

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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**Towards a summer of
discontent**

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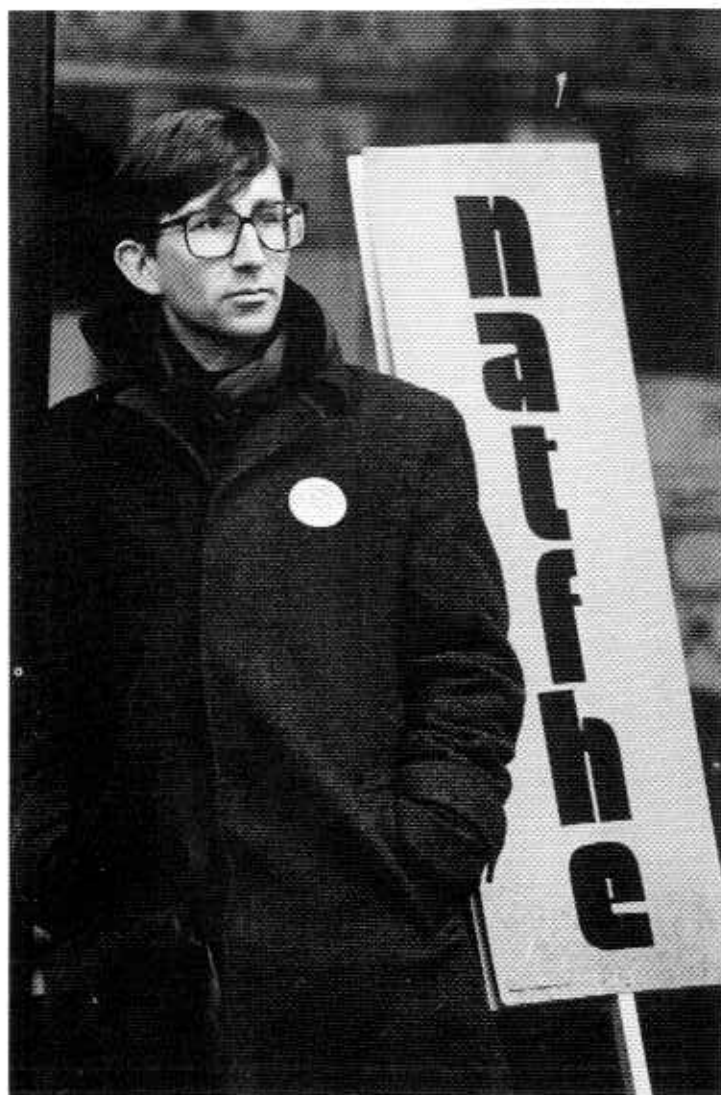
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Even lecturers are joining the class struggle ...

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Towards a summer of discontent

JUST WHEN Labour's leadership thought it was safe to water down some more policies, telling us that collective action and mass struggle went out with flared trousers and hot pants, along comes another wave of good, old-fashioned working class militancy.

And no sooner has the TUC formally thrown in the towel on the Tory anti-union laws – now reaching the level where it no longer even asks a future Labour government to do more than make a few partial alterations and legislate individual rights at work for union members – than the port employers threaten to wheel out the judges once more and take the biggest union in the country to the cleaners should there be a docks strike.

The class struggle, which never really went away, has forced itself back onto the front pages: and each militant stand adopted by one section of workers is reinforcing the anger and self confidence of others.

The reason for the rising temperature in the workplaces is not hard to find: while the dockers face a last-ditch fight to save the Dock Labour Scheme, tube drivers, bus crews, rail workers, engineering workers, BBC staff and others – even college lecturers – have been angered into taking action by the runaway cost of living, coupled with relentless management attacks.

The same basic causes could yet transform other normally placid sections of workers into angry militants prepared to take action against their employers and in defiance of an increasingly unpopular government.

Thatcher's main selling point had always been the economic 'miracle': but that has now gone horribly wrong. Inflation is now soaring. Petrol prices alone have gone up 30 pence a gallon (almost 20 percent) in just a few months. Figures show that mortgage payers face an inflation rate of 19 percent, thanks to Chancellor Lawson's repeated rises in interest rates, imposed to compensate for catastrophic balance of payments figures as the whole economy lurches into chaos.

