the reality of the polarisation taking place.

The state seems incapable of meeting the demand for a negotiated settlement. Meanwhile it is propped up by massive financial subsidies from the US. While much of this goes into corruption, it is much harder for the US to maintain this aid (second in size only to that given to Israel) if the government is too openly fascist.

In this context the presidential elections in March are quite important. They will be fraudulent and only a minority will participate, but they might be decisive in deciding the balance of forces within the bourgeoisie and influencing their subsequent strategy. ARENA are likely to win, although probably not with an outright majority, so it might have to go to a second round.

It is very interesting that the FDR have decided to participate and stand candidates as part of the newly established Democratic Convergence (CD). This has resulted in an open but apparently friendly split between the two revolutionary fronts FMLN and FDR. The FMLN will not call for a vote for CD, but for abstention. Both fronts stress the tactical nature of the disagreement because they agree that the elections are fraudulent and that power cannot come from winning votes through them.

Guillermo Ungo of the Socialist international affiliated MNR is standing for president, and Reni Roldan of the Social Democratic party, which is not part of the FDR, is standing for vice-president.

CD say they are not competing for votes, but in order to put forward their politics, in particular a negotiated political settlement to the conflict. If they hold a balance of votes between the two parties, they will not recommend that their supporters vote for either of the other parties.

The international context is critical. The most difficult issue is that a popular insurrection and military victory by the FMLN would undoubtedly be met by an invasion of US troops. The FMLN/FDR is very aware of this and is preparing the ground to make it as difficult as possible for any US intervention.

The US policy is to contain the situation, given that its plans to defeat the FMLN and set up a pliant democracy have miserably failed. There is no reason to believe that the Bush administration will differ from Reagan's. The US is particularly eager to get the international trade union movement to aid it in its attempts to set up parallel unions in El Salvador in order to undermine the mass movement. The CIA continues this work with British trade unions, but the TUC itself has taken a stand in favour of promoting the UNTS, which is a boost for the Salvadoran labour movement.

Latin American governments take the Salvadoran revolutionary situation seriously and are probably more aware than the US government of the effect of a US invasion on the whole sub-continent. Arguably they would prefer a tame revolution to a violent counter-revolution imposed by the US. This is also the view of the Socialist International.

Guillermo Ungo of the FDR is also the vice president of the Socialist International and was invited to speak to the European parliament in November, a sure sign of the differences that the European capitalists have with the US counter-insurgency approach.

What are the essential features of the Salvadoran revolution? Firstly the size of the US intervention prior to an insurrection means that the revolutionaries face a task far more difficult both militarily and politically than that faced by Nicaragua or Cuba. Given this the revolutionaries have achieved a great deal, something not to be underestimated.

The project of the revolutionaries has been to win hegemony. They have gone a long way towards this with their demand for a negotiated political solution. A large social political movement has developed which is much broader than the FMLN fighters. If the movement continues to grow and the government refuses to recognise it, repressing it instead, the conditions will be set for an insurrection,

one of the FMLN's scenarios.

But what would a negotiated political solution mean? Could it be a Lancaster House type solution? Quite possibly, but the best way to look at it is as a framework for a political battle that could go various ways, not as a solution in itself. However, this is not how it is presented by the FMLN.

It is a strategy that is undoubtedly working in the revolutionaries' favour, whatever the risks involved with it are. Most importantly it is a policy that allows or anticipates mass participation in the process of deciding the future of the country, in a way far more advanced than any bourgeois election process.

The problem is that it is posed as a solution within itself. It is difficult to see from here if people are being misled into believing that peace could be achieved through compromises on both sides. Alternatively the unfolding of the struggle will teach people the need to replace the entire state structures, and replace them with a new one based on new values and a different social and economic order.

Trotsky put forward an idea in his writings on Britain, that the people will try everything else before revolution. This could be a giant practical lesson that the bourgeois state cannot in any of its various forms meet the demands of the people. The choice facing the people would then be the FMLN slogan 'revolution or death'.

In Britain our starting point must be solidarity: support for the right of the Salvadoran people to self-determination, support for the trade unions and the mass movements in their just struggles. The way to do this is through the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC).

Get your trade union, trades council, Labour Party or whatever to affiliate locally, regionally and nationally to ELSSOC. If you cannot do it yourself, get someone you know to take a regular active role in solidarity work through their local branch of the campaign. The starting point is affiliation and donations.

ELSSOC is vastly under-resourced because people have lost interest over the eight years of the civil war. Now, when El Salvador is nearer popular insurrection than any other country in the world, the campaign will be unable to meet the new demands being put on it unless the left gives it more support. The rewards are not only giving concrete support but being in the best position to learn from the unfolding revolutionary process and its strength and weaknesses.

Gareth Mostyn

**Nicaragua
Solidarity
Campaign,
23 Beveden
Street, London
N1 6BH
Affiliations:
£12.50,
£5 unwaged.**

**ELSSOC,
20 Compton
Terrace,
London N1
Affiliations:
£6 individuals,
£2.50 students
/unwaged,
£10 trade
unions,
LP wards,
£20 CLPs,
trades councils.**

Riding a Tiger into a blind alley

In our last issue (S.O. 11), in 'Tigers the Indian Army Cannot Tame', Finn Jensen argued that as 'the leading force – politically and military – in the fight for a liberated Tamil Eelam', the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) should be supported by socialists internationally, irrespective of differences over their tactics. M. MANICKAM and LAL SILVA take issue with him below.

Jensen's analysis contains inaccuracies and fails to deal with the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the role of different political and military groups from a class perspective. His article reproduces uncritically the selective 'facts' and interpretations which the LTTE use, and so Jensen unwittingly abandons a marxist approach.

Tamils and the Tamil nation

Tamils make up about 21.5 per cent of the population of Sri Lanka. But there are significant caste, class, political and economic differences between the Tamils in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, and the Tamil plantation workers who live mainly in the Central and Uva provinces. Jensen lumps them together.

And by stating that 'A plantation economy was introduced in Sri Lanka which forced hundreds of thousands of Tamil labourers to migrate to the Sinhalese south', Jensen gives the impression that a significant proportion of these Tamil plantation workers came from the north and east of Sri Lanka, or Ceylon, as it was then called. This was not the case. All the plantation workers came from South India and they were regarded as low caste 'untouchables' by Ceylon Tamils, who were used as middle management and as supervisory personnel by the British plantation Raj. In 1948 when the first post-independence government formed by the conservative United National Party (UNP) disenfranchised the Tamil plantation workers, the overwhelming majority of Ceylon Tamil MPs voted in favour of that draconian act. The marxist and liberal MPs (mainly Sinhalese) voted and campaigned against it. Furthermore, up until 1965, Ceylon Tamil politicians regularly formed coalition governments with the UNP.

This accounts not only for the traditional antagonism between the plantation Tamils and Ceylon Tamils, but also for the total lack of support amongst plantation Tamils for the demand for a separate Tamil state, despite the super-exploitation they have suffered for many decades.

These are not just historical issues. Even today, the LTTE has no programme for the tea

plantation workers, and have consistently failed to support their struggles. In fact any attempt to campaign on the specific demands of the plantation workers has been opposed by the LTTE as a diversion. Not surprisingly in the recent presidential elections held last December, the vast majority of the plantation workers voted for the UNP candidate.

For the very same reason it is methodologically incorrect – if we still accept Lenin's method – to lump together these two separate and distinct communities as one nation. Quite apart from cultural, caste, and class differences between these two groups, they live in different geographical areas and have different 'national' aspirations. For Jensen 'nation' is an ahistorical concept: he speaks of 'two nations' unified by the British, thereby using the term 'nation' interchangeably with the term 'kingdom'. (Ironically, immediately prior to the British conquest, the so-called Sinhala Kingdom in Kandy was ruled by Tamil kings and its official language was Tamil.)

In our opinion, the development of the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka is a post-imperialist and post-capitalist phenomenon, with its roots in the inability of the post-independence Sri Lankan ruling class to fulfill basic tasks of the democratic revolution. It is theoretically and politically incorrect to refer to pre-capitalist political formations as 'nations'. Jensen falls into this trap.

The development of a Tamil 'nation' was by no means a foregone conclusion. In fact there was a far greater degree of class solidarity across Sri Lanka as a whole – both in the ruling class as well as in the working class – than on a linguistic or ethnic basis, in the first decade after



Sri Lanka union demo against 1965 UNP government

independence. The Sinhala and Tamil bourgeoisie ganged up against the Tamil plantation workers in 1948 precisely because these workers had voted for marxist and working class representatives to parliament that year. If it were not for the Ceylon Tamil representatives, the first government of Sri Lanka would have been a coalition of working class and ethnic minority representatives led by the Trotskyist LSSP (literally translated, the 'Equal Society Party').

Tamil resistance

Jensen's potted history of Tamil resistance leaves out one very important feature of almost all Tamil political formations including the LTTE. That is their consistent subordination of the interests of the Tamil people to bourgeois and/or imperialist interests.

Jensen states that in 1976 the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) called for the 'restoration and reconstitution of the free, sovereign, secular, socialist (!) state of Tamil Eelam' and that 'the 1977 general election gave a majority in Parliament to the right-wing United National Party, with the TULF as the leading opposition party.' What has been omitted here is that despite their rhetoric, the TULF was an opportunist bourgeois formation and that in 1977 the TULF made a secret pact with the UNP. In return for certain concessions and possible of-

fers of ministerial jobs, the TULF delivered a substantial portion of the Tamil vote outside the north and east to the UNP. Jensen's article also fails to mention the fact that many of the leading cadres of the LTTE itself were the strong-arm men of the TULF.

When UNP repression compelled Tamil youths to take up arms, the leaderships of most armed groups switched their allegiance from the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie to other ruling classes – including the Indian bourgeoisie. These leaderships consciously and deliberately prevented the development of solidarity between Tamil masses in the north and east and the oppressed Sinhala workers and peasants, or the super-exploited Tamil plantation workers. They would seek the assistance of plantation youth only as foot soldiers in their 'Eelam' suicide squads.