All this has helped kill off the credit boom: Access has already led the pack of credit card firms by declaring 150 redundancies and predicting tougher times to come, since workers can no longer afford to borrow more. Meanwhile those caught with devastatingly high mortgage payments and looking for a way out now find the housing market paralysed – as a result of Lawson's successful budget moves to freeze out first-time buyers. The housing crisis rages on unabated, with the public sector almost closed down, the market frozen at unpayable prices, and agony for all concerned.

When the going gets tough, the employers get tougher: there has been no let-up in the onslaught on jobs and conditions – not least on the rail and tube services, where staffing levels have been slashed despite public alarm over safety.

As if to wind people up even more, the Tories are also forging ahead with their wildly unpopular privatisation of water and electricity, their universally condemned 'reform' of the National Health Service, and the imposition of the Poll Tax.

With Thatcher's government visibly losing its grip on public support, even the breathtaking incompetence and spinelessness of the Kinnock leadership has not been able to prevent a rise in Labour's fortunes in the polls.

All of these factors increase the determination and self-confidence of workers as they weight the odds before opting for struggle. There is a good chance that some of the stronger sections will win substantial concessions on pay and conditions if they stick to the new, more militant line of action. (This could have the short-run effect of bringing the whole of London to a grinding halt – a timely reminder for the 'designer left' around Kinnock and *Marxism Today* that the working class is still very much alive and capable of kicking back).

Even the dockers, who face a frontal confrontation with the government, cannot rule out the chance of victory – if only they can prevent Ron Todd and other TGWU leaders cringing to the courts, and force them to wield the huge strength of the union to defend their members.

The lesson being rapidly learned by a new wave of workers in struggle is that 'new realism' can't pay the rent, and has never saved a single job. The only realistic way for workers to challenge hard-faced employers and the government is through the *old* realism – collective, mass action and trade union solidarity, tapping the huge reservoir of hostility to the Thatcher government, and brushing aside those timid Labour and trade union leaders who would prefer to stand idly by and watch jobs slashed and wages axed *now*, in the vague, vain hopes that this will produce an electoral victory for Labour in the sweet by and by.

As the workers' movement heads for a summer of discontent, the need for a new, class struggle leadership in the unions is sharper than ever. The forces ranged in opposition to new realism in the Socialist Conference movement must link up with those already active in trade union broad lefts and with the new sections of militants emerging in today's struggles to ensure that out of these experiences we build a hard left current to break the grip of the right wing in the unions. With a long, hot summer of action on the cards, the conditions are in our favour.

The dock strike and the law

DOCKWORKERS ARE RIGHT to see the Tory Bill to abolish the National Dock Labour Scheme as a fundamental attack on their jobs, wages, and conditions of employment.

The conditions contained in the scheme were the fruits of a long struggle against using dockers as casual labour which resulted in the jailing of the Pentonville Five in July 1972.

The national dock strike, which continued after their release, demanding that all ports be included in the scheme, culminated in the Jones/Aldington report, which offered job guarantees to the dockers in existing Scheme ports but at the same time also confirmed that unregistered ports would continue to exist and would be greatly extended.

This was a sell-out which split the industry down the middle and was bitterly resented by dockers at the time. The Jones/Aldington report was accepted by Edward Heath since it was a formula for a massive reduction in registered dockers. Under its proposals we have seen a reduction in their numbers from over 60,000 at the time to under 10,000 today.

Now, however, the Tories see the scheme as offering unacceptable guarantees of job security and conditions of employment which are out of step with the conditions they are imposing on the rest of industry. This is in conflict with their requirements for 1992 and the single European market. They have the nerve to present a 'job for life' for a docker as outrageous when most of the ruling class (not to mention TGWU officials) have always had this security.

The port employers, who have always hated the scheme both for its job security and the joint administration which challenges their 'right' to hire and fire, have welcomed the Bill with great enthusiasm and intend to extract the maximum possible advantage from it. They have already announced the ending of the current national wage bargaining arrangements, which are not a part of the scheme but exist as a separate arrangement. The employers have given 'assurances' on job losses which are rightly seen to be as



PHOTO: Wayne Edgington

'No, lads, don't ask me to break the law' - Ron Todd

worthless as the 'assurances' given to the miners during their strike.