Prettifying the LTTE

Marx often said that if appearance and reality were the same there would be no need for science. We need to look further, beyond the rhetoric and behind the superficial appearance of LTTE's class character (where Jensen seems to stop), to the reality of their politics.

The LTTE (with, to a lesser extent, the student organisation EROS), more than any other Eelam group, have treated not just the Sri Lankan ruling classes and the Sinhala dominated army, but also ordinary Sinhala workers and peasants, as their enemies. They have carried out innumerable attacks – massacres – of Sinhala civilians. Small children too, have died at their hands. Just like the Sinhala soldiers who indiscriminately attacked Tamil villagers, LTTE cadres have repeatedly attacked Sinhala civilians. Before the arrival of the Indian peace keeping force in 1987, this policy of the LTTE strengthened the hand of the government and Sinhala chauvinists. It also substantially weakened the efforts of progressive forces in the Sinhala south that supported the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation and opposed the militarist and chauvinist policies of the government.

Whilst every subjugated nation has a right to determine the tactics and strategy it should adopt in the struggle to free itself, those within that nation must adopt strategies to unify workers and all the oppressed forces against the ruling class. Socialists have an additional responsibility: to assist workers to develop a socialist consciousness. It is not enough merely to tail-end bourgeois and petty-bourgeois currents in the nationalist movement. Through their programme and their actions, socialists must consistently seek to break the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois stranglehold.

This the LTTE will not do. It is the most right-wing of all the Eelam groups. Instead of promoting political debate and dialogue with other Tamil liberation groups it has attempted to annihilate them – particularly those who raise the awkward issues of caste, class and women's oppression. Since it is backed by powerful bourgeois interests, it undoubtedly has the firepower to outgun its democratic and left-wing opponents. Between 1983 and 1987, an estimated 3,000 Eelam militants have died. 1,500 were killed by the Sri Lankan army or police. Another 1,000 were militants of other groups

killed by the LTTE. (A further 260 or so were LTTE members who took cyanide pills when captured by the army, and the remainder were militants killed by their own organisations.)

Organisations such as the Eelam People's Liberation Front (EPRLF), which aims to combat caste oppression and has set up grassroots committees of the masses, have been the chief targets for LTTE liquidation campaigns. Like the Sri Lankan government, which set up special detention camps (the most notorious being at Boosa, near Galle), the LTTE also set up their own version of Boosa. After a bomb was thrown at Kittu, an LTTE militant, all these detainees were summarily executed.

And in January of this year, Annamalai, the Jaffna leader of the Trotskyist NSSP, was shot and killed by LTTE forces.

In the Tamil community itself – both nationally and internationally – the LTTE draws its support largely from the upper layers of society. Internationally their main financial support has come from the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu – M.G. Ramachandran and the American Tamil Association. Many Tamil socialists are suspicious of the amount of American Tamil money going to the LTTE. One of LTTE's most vociferous supporters (at present campaigning for them in Britain), is N. Satyendra, the former Chair of Union Carbide in Sri Lanka. He was a vicious anti-working class record co-operating with the Sri Lankan government in 1978 to smash a number of workers' struggles. He is one amongst many in the LTTE pack. The LTTE claim to be advancing the class struggle, even in the north and east, is, to say the least, absurd.

Relations with the Indian ruling class

The Indians, as Jensen correctly states, certainly trained and armed the LTTE better than other groups. In particular the Indians made sure that left wing groups such as the EPRLF were not well armed.

The Indians had constant consultations with LTTE leaders. They were the *only* group consulted by the Indian government immediately before signing the Indian-Sri Lankan accord. To all the others it was presented as a fait accompli.

The LTTE did not always oppose the peace accord. Initially they accepted it and tried to put pressure on the Indian government to implement it in a manner that would allow the LTTE to dominate the Provincial Councils. In fact to date, the LTTE has not called for the withdrawal of the Indian peace keeping force from Sri Lanka.

The Revolutionary Marxist Party of Sri Lanka accurately characterised the accord as horse-trading between the Indian and Sri Lankan bourgeoisies, over the heads of the Tamil and Sri Lankan masses. The LTTE is a part of this robber gang and is in no way a revolutionary force. Its quarrel with the Indians is not about transferring social and economic power to the masses. For their part, the Indians want to ensure that the US and other western interests do not establish military bases in Sri Lanka.

Jensen seems to have ignored the fact that the

LTTE itself wants to do a diplomatic deal with the Indians. And the Indians do not want to eliminate the LTTE at the risk of weakening their bargaining power with the Sinhala bourgeoisie; so they are smugly using all the political groups to achieve their ends. To this extent Jensen is right – the Indians want to 'tame' the Tigers – but not eliminate them. Contrary to LTTE propaganda, the Indian peace keeping force has succeeded in limiting the effectiveness of the LTTE, largely because many people in the north and east have become war weary.

The LTTE'S blind alley

The LTTE policy of alienating all other sections of the oppressed masses in Sri Lanka has driven them more and more into the arms of the Indian and other bourgeoisies. They have fought tooth and nail against any form of democratic grassroots organisation of the masses, opposed moves to challenge class and caste oppression, and sought to maintain their grip by sheer armed might and the physical elimination of all other political currents. They have alienated not only Sinhala toilers and plantation workers, but also a substantial section of the Tamil masses too. In the recent Provincial Council elections a majority of Tamils in the eastern province defied LTTE threats and their call to boycott the elections. The LTTE are not 'the leading political and military force' in the fight for Tamil Eelam, as Jensen claims.

The Leninist thesis

Often petty-bourgeois nationalists will brandish Lenin's thesis on the national question but emphasise one aspect of his thesis and happily abandon another. They draw our attention to Lenin's insistence that socialists should recognise the right of oppressed nations to decide their own destiny; the right of self determination, including the right to secede from the oppressor nation.

However, in the very same thesis, Lenin also emphasised that on no condition should workers' organisations be divided on national or ethnic lines. Furthermore the whole thrust of Lenin's orientation was to assist workers of the oppressed nation, whose socialist consciousness had been blocked by national oppression.

By intervening in the struggle for full democracy, socialists enable these workers to overcome this obstacle and create conditions for a unified struggle to overthrow capitalist rule. This involves a dual fight – against chauvinist consciousness of the workers and toilers in the oppressor nation, and for a class programme and against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois currents within the oppressed nation. Socialists must implement this approach in its totality and struggle against petty-bourgeois charlatans seeking to steal some of their clothes to serve their own class needs.

The LTTE, like many other petty-bourgeois nationalists, have been quick to adopt those aspects of Lenin's thesis on the national question that suit their class interests, whilst discarding and suppressing those that don't. Viewed from this standpoint it looks like the Tigers have taken Jensen for a ride.

M. Manickam and Lal Silva



Getting to grips with Thatcherism

Is 'Thatcherism' a completely new political phenomenon, or just a handy smokescreen to mask the capitulation of sections of the Labour, trade union and Communist Party leaderships? Or is the truth somewhere between the two?

In the last issue of *Socialist Outlook* Phil Hearse in a controversial article suggested Thatcherism represented a decisive move towards a 'strong state', and embodied elements of 'semi-bonapartism'.

Here, JOHN LISTER, opposing the notion of 'semi-bonapartism', widens the debate by looking in more depth at the origins of Thatcherism and its dependence upon the weakness of leadership in the labour movement.

Future articles continuing this debate will also include a political assessment of the 'Charter 88' campaign around democratic rights.

THATCHERISM has in the past few years become the measuring stick for political ideology and method not only in western Europe, Australia and New Zealand but also – especially since Thatcher's Polish visit – in the Stalinist states as well.

Recent articles in two important Soviet publications show that perestroika is bringing in its train a growing appreciation of the politics of the 'Iron Lady', according to the *Financial Times*. While an article in *Pravda* was comparatively muted, stressing her success in turning around the economy, accelerating its growth and stabilising the British share of world trade, another author, writing in *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* was positively eulogistic:

'The British ruling class turned in desperation to Thatcher, writes Mr Lev Makarevich, and chose well: "In nine years she had "lifted the country out of its depressed state", privatised ailing industries and sacked incompetent bureaucrats.' (*FT* December 6)

Both writers point admiringly to the growth of share ownership and home ownership in Britain, and regard the Thatcher reforms as a unified perestroika-style package. Both agree that Labour is unlikely to win the next election, and both are contemptuous of the trade unions, of which Makarevich points out: 'Overcoming them proved easy, since the leadership was paralysed by bureaucracy and fear of the scientific technical

revolution.'

This approach is not only illuminating for our understanding of the politics of today's Soviet bureaucracy and the implications of perestroika, but also a reminder that the Thatcherite package of policies has been dependent for its implementation upon a certain relationship of class forces that has been established since 1979.

In this sense it is useful to look again at the question of definition of the Thatcher government and its ever-increasing powers.

In the December-January issue of *Socialist Outlook*, Phil Hearse stressed the sinister strengthening of the state machinery and its use by the Thatcher government, as well as her dominant personal role in the cabinet, and warned of the possibility that the government is becoming a 'semi-bonapartist' combination between parliamentary democracy and forms of dictatorship.

In posing the question this starkly, Phil's article has unleashed a number of heated responses (see Letters page). Many feel that the heavy qualifications needed in using the term 'semi-bonapartist' to characterise Thatcherism are so far-reaching as to question the value of the label. Indeed the questions arising from it flow thick and fast:

- Would a 'semi-bonapartist' regime, in the sense that Trotsky talked of bonapartist dictatorships in the 1930s, really remain subject to regular elections in which it could be simply voted out of office?

- Has the Tory Party been refashioned behind the scenes into the power-base of a new dictatorial regime?

• Is it true that the incipient revolutionary strength of the working class forces the British bourgeoisie to contemplate such extraordinary measures in order to preserve its class rule?

• Are Thatcher's anti-union and anti-democratic measures – sweeping and breathtaking though they be – qualitatively more draconian than those prevailing in other advanced bourgeois democratic countries (West Germany, the USA, Japan)?

There are other problems with the use of the term 'semi-bonapartism'. By implicitly (through the analogy with actual dictatorships) exaggerating the extent to which Thatcher's authoritarian approach rests upon *extra-parliamentary* support, it runs the serious risk of fostering illusions that a 'real' bourgeois parliamentary government could not act in the increasingly savage fashion we have seen since 1979. Yet in fact Thatcher is simply taking advantage of the British parliamentary system, which has always been wide open to the arbitrary abuse of a large majority by a right wing party – provided only that it is able to maintain sufficient discipline over its MPs.

The same options have never been open to a majority government of the left, since the full use of these parliamentary powers depends upon the connivance of both the media and the establishment – the judiciary, police, military, Lords, monarchy and the like – which would certainly intervene to disrupt any progressive measures from the very outset. This is of course why the notion of a 'parliamentary road to socialism', whether in the *Marxism Today* or *Militant* ("Enabling Act") version, was a pipedream long before Neil Kinnock and Co jettisoned the word 'socialism' from Labour's vocabulary.

A second problem with the insistence upon the term 'semi-bonapartism' is that by overstating what is new about Thatcherism it can – in the manner of *Marxism Today's* fixation with and capitulation to the apparent strength of Thatcherism – open the door to defeatist 'solutions'.

One such solution that has been raised – though not by anyone writing in *Socialist Outlook* – could be the search for desperate last-gasp 'democratic alliances' on the model of the Stalinists' ill-fated 1930s 'Popular Fronts', aiming to appeal to 'democratic', anti-authoritarian elements of the middle class and bourgeoisie, precisely those elements who have done so little to fight any aspect of Thatcher's policies up to now.

This would be particularly pernicious if (unlike Phil Hearse's proposals, but as with *Marxism Today* and its fellow travellers in the labour movement) such alliances are seen as a substitute for working class political action, or as a step towards coalitionist 'anti-Thatcher' electoral fronts.

While only a died-in-the-wool sectarian would disagree with Phil Hearse that every democratic right must be defended against Tory attack through campaigns involving the widest possible united fronts, the extent to which this can be seen as a front-line response to Thatcherism is limited, not least by the minuscule extent to which more than a handful of the middle classes, let alone wet Tories, are prepared to become involved in fighting the government (except perhaps on rare, emotive issues such as Clause 28). There is no sign, for instance, of substantial layers of the white petty bourgeoisie getting angry over the immigration laws, the anti-union laws, or the laughably anti-democratic Housing Act, designed (by counting abstentions as votes for change) to force even more council houses into private hands.

However wide we may wish to throw the campaigning net, and whatever success we have in doing so, the decisive factor in each of these major struggles remains the role and the mass organisations of the working class. And here the issue of leadership is absolutely central. Indeed, what *Pravda* and *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* point out, but many British analysts forget, is that Thatcher's successes to date can only be properly understood in the context of analysing the unresolved and appalling crisis of leadership that has confronted the workers' movement in the 1980s.

Before resorting to new definitions and labels to characterise Thatcherism, we must be certain that the present situation has outgrown the old terms and explanations. Yet there seems no reason to alter our historical understanding of how Thatcherism developed from a glint in the eyes of a handful of right wing ideologues and the bar-room daydreams of the more brutal employers into the present rampant offensive against working class rights and living standards.

Insofar as Thatcherism represents a qualitatively new political force – personified by and imposed through the decisive personality and authority of Thatcher herself, ruthlessly selecting, purging and remodelling her cabinet in her own image – it derives not from a new dictatorial grip on the state machinery so much as the conscious adoption of a vanguard role by the party of the capitalist class, energetically using the powers already open to them. And this strength of purpose has, especially since Kinnock's takeover as leader in 1983, been reinforced by the almost total collapse of Labour and trade union opposition.

Socialist Outlook has previously editorialised on former Tory chair

Norman Tebbit's definition of the role of political leadership – moving from analysis to define necessary tasks, and then through determined action to implement the policy decided and if possible convince the electorate (or in any case change the status quo). We have pointed out that Tebbit's approach – here echoing Thatcher herself – is much closer to the 'Leninist' notion of the vanguard role of the party than that of the current Labour Party leadership. Tebbit's method is the polar opposite of the Labour leadership's timid 'ask the MORI pollsters' view of how policies should be tailored to avoid offending the existing prejudices of the electorate – ensuring no commitment to radical change.

Thatcher and the strongest elements of her team grasped the role of generals leading the counter-attack of British capital against a workers' movement which despite – or partially because of – the concessions and reforms it had won since the war, was saddled with a bureaucratised,

passive, complacent trade union and political leadership. Even the more militant shop stewards movement and rank and file forces lacked any developed class conscious socialist leadership capable of withstanding a full-scale onslaught from the employers. The traditional power-base of the shop stewards movement, in manufacturing industry, had already come under attack during the Labour government, and was the first to suffer the squeeze of recession under the Tories.

The Thatcher years have been marked by a relentless drive to exploit every opportunity opened up for the bosses by this leadership crisis. Learning the lessons from Edward Heath's half-hearted efforts at anti-union laws and his inelegant retreats, culminating in the electoral defeat of February 1974, and utilising the new police anti-picket squads set up by the Labour government to smash strikes at Grunwick and other firms in the late 1970s, Thatcher resolved to prepare the ground more thoroughly for each confrontation. The Tory strategy relied upon the 'salami tactics' of picking off one section at a time – and took for granted the refusal of TUC and Labour leaders to fight for united mass action. Thatcher was allowed to pick the best time to provoke each fight, and then able to utilise the full forces of the state to hold the line, as unions were confronted one by one.

It was therefore no accident that the Thatcherite priorities were – in order – monetarist policies to squeeze inflation through mass unemployment; anti-union laws to bang home the attack on unions already weakened by the recession; and wave after wave of privatisation to liberate resources for tax cuts and effect what Thatcher expects to be an irreversible blow against the 'corporatist' state sector.

Through monetarist discipline in the first phase, employers were press-ganged into imposing massive closures, redundancies and speed-up almost across the board in manufacturing industry. As had been seen during the period of Labour government, trade union leaders and shop stewards accustomed to negotiating on wages and conditions in times of



Police powers have increased; but key is political paralysis of labour movement

Andrew Moore/Reflex

relative expansion, had never questioned the 'right' of the employer to a profit, and therefore to make firms 'viable' in capitalist terms at a price of massive redundancies and closures. This inability to challenge the logic of capitalism (transformed into an argument that only through collaboration with employers at every level to prevent strikes could jobs be saved) has become the bedrock of today's politics of 'new realism' that dominate both TUC and Labour Party.

The same period brought the relaxation of exchange controls, which enabled the big employers and the finance sector to maximise their profits despite the recession by channelling vast sums of North Sea oil revenues into investment portfolios overseas.

Despite the political weaknesses of the labour movement, this first phase could only have succeeded under conditions where the trade union leaders refused to strengthen and link up the early struggles which quickly broke out against a still new and inexperienced Thatcher government. TUC leaders in February 1980 ganged up not to support but to isolate the marathon 4-month national steel strike (squashing calls for general strike action and potential support from miners and rail workers) and simultaneously sold out the BL carworkers; other sections too were held back from struggle until after the steelworkers had been forced back to work with a hollow 'victory' on pay and the certainty of plant closures to follow.

Given this kind of seemingly limitless elbow room by terrified TUC leaders, Tory policies successfully turned the screw on manufacturing industry, and quickly threw over 2 million additional workers onto the dole queues. This in turn halted the progress of unionisation in the private sector, and also — alongside cut after cut in unemployment and social security benefits — began to open up what has been a deliberate and ever-widening gap between the employed and unemployed working class.

The lesson for today, however is that it need not have happened. In 1980 it was not the 'bonapartist' use of dictatorial powers which kept Thatcher in office so much as the timidity and treachery of the union leaders.

The Tories next turned their attention to a frontal attack on the trade unions themselves, in the form of two major Acts piloted through by Norman Tebbit. Once again the TUC showed itself to be all mouth and trousers: as soon as the NGA print workers ran up against the new laws and the courts in fighting Eddie Shah's Messenger Group in Warrington, and the NGA faced threats of sequestration, the TUC collapsed and abandoned its pledges to give industrial support.

By the time the miners, too, had been sequestered, months into their strike, the TUC had long abandoned even the pretence that it would defy unjust laws, and union chiefs promoting the 'new realism' could hardly conceal their hopes that Scargill and the NUM would be defeated. The bitter battles of Wapping and the National Union of Seamen's retreat in front of the sequestrators in the P&O dispute simply rubbed in the fact that the unions' bluff had been called, and that virtually every national union leader had been shown to be spineless, and the TUC itself increasingly an irrelevance.

It is on this new balance of class forces — backed up and budged home by new peaks of police thuggery on the picket lines during and since the miners' strike — that Thatcher's authority and authoritarianism rest.

By their tacit support for the government, or refusal to combat Thatcher's offensive on the NUM, and their insistence upon drawing false, defeatist lessons of such major class battles since 1980, the TUC leaders have also played a key role in consolidating her political grip within important sections of the capitalist class and Tory Party. Even employers who suffered squeezed profits from the earlier monetarist policies have been placated since she delivered the goods in the form of tax cuts and major blows against the unions. And even more have been delighted by the short-term profits bonanza opened up by privatisation.



Wapping dispute: landmark in Tory anti-union offensive

The drive to privatise the major state industries — shortly to reach a new peak with the sale of vast electricity and water industry assets — began in part from the monetarist squeeze on 'loss-making' nationalised industries (steel, shipbuilding, British Airways, BL cars). It also stemmed from the lust to liberate vast profits generated in natural monopolies such as British Telecom and British Gas; and it later developed through mass share issues as a sophisticated bribe to more prosperous sections of the middle class and employed working class.

Though she has been egged on at each stage to go further by visionary prophets of the ultra-right, it is still not proven that Thatcher has all along simply been carrying through stages of a pre-formulated overall strategy. One of her former policy advisors, Patrick Minford, in a recent essay brands the early exercises in council house privatisation as 'initially a sideshow' (in *Thatcherism*, ed Robert Skidelsky). Mobilising the short-term self-interest of existing tenants to break up the public sector in housing proved successful in many ways: it won extra Tory votes; it undermined another area of local government; and it boosted the long-term profits and prospects of estate agents, private developers, builders and landlords.