All indications are that the current ballot will produce a majority for strike action. Registered dockers handle over 70 per cent of cargo through British ports, much of which cannot be switched to unregistered ports, which have not the capacity or the special facilities to handle it even if they were prepared to do so. This is admitted in a Department of Trade and Industry circular to regional offices which says that: 'sectors heavily dependent on imports of raw materials or components could face problems quite quickly. Steel vehicles, chemicals, newsprint and textiles could all be hit.'

The dockers have both the determination and the industrial strength to win the strike, but the problem remains of the leadership of the TGWU and its attitude to the courts. Ron Todd's immediate reaction to a dock strike is that it must be within the law! He presumably had the support of the left majority on his executive for this stand, since the executive agreed to overrule the docks national committee, who had agreed to ballot the dockers directly in defence of the scheme.

Todd's stand is well to the right of previous leaders faced with

similar situations. The NGA defied the law at Warrington until they were stabbed in the back by the TUC. Arthur Scargill refused to comply with the law during the miners' strike. Print union chiefs, Tony Dubbins and Brenda Dean were at least threatened by the courts before they complied at Wapping. Sam MacCluskie defied the courts for a period during the seafarers' strike, saw his union's assets seized, and talked about being prepared to go to prison before he caved in and complied with the law.

Todd's position, announcing in advance that there would be no resistance offered open encouragement to the courts to do their worst. It accepted from the outset that a strike would be illegal if it was seen to challenge a decision of Parliament! This would represent the most far reaching use of the law since the Tories started legislating against the unions in 1982, and would outlaw strike action against any Government decision - for example the Baker Bill or the White Paper on the NHS.

If the courts are prepared to take such a step at the present time their decision would be based on what resistance they expect, not on technicalities such as whether the TGWU had met the port employers and insisted that the

dispute was with them. It is clear that each new extension of the law against trade unionists since 1982 has been introduced on the basis of a precise assessment of the balance of forces - a judgement on what the courts and the government can get away with.

In any case it is very difficult for a dock strike to be kept within the law. Even if the port employers fail to win a decision to outlaw the strike, that would not be the end of the story. If the unregistered ports continue to work, striking dockers will picket them when their work is diverted, and this will be unlawful secondary picketing. If unregistered ports join the strike, that too will be automatically declared unlawful secondary action. Several of the non-scheme ports have already pledged support since they know that the wages and condition they enjoy are underpinned by conditions in the scheme ports.

The only viable way to defend the Dock Labour Scheme is for the TGWU to be prepared to defy the law if necessary, and see the strike as against the Government. Ron Todd is worried about the funds of the union, but the funds of the union are worthless unless they can be used to defend the jobs and conditions of the membership, and they can't be whilst they are hamstringed by the courts.

Previous anti-union legislation was destroyed because it was defied. It was the dockers in 1972 who dealt the fatal blow to the Industrial Relations Act with their defiance of the National Industrial Relations Court.

If these political problems are tackled a national dock strike can become the cornerstone of a fight-back against Thatcherism, at a time when the government is losing its grip on the economy, and industry is faced by a wave of disputes over wage claims generated by rising inflation.

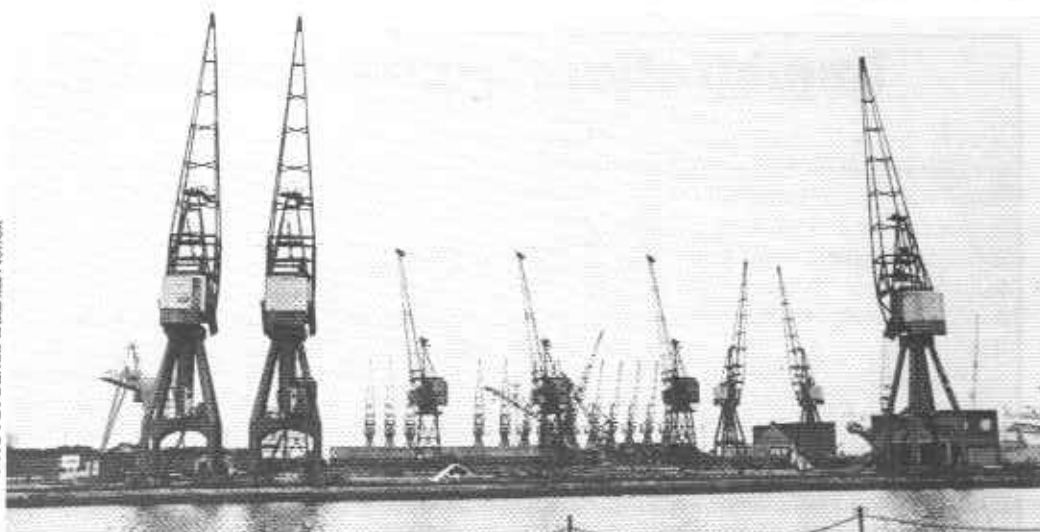
International support for the strike will be helped by the fact that dockers in many parts of the world are under attack. Indian dockers are on strike. There was a national one-day dock strike in France in March and there have been strikes in Holland, Spain, Australia and New Zealand.