Minford then describes the subsequent moves towards mass share issues in the privatisation of the big nationalised industries as a logical 'follow-up' to the unexpectedly popular success of the housing 'sale of the century'. Of course the goal of privatisation could as easily have been carried out by selling shares primarily to big city institutions. As it is, the whole myth of 'popular capitalism' — where a few more prosperous share-owning workers labour under the delusion that they, too, are capitalists — appears to have taken shape empirically rather than to a pre-planned formula. However the chief long-term advantage for the Tories of dispersing millions of shares to large numbers of individuals is that it makes the task of reversing these measures even more daunting for any subsequent Labour (or socialist) government.

Throughout the Thatcher years there has been a consistent pattern of forcing through measures without undue regard for their short-term popularity, in such a way as to pull up the ladder behind them, making it almost impossible for a reformist Labour government to return to the old status quo. Money freed by cuts in social security, the housing budget and other sectors of state spending has been immediately redistributed to the wealthy and to the employed in tax cuts — forcing Labour to contemplate tax increases to restore previous levels. Similarly Tory restrictions on local government, including ratecapping and soon the Poll Tax, have reduced or restricted rates, or thrust the burden from rich to poor, forcing any Labour reform to contemplate major increases. Privatisation of British Aerospace and the planned sale of the water authorities seem certain to be followed by huge once-and-for-all asset-stripping land sales — as has happened with desperate health authorities selling property to balance their books.

There are still many Tory projects to complete, not least the full exploitation of the current balance of forces to drive still lower the basic rates of pay. The significance of the 'slave labour' youth opportunities, youth training, employment training and 'Restart' schemes (now backed up by new, brutal cuts in social security and the threat that youth refusing such schemes will be denied state benefit) is the overall objective of lowering wage expectations and actual pay levels. The Tories believe this will bring in its train the destruction of what remains of trade union organisation, beginning in the lower-paid jobs; and in addition they are out to dismantle virtually all of the protective legislation covering the conditions of youth, women and the lowest-paid, some of which dates back to the more enlightened liberalism of a few Victorian parliamentarians.

The Thatcherite drive towards decontrol and deregulation is also having a contradictory effect on the media, where the proposed proliferation of television and radio channels runs counter to moralistic attempts

to impose censorship of sex and violence, and authoritarian moves to censor news on many issues, and to stuff the BBC and IBA governing bodies (and the so-called broadcasting standards council under Lord Rees-Mogg) with hand-picked Thatcherite appointees (the latest example being the head-banging Lord Chalfont installed on the IBA).

We should recognise here, however, that the Thatcher ideal is one in which, while the most prestigious and 'official' news sources are carefully vetted and censored, for the most part, as in the USA, most people read and see little or no accurate or serious information. Like broadcast versions of the gutter press, the deregulated satellite and other tv channels would offer little or no 'news', and that small quota would be swamped by trashy films, soap operas and game shows – leaving the core elite of the bourgeois state to monopolise political information and expertise, and leaving the labour movement even further removed from access to mass forms of publicity.

Other Thatcherite irons in the fire include the sweeping 'reform' of the NHS and education, to open them up for privatisation along American lines, and force home upon the working class a new reality in which, with the rapid erosion and eventual disappearance of the collective, social provisions of the welfare state, in Thatcher's famous phrase 'there is no such thing as society, just individuals and families'.

The common thread through all of these proposals is to break down the collective strength of the working class, break down collective institutions, and supplant in their stead individualism, self-interest, and divide-and-rule. For every measure which strikes heavy blows and further alienates and antagonises the unemployed, the low-paid, the most exploited sections of the working class, black communities, women and the more socially aware sections of the middle classes, Thatcher has – in the absence of any serious political or industrial opposition – been able to counterpose a consolidation of her electoral base among the most prosperous layers, exploiting and pandering to their greed, their racism, national chauvinism, and anti-communism.

However the polls indicate that it is not so much the electoral appeal of Thatcher's policies as the lack of any credible opposition that has decisively strengthened the Tory hand.

Despite appearances and the popular preoccupation with yuppie values, there is little evidence that Thatcherite politics have made much more than a skin-deep impact on most voters, who are far from sharing the Prime Minister's views. Poll information suggests that on such questions as poverty, unemployment, the NHS and education, the Poll Tax and other issues – and also on matters of 'morality' such as abortion and restrictions on media coverage – the electorate has remained stubbornly unconvinced by the Tory line. Indeed the new White Paper proposals on the NHS seem to represent in this respect one of the most risky projects to be attempted.

The same situation applies in the industrial situation: though the employers by dint of brute force, appalling levels of class collaboration from many top union leaders, and the straitjacket of anti-union laws, have in some instances succeeded in raising levels of exploitation and productivity, this should not be read as workers accepting the employers' line. Time and again disputes erupt over pay or conditions as soon as workers feel they have an opportunity to fight back.

Much is made in *Marxism Today* and elsewhere of the changing face of the working class in the 1980s, and the supposed end of traditional trade unionism. Again this is largely an excuse for the failure of 'designer left' forces to relate to the actual working class as it has developed. In some areas it is clear that the traditional manufacturing industries have been all but wiped out: the old stewards' committees and union strongholds have also been hammered down – from the one side by management and from the other by their own bureaucratic union officials.

But the growth of the service sector – retail, catering and other jobs – does not mean that the working class has disappeared: simply that workers who would otherwise have become manual workers in factories have become unskilled, low paid workers in shops, warehouses, hotels or burger bars – often under highly exploitative conditions. The task for the unions, as before, is to *organise* these workers and take up their fight for adequate pay, working conditions, health and safety.

Yet despite the odd tokenistic and trendy glossy leaflet targeted at these often part-time staff, many of whom are women and black workers, the absence of a wave of small and larger-scale disputes in the service sector suggests that the unions are not recruiting and not mobilising these layers. This should come as little surprise: the same union bureaucrats who have betrayed and ignored their previous strongest battalions of in-

dustrial workers are scarcely likely to become transformed now into model fighters for the downtrodden and oppressed. The bureaucracy has never shown much enthusiasm for recruiting workers whose subscriptions are low, but who bring with them a host of problems and possible confrontations with management.

Once again we return to the question of leadership as central to any serious explanation. Even with firm leadership, victories cannot be guaranteed; without it, under such adverse circumstances, defeats and setbacks are certain.

Under Thatcher's decisive leadership, the Tory Party in government has effected far-reaching changes, reversing or preparing to reverse many of the progressive social reforms carried through by successive governments: but there is no sign that it has quelled the class struggle or won over substantial layers of the working class to Thatcherite politics.

Rather than resorting to unprecedented 'bonapartist' measures to contain the working class, Thatcher has followed the more established path of previous authoritarian Tory governments – such as that of Stanley Baldwin, which organised massive scabbing operations and defied the 1926 General Strike, and followed it up after the TUC capitulation with brutal anti-union laws and savage wage-cutting before the 1930s ushered in the new horrors of the means test.

Indeed 'strong government' was also the style of Thatcher's hero Winston Churchill in the leadership of the wartime coalition, with its ruthless repression of strikes and trade union rights: Churchill also led the post-war Tory opposition into the lobbies to oppose the National Health Service Bill, representing a continuity of that strand of Tory thought which always – long before Thatcher – rejected the welfare state.

It is instructive to remember that even Churchill's largely uncontested personal prestige in 1945 was not sufficient to prevent the working class, among them returning soldiers, sweeping him out of office and delivering a landslide victory to a radical Labour manifesto. Thatcherism has sunk no deeper roots than Churchill's patriotic wartime bandwagon: it could be defeated given the right combination of circumstances and a determined Labour leadership.

A measure of the truly wretched political level of today's trade union and Labour leadership is that Baldwin's government had to organise a full-scale scabbing operation and confront a General Strike before it could establish a balance of forces favourable for its attacks on the working class. Churchill required not only the 'patriotic' fervour of the war period but the total complicity of the Labour, trade union and Communist party leaderships to impose his vicious anti-union laws. Yet Thatcher has since 1979 been allowed to confront and inflict huge setbacks on a much larger and stronger trade union movement *without* undergoing the ordeal of a General Strike, or any sustained united fightback by the trade union movement whatever.

Indeed the defeatist politics of the union leaders have now also translated themselves, via 'new realism' into the total collapse of the Labour Party as an effective opposition, despite all of the opportunities that there have been to combat the evils of the new 'free market' economy.

Though workers continue from time to time to rebel against particular Tory attacks, the full-scale political retreat that is taking place under the banner of Labour's 'policy review' threatens to change the political profile of the labour movement for years to come.

As one correspondent points out (Letters page), if we have Kinnock, who needs bonapartism? It is indeed ironic that while most workers remain relatively impervious, the section of society most impressed and affected by Thatcherite propaganda and values should be the political leadership of the mass working class party that is supposed to lead the opposition.

As a new year of struggle begins with inflation again on the increase, mortgage-payers under pressure, the economy unstable and the government still on the offensive, it is important that discussion on the politics of Thatcherism is focussed on the element of the situation that we as class struggle can hope to do something about: the necessity for a new, socialist leadership fighting at every level for mass action by workers to defend democratic rights, the welfare state, jobs, housing and every other post-war gain that is now under attack.

This means fighting tooth and nail against further concessions to Thatcherism in Labour's policy review, but also spelling out a more coherent, socialist response to the economic and social crisis of the 1980s-1990s. Instead of using 'Thatcherism' as an excuse for defeatism, a sober recognition of the comprehensive scope of the bosses' offensive must be a stimulus to develop the fightback.

Can Stalinist parties make revolutions?

The discussions now raging on the left over the political assessment of Mikhail Gorbachev, his reforms in the Soviet Union, and of the dramatic developments unfolding in other bureaucratically deformed workers' states are not the only items of controversy in the analysis of post-war Stalinism.

In our supplement on the 50th anniversary of the Fourth International (November 1988), a special article by Dave Packer included an assessment of the contradictions involved in the post-war overturns of capitalism under the leadership of Communist Parties.

Pursuing this question, here FINN JENSEN presents a rejoinder, while DAVE PACKER and PHIL HEARSE develop the debate, which will continue in future issues of Socialist Outlook.



Chou En Lai (right) joins Mao for the Long March to Yen-an (1934)

Mao's break from Stalin's line

In his article in *Socialist Outlook* no 10, Dave Packer dealt with an important question. How can we explain that communist parties coming from the Stalinist tradition have been able to lead successful revolutions?

The question is not one of only of historic interest, because the answer has consequences for today: can any of the existing parties from the Stalinist (or Maoist) tradition lead a successful revolution? If some of them might be able to do it, what should be our relation to them?

Dave takes in his article the example of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP):

'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 other openings (some of which were tried) were progressively closed off to it.' (Page 18).

Trotsky's view of the Red Army was much more nuanced than that of the Chinese Trotskyists. In 1931 and 1933 in letters to the Chinese Left Opposition he advocated sending comrades into the Red Army, in order to get a precise picture of the nature of these armies and the territory they controlled. (See pp 498 and 528 in *Leon Trotsky on China*, Pathfinder Press, 1976). Unfortunately the Chinese Trotskyists did not follow this advice - and the 1949 revolution came as a surprise to them and to the Fourth International.

But were Mao and the Red Army forced to make a proletarian revolution by the objective circumstances, or was the 1949 revolution the

result of a revolutionary leadership that consciously used the objective situation to lead a socialist revolution? Dave's article is not clear on this important issue:

In the 1930s there was a faction fight inside the CCP, which Mao won in 1935. The pro-Stalin faction around Wang Ming lost. Mao did not make an official break with the line of the Communist International (which was under Stalin's control). But he did not carry out Stalin's line in practice either.

Mao would not let the CCP be subordinated to the Soviet bureaucracy, but wanted to lead a proletarian revolution to victory. In that sense Mao was a revolutionary, and not a counter-revolutionary Stalinist. At the same time the CCP was a party with severe bureaucratic deformations.

So although the CCP was part of the Communist International it had a leadership that developed its own line in opposition to Stalin's and implemented that line.

That was also the case with the communist parties in Vietnam and Yugoslavia and that is why they were able to lead successful revolutions. The Vietnamese Communist Party led a struggle for 40 years, which after 1954 threatened the very existence of North Vietnam in its war to liberate South Vietnam. Not a very typical behaviour for Stalinists!

To recognise that a few communist parties from the Stalinist tradition have been able to break with that tradition and lead successful revolutions should of course not make us jump to the conclusion that that could be a pattern for a lot of other communist parties.

It is unlikely to be the case in the imperialist countries. In the third world countries we have to analyse each of the communist parties concretely in order to judge whether any of them have the potential to lead socialist revolutions.

The Philippine CP could be one of them,

Finn Jensen

The way out of a tangle on Stalinism

Finn Jensen's argument that Stalinist parties cannot lead revolutions because stalinism is the subordination of the interests of the world revolution to the narrow interests of the counter-revolutionary Soviet bureaucracy. Therefore he argues, where successful socialist revolutions have occurred, the parties that led them must have broken with stalinism.

This line of argument proceeds from a self-justifying definition, which is based on circular reasoning. In effect it says: *Stalinist parties can't lead revolutions, therefore where revolutions have occurred, the parties that led them can't be stalinist.* QED.

Comrades who hold this view get themselves in a tangle because the question is badly posed. If we formulate the question slightly differently, then it is easier to get at the solution. If we ask ourselves: *can stalinist parties under*

certain conditions, break with their local bourgeoisie and lead a struggle which results in the destruction of local capitalism?—then the answer can only be 'yes'. That does not lead us to rethink our conception of stalinism as counter-revolutionary in an overall sense.

Let us look at things a bit more concretely. In eastern Europe, quite obviously stalinism, — under Stalin no less — did break with the bourgeoisie and destroy local capitalism. Stalin's main interest here was to construct a ring of 'friendly' states and it is by no means clear that he set out to destroy capitalism there. In all probability he would have preferred a ring of 'Finlands', capitalist states friendly to the Soviet Union. In any case, the intransigence of the local bourgeoisies excluded this option. In Austria Stalin withdrew his troops and handed power back to the capitalist class. Elsewhere, faced with a choice between hostile capitalist classes taking power and installing his own stalinist puppets, he chose the latter course. Only in Czechoslovakia, and to a lesser extent Poland, were there mass Communist parties with large support among the masses.

You can argue that this military-police action of the stalinist bureaucracy is different to stalinist parties taking power on their own — although of course in Czechoslovakia the local CP did have something to do with coming to power itself — but at least what happened in eastern Europe constitutes some evidence for the fact that stalinism can in fact break with capitalism to defend its own specific interests.

Now, if we look today at a whole number of regimes, like the Chinese, Albanian, North Korean and Vietnamese, then we have to ask the question — is this stalinism? Are there stalinist parties in power in these countries?

Ernest Mandel, who holds the same theory as Finn Jensen, is quite consistent when he says 'no'. According to him, these are not stalinists in power, these are 'bureaucratic centrists' who have a qualitatively less manipulative and authoritarian attitude to the masses than the stalinists per se — the soviet bureaucracy and their allies. Now we think that this is an uncomfortable theory to hold, but at least it has internal consistency. For if you were to assert that these parties are stalinist today, you would be left with the obviously self-justifying and tendentious notion that these parties were originally stalinist, broke with stalinism to make the revolution, and then returned to stalinism when in power!

Ernest Mandel's version is uncomfortable because it leads to asserting, as he does, that the Chinese, Albanian and Vietnamese are less authoritarian and manipulative towards the masses — less bureaucratic. In our opinion you would be very hard put to prove that Kim Il Sung's North Korea, or Enver Hoxha's Albania, or even Deng's China were less bureaucratic, authoritarian, *stalinist* than Gorbachev's Soviet Union!

The real problem with Finn's and Ernest Mandel's position is their restrictive definition of stalinism as subordination to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. Why just Soviet? Why not the bureaucracy of any workers state? For example, our movement has habitually analysed the Indonesian CP, whose popular



Vietnamese victory: but was Ho still a Stalinist?

frontist opportunism in 1965 led to the biggest defeat of the world workers' movement since 1933, as a stalinist party. Aidit's party was almost a walking definition of the term, but by 1965 it had, for at least two years, broken its links with Moscow and was a pro-Chinese party with Peking warmly supporting its policies. Had the PKI therefore broken with Stalinism? Or was it not, on the contrary, a stalinist party which subordinated itself to the interests of the (counter-revolutionary) Chinese bureaucracy. Finn's theory is unable to cope with this example.

What has led stalinist parties, parties of stalinist origin if you prefer, to break with the bourgeoisie in certain conditions? Most of the examples are from the 'third world'. The politics of popular frontism, however sincerely held, have been much more difficult to apply in many of these countries because in many cases *no section of the bourgeoisie has been willing or able to play the role of counter-revolutionary ally in the popular front*. From the Shanghai massacre onwards, the Guomindang in China refused Mao's advances, and posed the Chinese CP directly with the question — capitulation or relentless struggle? The same is true for Yugoslavia where the would be bourgeois allies sided with the Nazi invaders rather than fight alongside Tito. You can't make a counter-revolutionary popular front, in traditional stalinist style, with those who refuse it. Or rather, you can try, you can pretend it exists, and be massacred. Like Aidit did in Indonesia.

In certain cases these parties, when they came to power established perfectly stalinist regimes, did make a positive choice at a certain stage in the struggle — against being massacred and for the struggle to the finish.

The Greek CP, at the end of the 1940's, took up armed struggle again in a civil war against its native bourgeoisie and US and British imperialism. It never ceased being a stalinist party, and never stopped professing adherence to the goal of a popular front government. It was 'armed popular frontism'. But if the Greek CP had won their struggle in the civil war, would they not have been propelled along the road of establishing their own bureaucratic power, having defeated the local bourgeoisie? And would latter day theorists claim they must have 'broken' with stalinism in order to do it?

It should be clear that we do not believe the idea, put forward in some quarters, that parties like the Chinese seized power 'under pressure from the masses' and against their own will. The pressure of the masses, one way or the

other, was undoubtedly there, but not the decisive thing. A party can be led to a more radical break with capitalism than it had intended in its original programme and practice: it can't be made to do it against its own will!

To develop a satisfactory explanatory framework it is better to abandon the narrow definition of stalinism as subordination to the soviet bureaucracy — which for example an utterly stalinist regime like the Albanian is clearly not. Stalinism is a group of movements and parties which are subordinated to the interests of the bureaucracy of a deformed workers' state, or have their origin in such subordination and today retain the characteristic bureaucratic theories and practices of the stalinists.

This is a much more complex, nuanced and problematic definition of stalinism than 'subordination to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy' — but much less schematic, and much more in tune with reality. After all, if Finn, like comrade Ernest, wants to insist on his theory as the essence of the matter — where today is there a stalinist party, strictly subordinate to Moscow, in the sense of the old Stalinism and Cominform? You will hardly find such a party. The links that most stalinist parties have directly with the Soviet Union are either very attenuated, non-existent, or heavily mediated through their links with their own bourgeoisie. But we cannot conclude from this that stalinism is disappearing, although of course it is in massive crisis. Right wing stalinist parties like the French, or Italian, maintain a relationship with the masses, with the trade unions and municipalities and have a type of organisation and cadre development and an ideological formation which makes them characteristically different from social democratic or bourgeois parties.

This is a complex debate, which ranges over social reality in most parts of the globe. It is a shifting reality, as eastern Europe and China are in the throes of major upheaval, and as the western CPs themselves go through organisational collapse and political transformation. It is therefore a discussion which we should continue. But first off, we want to pose the question — what difference does it make *in practice*?

Political line cannot be deduced directly from theory. But the view that 'bureaucratic centrist' parties have a less bureaucratic attitude than the stalinists led to the notion that we are not for political revolution in Vietnam. The position of the Fourth International on this question is unclear: *it has never adopted a position*. Until 1963, and maybe later, many forces in world Trotskyism did not have a position for political revolution in China. But the main directly political issue of disagreement has of course been the overall course of the world revolution since 1945, as Dave Packer explained. The understanding of stalinism put forward here enables us, we think, to better grasp the long historical detour of the world revolutionary process in the post war period, the period of the long imperialist boom and the beginning of the unravelling of stalinism.