A dock strike will of course not receive the support of Neil Kinnock (despite his talk at the last

Labour Party conference of the need to win the support of the £400 a week docker!) or the leaders of the Labour Party, who see a strike as an electoral liability and have already persuaded the TGWU to delay the announcement of the ballot result until after the local elections. They do not speak for the labour movement on this however. All the signs are that the movement will respond to a dock strike as the did to the miners by organising a mass support movement throughout the country.

Alan Thornett

PHOTO: Carlos Guarita/Reflex



70 per cent of cargo is handled by registered dockers.

Italy Mass protests against health cuts

THE ITALIAN government is trying to out-Thatcher Thatcher with its latest deep cuts in the country's health service.

A government budget decree at the beginning of April included the imposition of 'hotel' charges of nearly £5 a day for the 'privilege' of being a hospital patient. People will also have for the first time to pay for X rays and other tests. For good measure the prescription charges were jacked up too. Plans are underway to replace regional political administration of the hospitals with autonomous units led by business managers... where have we heard this before?

The huge Italian public sector deficit would give Thatcher and Lawson apoplectic fits. It is the time-bomb ticking away at Italy's so called economic success-story. The employers want the government to take tough action - even if this means some reduction in the ruling parties' political patronage through the public sector. So there is much talk in the media and political circles about the Thatcher example. Craxi, the Socialist Party leader, wants to impress the middle ground by showing that he can take the tough decisions that the Christian Democrats have shirked for so long. His man, Amato, is the author of the infamous April decree.

Fortunately - and to most observers' total surprise - there was a magnificent response to the April decree from the rank and file

of the labour movement. Protest strikes broke out almost immediately after mass meetings had been held in many workplaces to discuss this attack on working people. Whole cities ground to a halt in the first week of April as day after day workers left their workplaces en masse and marched down to the main squares. This encouraged people who had to pay the charges on the first day to voice their anger rather than meekly submit.

Police had to be called at some hospitals as people staged protests. Health workers made their solidarity with the patients very clear - they know their jobs and working conditions are next in the firing line. Medical and admin staff have developed various strategies to nullify the decree's effect. Patients have been asked to sign promises to pay if the decree is transformed into a proper parliamentary law. In other places they have been promised refunds in writing if the decree becomes invalid.

Calls were made from the start by the factory shop stewards committees for a national general strike. At no time had the national union leaders called for strike action. Powerless to stop walk-outs they cautiously ap-

plauded local initiatives from the sidelines. Bruno Trentin of the largest trade union federation, the Communist Party-led CGIL, joined his fellow trade union leaders to denounce talk of a general strike. Instead they called up a team of experts to conjure up an alternative package of measures to solve the health service's financial crisis. They accept the government's general framework of making 'savings' to reduce the deficit, but want working people to pay a slightly smaller bill for it.

On the April 10 there was a regional general strike in Milan, organised by the more militant sectors opposed to the national leaderships' line, and a demonstration of 50,000. After this the union leaders could no longer block the momentum towards coordinated national action, and agreed to a national one day general strike for May 10, thinking it better to try and control the protest than to let regional or rank and file structures start to or-

ganise nationally.

Already the force of the protest has caused rifts within the government. Donat Cattin, the Christian Democrat health minister, has pleaded it was nothing to do with him, but was all down to Amato, the Treasury minister. The decree will become invalid after 60 days if parliament does not discuss and pass it as legislation. Party bosses in the five-party coalition are already manoeuvring with a view to gaining a percentage point here or there in the June Euro-elections. The last thing they want is sustained protest against an unpopular government measure. Craxi's Socialist Party is already trying to distance itself from the decree.