Forward with the struggle, the discussion continues!

Phil Hearse and Dave Packer

Unofficial Secrets

Child Sex Abuse: The Cleveland Case
Beatrix Campbell
Virago Press, £3.95

Reviewed by
VALERIE COULTAS

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE is a secret and difficult crime to detect. As with other sex crimes it relies on the willingness of the victim to testify to prove a crime has been committed. When the perpetrator is a close male relative (as is usually the case), admitting abuse can involve enormous psychological and emotional difficulty for the victim.

Unofficial Secrets tackles some of these issues in the context of the Cleveland case

where in 1987 165 boys and girls were diagnosed by paediatricians at Middlesbrough General Hospital as having suffered suspected sexual abuse. Despite admitting that Drs Higgs and Wynne (the two paediatricians involved) were not conscious feminists, Beatrix Campbell comes down firmly on their side. Using medical evidence and the conclusions of the Butler-Sloss enquiry in 1988 she argues that the anal dilation test the doctors used as a basis for their diagnosis was vindicated, despite the campaign of vilification against the doctors and their diagnoses waged by the 'popular' press.

The police in Cleveland 'as a praetorian guard of masculinity' were incapable, Campbell argues, of dealing with the sexual side of child sexual abuse. Photographs taken by the doctors of the abused children's genitalia were dismissed as

irrelevant and unacceptable evidence, whereas bruises and scars were seen as acceptable evidence of violence. Disbelief in the doctors' diagnosis was the basis of the reactionary campaign of the press, the police and the right-wing local Labour MP, Stuart Bell.

The book is strong when it discusses the evidence on child sexual abuse, the breakdown in relationships between police, social services and the medical profession, and discord between doctors and nurses as the crisis developed. It is also sensitive to the debate about child sex abuse and the fact that there are no easy solutions available, especially when social workers seem to have more power to disturb working class lives than middle class lives.

But what I was looking for was a chapter that discussed socialist and radical feminist strategy or thinking on child sex abuse and violence against women in much more detail. How did socialists and feminists campaign in the nineteenth

century and early twentieth century on these matters? How had the Domestic Violence Act got on the statute books in 1976? Shouldn't feminists now be campaigning for a child sexual violence act that calls for child referral centres and for society to place the blame for child sex crimes on the (usually) male perpetrators? What implications does this debate have for an analysis of power relations in the family?

The commentator conclusions are the weakest point of the book. Campbell touches on the problem of the silence of feminism in the Cleveland debate only to apologise for it. 'Activists felt torn by conflicting allegiances both to professionals and parents...' she writes. The other flaw that runs through the book is that 'male sexuality' is assumed to be responsible for child sexual abuse. This idea deserves discussion and doesn't get it. What about the sexuality of men who don't commit child sexual abuse?

Sharp!

'Art of the South African Townships'
Gavin Younge,
Published by Thames and Hudson 1988 £6.95

Reviewed by
TRACY DOYLE

'SHARP!' is an exclamation of approval among South Africa's urban proletariat. American in origin, it is applied to anything which puts one over on "whitey", or which offers a purchase in the slippery world of getting ahead.'

So states Editor Gavin Younge in his book 'Art of the South African Townships', in a chapter where he examines the relative history and significance of music and art as a focus of cultural and social life for black people in South Africa.

Music has always been a site of resistance. After many years during which black musicians were ignored and marginalised the music industry discovered the profit-making potential of these same musicians and many have now achieved a degree of popular success. There has not been a similar breakthrough for black visual artists. Galleries cater for an exclusively white clientele. A national art conference held in Stellenbosch in April 1988, aimed at

addressing 'special problems', had an organising committee which did not include one black person. It is not possible to examine the development of art in black South Africa without looking at the systematic attempts to degrade, isolate and dehumanise black people. A situation of second class education, brutal state control and lack of materials forms a common starting point for the work of artists of widely differing styles. Much of the cultural heritage of Africa was long since borne away to adorn the museums and drawing rooms of colonial rulers. Younge provides a detailed analysis of these processes as a background to the 134 photographs that form the basis of this stunning book.

In a country such as South Africa, the very notion of black art is political. The South African government, has used the provisions of the State of Emergency to enforce new and broader definitions of what constitutes a 'subversive statement'. Section One of the Public Safety Act (1953) allows the banning of any picture, photograph, print, engraving, lithograph, painting or drawing. The provisions of the act are so wide that even the publication of blank spaces where material has been edited out can be considered subversive. In 1987 Benjamin de Bruyn, appeared in court on charges relating to a number of tattoos on his body, one of which read 'God give me



'Heart in the Oven' Avashoni Mainganye

freedom but the whites take it away that's why I am (sic) ANC'. He was ordered to have the tattoos removed and was sentenced to an effective 3 years imprisonment.

What also comes out through the book however is the persistence and resilience of black artists. Working with the materials to hand means that many artists have developed a style based on the use of such diverse things as scrap metal and corrugated card. Derrick Nxumalo works in felt pen while Tito Zungu has a particularly unique form of art. His first drawings, and in fact the greater volume of his work, was done in ink with a ball-point pen on ordinary envelopes which he sold to his work mates for less than the price of a picture postcard; these envelopes were used to send letters back to wives and children in the countryside. Geometrical portrayals of trains, jets and city buildings, his pictures show no sign of human life. His world has an alluring innocence, one which renders redundant all social or political issues. In a

curious but surpassingly human way his glorification of city life found working-class support from his friends and colleagues precisely because it provided a way of coping with life in the ghetto. For white buyers however his delightfully zany creations serve to convince that life in the backyard ghettos can't be all that bad.

Based on meetings and discussions with many black artists and containing a large number of brilliant photographs taken by himself, Gavin Younge's book is fascinating and beautiful. It combines an insight into the work of 51 artists with a focus on the extraordinary flowering of black South African art in the 1980s and an examination of the struggles which have shaped it. He describes the efforts to establish a black arts educational programme and looks at the ways in which the work of individual artists relates to native and foreign influences and the development of an art of protest.

This is a book not to be missed!!

Marxist History?

The Labour Party — A Marxist History
 Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, Bookmarks, 1988. £7.95.

Reviewed by
 JANE KELLY

BOURGEOIS history, pretending to be objective, is generally written from the point of view of the ruling class. A work of Marxist history, which this purports to be, should have as its starting point the interests of the working class in its struggle against capitalism.

Unfortunately the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) version of the Labour Party is written by Cliff and Gluckstein from the narrow viewpoint of a relatively small organisation and in support of its immediate tactical interests.

It contains a devastating critique of Labour's role in selling out the working class at every opportunity, and as such it could play a role in educating some of the Labour left who retain illusions in the party. But it does so in a very one-sided way, underplaying the contradictory nature of the Labour Party. It also ignores the role of revolutionary marxists in relation to this party; including the International Socialists, precursor of the SWP, in the late 1960s. As a result its usefulness as a revolutionary socialist view of the mass party is completely undermined.

Lenin's formulation of the Labour Party as a 'bourgeois workers' party', appears at the very beginning of the book as the theoretical framework for the argument, but although the writers accept its contradictory character in the abstract, they are mealy-mouthed about the historic gain for the working class that the formation of the Labour Party represented. It is presented as the result of defeat: '*The ILP was not the child of new unionism, but of its defeat*' (Page 12, their italics). The election of Labour MPs to Parliament is seen as a substitute for trade unionism: '*a retreat from trade unionism — from the belief that collective organisation could defend itself*' (Page 29, their italics). The party

itself was 'a mixed blessing...an improvement' from the openly bourgeois parties, but 'a millstone' around the necks of the minority of advanced workers (Page 37). In reality the formation of the Labour Party, as with the building of other mass parties in Europe, represented an important step in the direction of class independence by the working class, despite the betrayals of the leadership. This was always the understanding of Lenin and Trotsky.

Most of what the authors say about its class collaborationist history, its early pacts with the Liberals, its sell-outs of industrial action, is true. Its pro-imperialist chauvinism and its elevation of 'national interest' over class are proof too of its seemingly endless capitulation to the needs of the ruling class. A strong Labour Party in Parliament was seen openly by Sidney Webb and others as 'a safeguard against "Bolshevism"' (Page 71).

But we need only look to the United States, where no mass workers' party of any sort exists, to see the real gains in the form of class independence that the Labour Party represented and still represents. Less than 25% of the adult population voted in the last US Presidential election. They see no alternative to the bosses. The failure of the US working class to build an independent party not only represents a lower level of class consciousness, but has a significant impact on the relation of class forces in American society.

But there is a lot more wrong with this account than a bit of one-sidedness in its emphasis. For the one-sidedness flows directly from the narrow interests of the SWP today, from its belief that it is already the mass revolutionary party which will lead the working class to its liberation. It believes that it can play the classic united front role proposed by Lenin and Trotsky in many of their writings in the 1920s. Posing themselves as the alternative to the mass party today, they deride work in the Labour Party by revolutionary Marxists in a footnote discussing the tactics of the early Communist Party as advised by Lenin. The footnote points out that these tactics were based on a 'party to party' united front, with the Communists numbering

some 6000 and the Labour Party still in its infancy:

'Tactics appropriate to parties may not be suitable for minuscule groups... There have been occasions when the extreme weakness of the revolutionary left has necessitated different tactics. Thus Trotskyists in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the Socialist Review Group (the precursor of the SWP) used "entrism" inside the Labour Party. This did not involve a public declaration of revolutionary intent, or insistence on official recognition of the right to free criticism and organisational autonomy. Such entrism had to be recognised as a tactic imposed by great weakness. As soon as it had served the purpose of helping revolutionaries to stand on their own feet, entrism had to be abandoned. As a long-term policy it could only lead to absorption by the reformist milieu or the abandonment of genuine class struggle (which has always been outside the confines of the Labour Party organisation)' (Page 108).

Two questions (at least) arise. First, is a group like the SWP of less than 4000, in a position to impose the classic united front on today's Labour Party? Of course not. Only once has this been partially achieved, with the Anti-Nazi League at the end of the 1970s. For most of its existence the SWP has been characterised by sectarian denunciations from the sidelines.

Has the SWP's effective abstention from the struggles of the left in the Labour Party put them in a good position to propose and carry out joint work with the Labour left, as they argue in the conclusion?

The experience of the support groups set up during the miners' strike of 1984-5 answers that one: no again. In many areas, especially where they were strong, the Labour left (along with trade union lefts, women's groups, other left groups) initiated and led these support groups. Constituency party rooms were lent to miners to work from, rallies were organised, money and food collected, pickets supported. It took the SWP months (some say six) to realise that the strike was going to last a long time (contradicting their theory of the downturn) and that the support groups were full of militants and

activists, many in the Labour Party, who might be won to revolutionary politics. Their turn to these groups was met with quiet decision — better late than never!

The second question the book ignores is the role played by revolutionaries in the Labour Party, not just in the last decade, but since its inception. Here their attempt to immunise their members from the questions raised by entrism and the politics of the Labour left, leads to a distortion by omission. Apart from the footnote quoted above, a short section on the Militant (again because of one of their own projects), and a couple of pages on the Socialist League in the early 1930s, there is no reference to the role (good or bad) of Trotskyists, including the Socialist Review Group in the 1960s.

More significantly the work of the Socialist Labour League (SLL) in the 1950s is also omitted. The capacity of a small, even 'minuscule' group to lead the Labour Left, in such a way that the traditional division between the 'political' Labour Party and the 'industrial' trade unions was broken down is ignored. A few examples will suffice to underline the enormity of this omission.

In the section on Bevanism, the authors discuss the support given by Tribune to the left-wing 'Blue Union' against the TGWU in 1954, and for the right of dockers to join a union of their choice. Tribune's stand was apparently 'largely motivated by the hatred of the Bevanites for Arthur Deakin, who had used the massive force of the TGWU to squash the Labour left' (page 266).

Motivated by hatred it might have been; but why did Bevan, who 'had no link with rank and file workers' struggles' (Page 266) agree to support the breakaway to the 'Blue Union' organised by the unofficial committees built by the rank and file at every dock in Birkenhead, Hull, Liverpool and Manchester?

Why? Because the SLL had great influence in these unofficial committees, indeed they had fused with the Birkenhead Port Workers' Committee before the move to the 'Blue Union', and were therefore able to link together the dockers and the Bevanites.

Nor was this process simply

about building the Labour left, important though this was in the fight against the right. At the same time the SLL recruited both from the dockers and the Labour Party. Moreover, in the split from the Communist Party after the 1956 invasion of Hungary by the Soviet Union, of all the groups which tried to recruit the dissidents, the SLL were by far the most effective. They recruited intellectuals including Peter Fryer; workers' leaders like Brian Behan who sat on the building trades union's National Executive; the whole of the Young Communist League branch in Liverpool, and building workers and miners too. They were successful because they had a line; not only on Stalinism and the need to build a revolutionary party within the Trotskyist framework, but also a credible policy on the Labour Party and its relation to the trade unions.

The SLL continued to work effectively in the Labour Party and trade unions throughout the 1950's. They mobilised and linked activists on the Aldermaston marches under the slogan: NO WORK ON ROCKET BASES, NO WORK ON H-BOMBS, and called for industrial action against the nuclear arms race; they helped organise the left in the 1958 London busworkers strike with their popular weekly 'Newsletter'.

Although their history in this period was not wholly positive (they sold Tribune but had no influence over it and some of their decisions were opportunist), they grew from 40-50 in 1953 to around 200 in 1956-58. To leave their role out of account all together is wrong, and miseducates younger and less well informed militants. It suggests that the leadership of the SWP does not want an educated discussion in its organisation on the history of entrism.

Such omissions make for a very partial history. This partiality is most obvious in the section on the rise of Bennism and the Labour Party in the last decade.

In their determination to play down the role of the Labour left, to minimise the support that Benn achieved and to declare the Labour left 'in its death throes' as the SWP suggested at the Chesterfield Conference, the



Philip Gordon/Heriflex

Women Against Pit Closures: SWP took months to wake up to solidarity movement around miners' strike

authors distort history, making a nonsense of the title of the book. The extent to which the SWP's tactical decisions of the last ten years colour the books account of the period calls into question its whole validity.

Apart from some useful statistics to counter claims about the disappearance of the working class (propagated first by the Euro-Communists and later adopted by Kinnock and the Labour right), much of the last chapter, 'Labour Under Thatcher', is both methodologically wrong and factually inaccurate.

Methodologically wrong because they fail to place the class struggle and the changing balance of class forces as the motor force of history at the centre of the discussion, with the miners' strike of 1984-5 as the watershed of the decade. Instead such events are interwoven as one among many - no more nor less central than the Wembley Constitutional Conference of 1981 or Benn's Deputy Leadership campaign later the same year. As a result, the isolation and decrease in size of the Labour left is not explained by the defeat of the miners' strike but as an inevitable decline in the face of disillusionment with reformism. This is pure revolutionary romanticism!

There are factual inaccuracies too. Throughout the section on Benn's deputy leadership campaign the book argues that his support was much smaller than Bevan's in the 1950s (the membership of the Labour Party had 'shrunk by some three-quarters' (Page 352)) and that 'Benn's successes in the years 1979-81 depended entirely on the goodwill of a whole layer

of union officials' (Page 352). Whether this 'goodwill' was the result of some change of heart by the union bureaucracy, or because of pressure from the rank and file is left unsaid. The fact that during the high point of the campaign, 18% of those questioned in a MORI Poll thought Benn would make the best leader of the Party shows the stupidity of the authors' claim that his popularity was confined to the left of the Party.

Statistics are used again in a partial way to show how Labour Party membership declined between 1981 and 1982. Without the figures for the late 1970s and 1980 this decline can be misinterpreted. The fact is that huge numbers joined in the late 1970s and early 1980s precisely because the left was on the advance. The long term decline reasserts itself after Benn's defeat and even more sharply after the defeat of the miners. These set-backs, including the defeat of the Labour left, have had an impact on the combativity of the working class and on the relation of class forces.

Militants in the Labour Party and the membership of the SWP deserve better than this. The Labour Party is irretrievably reformist, it remains 'the main political obstacle' (Page 393) to constructing a revolutionary consciousness and leadership within the working class. But other writers have charted this before, most notably Ralph Miliband in his *Parliamentary Socialism* of 1961. I expected more from these writers. This book has nothing to say about how that obstacle is to be removed - apart of course from joining the SWP!

: Epilogue

his greatest asset
is that no one believes him
capable of anything else

arriving
by limousine
accompanied by his 2nd wife
he salutes a flower pot
no one bats an eyelid

the 50s
must have been
a crucible of sorts
commentating at ball games
endorsing products
speaking at business lunches
a decade of appliances
a fridgedaire in an automobile
gramophones in cabinets
live advertising
Martians in the Arizona desert
bubblegum cards
and the chance of a new career

the success of Oakland
in his last three years as
Governor
as logical as Nevada
Carter jogging to defeat
in Tehran, the smart money
already lodged on a second
term

...
the most powerful man
in the world
sitting behind a desk
partially deaf
his nose eaten by cancer
reading an autocue

...
he leaves by helicopter
waving to a lamp post

Steven Taylor

YOUR MOVE, JUDIT

THE RECENT VICTORY of Judit Polgar of Hungary in the Duncan Lawrie mixed chess tournament in London, over a field including two grandmasters, has attracted some attention.

Judit, aged 12, is regarded as the strongest ever chess player of her age. At 11 she became the youngest international master - her nearest rivals being a 13 year old (Saeed Saeed) and three 14 year olds (Matthew Sadler, Nigel Short and Bobby Fisher). She also won the world under-12 championship, so becoming the first female player to win any world title. She has two chess-playing sisters: Zsofi (13) who also played in the London tournament and defeated grandmaster Heikki Westercinen, and Zsuzsa (19) who recently came eighth equal in the world under-20 championship.

Why has chess been so overwhelmingly dominated by men, no woman having ever reached the level of grandmaster. Is it because women lack the necessary intelligence? Or because women lack the 'oedipus complex' of which chess is supposedly an expression? Or, as suggested by grandmaster Bill Hartston, because women lack the necessary streak of lunacy? Now it is emerging: there is no inherent reason. The Polgar sisters are not freaks, but are part of a growing incursion into this bastion of male supremacy.

The first strong woman player was Vera Menchik, who won the world women's championship when it was created in 1927. Her inclusion in a major tournament in Carlsbad in 1929 caused amusement; one player, Becker, sneeringly suggested that anyone beaten by her should be placed in the 'Menchik Club'. He became the founder member. A number of leading players joined the Menchik Club in the following years. Her death in an air raid in 1944 may have set back women's chess by some considerable time.

The women's championship was only revived in 1950, and was held by relatively weak players until the victory of Nona Gaprindashvili in 1962. Treated as a national celebrity in her native Georgia, she encouraged interest in chess among Georgian women and girls. Georgia became one of the few places to take women chess players seriously, but apparently for nationalistic reasons - to defeat women of other nations.

In 1961 Bobby Fisher claimed he was the greatest player ever, and that he could beat any woman, even giving her a knight's odds (a form of handicap which means starting a knight short). The Soviet Chess Federation then challenged him to a match against Gaprindashvili. He declined. Curiously, this received much less publicity than his original claim.

A handful of leading women players have sometimes competed (and held their own) in tournaments with men, women have generally played separately, with their own structure of tournaments, and titles. This may have initially encouraged some women players, but it seems to have become a hindrance. Now a number of women, including the Polgars, are avoiding women's chess, facing the men in open competition, and sometimes having to fight for the right to do so. (The Polgars were banned from international competitions for a time by the Hungarian Chess Federation because of this).

Press coverage of the Polgars during their visit to London was mostly sympathetic, apart from Dominic Lawson in the Spectator, who said that Zsofi was 'feminine' but 'no genius' of chess, and accused Judit of having a 'monstrous competitiveness', 'killer eyes' and that her favourite English word was 'crushed' (how would he have done giving interview in a foreign language at the age of 12?).

Where is all this leading? Surely we must have the first woman grandmaster soon. Beyond that, who knows? Gary Kasparov may yet receive his come-uppance for acting as a judge on 'Miss World'.

Campbell MacGregor

Marxism and Individualism

Whilst agreeing with most of what Theresa Conway has to say about the Labour leadership's conference Policy Review document (S.O. October 1988), I scent danger in her unqualified criticism of its 'incessant references to the rights of individuals'.

Marx wrote that the aim of the communist revolution was the creation of a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' and

where the administration of people would give way to the administration of things - both statements which make the human individual the end of emancipatory politics.

Furthermore the marxist critique of capitalism ruthlessly exposes the phoney nature of the freedom promised to the individual who subordinates him or herself to the needs of capital.

The truth of these insights can be seen for example in the sphere of education, where the free

marketeers attempt to limit and control access to knowledge, whilst socialist strive to make it available to whoever wants it.

Both the capitalist and the bureaucratic ideologies rest on a spurious counterposition of the individual to society - but starting at opposite ends. Every politically active woman must be aware how often references on the left to the interests of society as a whole conceal an abusive attitude to the majority part of that whole!

Colin Meade

Socialist Organiser

Mick Woods and Pete Firmin are in danger of creating a mythology in their article on Socialist Organiser (S.O. 10). They claim that it was Socialist Organiser's "lurch to the right" which led to the split in 1984 and that those who set up Socialist Viewpoint opposed this rightward drift. Neither of these claims are true.

In fact the political positions of Socialist Organiser in 1984 were almost identical to those of Socialist Outlook today. It was only after the split that the politics of Socialist Organiser changed dramatically on Ireland, on Palestine and now on the USSR and Eastern Europe. The reason for this has been the increased political influence and dominance of Sean Matgamna. It is probably true that Matgamna deliberately and bureaucratically provoked a split among the paper's supporters in order to gain this dominance.

Those who formed Socialist Viewpoint were either unceremoniously booted out, or organised to oppose the lack of proper discussion and democracy. Others were totally demoralised and left. The classic

bureaucratic methods of Sean Matgamna meant the end of an era in which Socialist Organiser had attempted with some success to apply the methods of the Transitional Programme creatively to the class struggle of the day. After bureaucratic ways had been used and swallowed, the path was open for the creation of a sect based on the developing thoughts of Chairman Matgamna.

The best traditions of Socialist Organiser were continued in Socialist Viewpoint and now in Socialist Outlook. I am certainly not ashamed of having been a supporter of Socialist Organiser and its predecessors from the start in 1967 to a principled break in 1984.

The break from their traditions on the part of today's Socialist Organiser can be seen in their drastic changes of line. On Ireland, for example, Socialist Organiser and its predecessors Worker's Action and Worker's Fight maintained throughout the 1970s and early 1980s a proud solidarity with the IRA when many left groups capitulated to bourgeois pressure.

On Eastern Europe, we fought tooth and nail inside the International

Socialists/Socialist Worker's Party for a 'defomist' position against the majority Cliffite 'state capitalist' line. In fusion with Worker's Power which held 'state capitalist' views in 1975, we embarked on a programme of education which heightened understanding within a traditional Trotskyist framework.

At all times we maintained three principles: for political revolution against Stalinist bureaucracy; for defence of the nationalized economy against imperialist attack; where there was any conflict between the first two, we argued for support for the self-activity of the working class.

This constant discussion on Stalinism led Socialist Organiser to be one of the first left groups to support Solidarnosc in Poland and to call for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is extraordinary that at a time when many Trotskyist groups are criticising their own past softness on Stalinism Socialist Organiser should abandon positions which are basically correct.

Dave Spencer

Sectarianism

I am writing because of my concern over the sectarian approach of Socialist Outlook.

The cover of S.O. 10 carries the heading 'A socialist response to the Green challenge'. You should be presenting a socialist response to the ecological crisis, rather than the green movement. An article on this subject should admit frankly that marxists have done very little on the issue, call for a greater commitment from

the left, and learn from the experience of those who have already been involved for many years, to discover what role marxists should play.

Instead the article explains that once again marxists have all the right answers and those who have been active in the green movement for years have got it wrong. I would not like to try and sell that issue of Socialist Outlook to my friends in Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth!

Then there is the article on Socialist

Organiser. What is the point of it - yet another vitriolic attack by one miniscule organisation on another? All the organisations (from the Communist Party leftwards) have some serious, committed militants. Attacking these organisations does not help your supporters to work with people who hold views different to yours.

This is not to say political differences should be ignored. If your publication carries an article on, say,

Socialist Organiser, a supporter of that organisation should be able to read it and feel at the end of it that their views have been fairly presented in a respectful way and that the basic differences between you have been clarified. It is not necessary or helpful to denounce it in the way you have done - talking about a 'lurch to the right', 'decline and degeneration', 'throwing the movement back to Kautskyism' etc etc.

Britain desperately needs an

organisation/publication that can rise above all this, that does not start from the premise that it has all the answers, that is open to other ideas, will discuss differing ideas in a respectful way. Only in this way will you win over the broadest possible alliance to tackle the huge problems facing us. Nobody is going to listen to you if you listen to nobody. It is high time for a change!

Richard Owens

Bonapartism 1

Phil Hearse's article on Thatcher's supposed Bonapartism (S.O. No.11) gave too much away in the direction of the Communist Party's document 'New Times' which he criticised in an earlier issue.

Hearse believes that the Tories are counter-revolutionary. This implies that Britain was a workers state, or at least in a

pre-revolutionary situation, in 1979. As a former editor of Socialist Challenge, Hearse will surely have noticed a degree of continuity (as well as a break) between the policies of Callaghan and Thatcher. Even the poll tax is, in part, another in the series of attacks launched by Labour on local government.

In fact Hearse's conception of a bonapartist government leads him to the idea that Thatcher is centrally concerned with the attacks on democratic rights, whereas she is centrally concerned with restoring the profitability of British capitalism. Fortunately the residual strength of the working class has prevented the bosses from restoring their world position through wage cuts etc.

Thus by counselling despair almost of the

'Marxism Today' type rather than optimism about the balance of class forces, Hearse begins to seek a broad democratic alliance with wet Tories, etc. The fruits of such ideas were evident when BBC journalists cancelled a strike against the 'terrorist' reporting ban, in favour of a joint approach with management.

*Geoff Collier
Hull SWP*

Bonapartism 2

The article 'Thatcherism, the coming of the strong state' by Phil Hearse (S.O. 11), whilst pointing out some of the unprecedented excesses of Thatcherism compared with any other British post-war government, still contains more dangers than virtues.

Hearse falls into the same terminological trap as the former Workers Revolutionary Party, the legacy of which is continued in the pages of Socialist Newsletter.

The first feature to be grasped in defining bonapartism (semi or otherwise) is, as Trotsky explained most clearly in his article 'Bonapartism and fascism' (1934) - the same article referred to by Hearse, that forms of bonapartism arise when deep class polarisation renders parliamentary rule impotent.

As soon as the irreconcilable camps have taken up their fighting positions at the poles of capitalist society, it wasn't long before it became clear that the adding machine of parliamentarianism lost all importance. It is true that the Doumergue Government, like the Brunening-Schleicher Governments in their day, appear at first glance to govern with the assent of parliament. But it is a parliament that has abdicated, a parliament that knows that in case of resistance the government would dispense with it. Thanks to the relative equilibrium between the camp of counter revolution which attacks and the camp of revolution which defends itself. Thanks to their temporary mutual neutralisation, the axis of powers has been raised above the classes and above their parliamentary representation. It is necessary to seek a head of the government outside parliament and 'outside the parties'...

The government does not appear as an executive organ of the parliamentary majority, but as a judge-arbiter between two camps in struggle... a government of the sabre as the judge-arbiter of the nation - that is just what bonapartism is.

Hearse's contention that the left assumes bonapartism arises only on the massive defeats of the working class is again incorrect. On the contrary, bonapartism arises when the parliamentary system is unable to contain the struggle of contending classes.

Trevor Wongsam

Bonapartism 3

In 'The Coming of the Strong State', Phil Hearse makes mistakes in fact, history and analysis. A complete and comprehensive correction would require an analysis of bonapartism, the theory of the state, the structure and changes in society and the economy, the successes of Thatcher and the failure and ineptitude of the opposition (why do you need Bonaparte when you have Kinnock?).

In the first place the analysis is anglo-centric. Many restrictions in democratic rights are also to be found in other advanced capitalist countries: the illegality of abortion and homosexuality in Ireland, as well as the press bans on the republican movement; the Federal Republic of Germany has the Berufsverbot, banning radicals from employment in the public services - from teachers

to train drivers; in the USA there are vicious anti-union laws and union busting by both professional firms and near fascist gangs; and the French TV channel ORTF was the Government station for many years after De Gaulle, although legally independent.

Any trawl of the advanced capitalist countries would drag up similar examples. Do they prove that these countries are or have been bonapartist? It is also important to remember that many democratic rights have been won very recently. Just to go back 25 years, abortion was illegal, so was homosexuality. Women were paid less than men for doing the same job and were blatantly and legally refused equal treatment in many areas of life. Was that a bonapartist system?

'Thatcherism' is a collection of the trends, facts and features that Phil Hearse notes, made into a coherent theory of an authoritarian, anti-democratic strong state beyond parliamentary democracy, precisely to justify the strategy of the Popular Front in the 1980's, and not to analyse a real phenomenon in society.

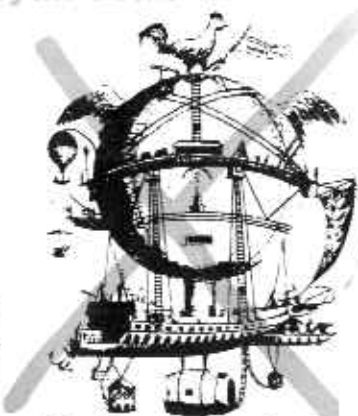
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