The wave of protest does show that the hard left minority in the labour movement still retains a capacity for taking a lead against the reformist trade union and Communist Party leaders, despite the long string of defeats over the last ten years. Struggle pays off. Apart from the disarray in the government, concessions have been won, the government has increased the number of categories exempt from the new charges - such as low-income pensioners, women with difficult pregnancies and the chronically ill. The May 10 general strike is vital if the government is to be forced to drop the decree; but the union bureaucrats would like nothing better - if they are given the chance - than to call it off in exchange for some shoddy compromise.

Dave Kelloway



Britain, France, now Italy: the fight for health services

PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Immigration: urgent cases for treatment

WITH MORE than one hundred people attending the Nalگو conference on the issue in Manchester on 15th April it is fair to say that a small step has been taken to make immigration cases a trade union issue.

The conference decided to establish a liaison network for trade unionists and others. A booklet will be produced by the National Black Members Group in Nalگو. Resolutions will be going to national trade union conferences to form policies on immigration and nationality. The conference also decided to mobilise for a lobby on May 15 in Manchester, when Francis Okanlami's appeal will come up.

It was expected that Labour's spokesperson on immigration, Alistair Darling, would talk about

about Labour's policy review on immigration. Instead he limited himself to criticising the existing racist and sexist laws, for which he admitted previous Labour governments had some responsibility.

The degree to which trade unions are involved in immigration cases varies a lot. Some unions do nothing, even when a case affects one or more of their own members. Some just give legal help but refuse to campaign to stop a deportation or to unite a family.

Nalگو is probably the most advanced trade union on immigration, and since 1982 has fought several successful campaigns for its members. In the advertising for the April 15 conference Nalگو argued that trade unions should 'not only fight for trade union members, but for all black people'.

That would be a qualitative step forward - meaning that unions should support *all* anti-deportation campaigns, and lead to a policy of opposing the deportation of anyone from Britain, regardless of their status. Whether Nalگو will implement such policies still has to be seen.

By 1992 the European Community (EC) will become Fortress Europe. An 'iron curtain' will ensure that non-EC citizens will get the same treatment in all EC countries. A person who has, for example, been refused entry in Athens will not be able to get into any other EC country. Information is already being systematically exchanged among EC governments to ensure this.

1992 and the Single Market Act are an attack on all workers, but particularly an attack on millions of immigrant workers. In the

USA employers are subject to sanctions for employing 'illegal' labour. In 1977 a Labour government select committee called for the same to be introduced in Britain! With the advent of 1992 such a policy could now be on the cards for the whole of Europe.

If the trade unions do not begin to tackle immigration issues, they will be cutting their own throats as well as betraying black workers. The new laws will ensure that millions of immigrant workers will be left to the mercy of the police, the courts, and the most unscrupulous employers, creating a two-tier workforce, where some have no legal rights, appalling working conditions and low wages. Such a situation will undermine the rights of *all* workers, whether members of trade unions or not.

Finn Jensen

France at the polls - for sixth time

ON JUNE 18, for the sixth time in a year, electors in France will be expected to vote, this time for elections to the European Parliament.

In the March municipal elections in France and the Overseas Territories, the Socialists were widely credited with having made considerable progress. This was hardly surprising since they had such disastrous results in the last municipal elections in 1983 - they could only do better this time.

The balance of left and right more or less returned the situation to that which existed before 1983, with local power shared almost equally between the two blocs. However many mayors elected on the ticket of the PS (Socialist Party), the PCF (Communist Party) and RPR (Conservative coalition) were 'dissidents', either because they didn't toe the party line (as in the case of the RPR candidate, Michel Noir in Lyon, who took a firmer stance against electoral pacts with Le Pen's racist National Front than did his party's headquarters) or because they have been expelled from their party - such as the right-wing ex-PS mayor of Marseille, Robert Vigoureux, or the ex-PCF mayor of Le Mans, Robert Jarry, who was elected in the first round with well

over the 50 per cent required.

The shift to the right in the PS was evident from the election of many supporters of the Prime Minister, Michel Rocard. Newly-elected mayors, such as Catherine Trautman (Strasbourg), Guy Ravier (Avignon) and Jean-Pierre Sueur (Orleans), are committed to the mixed market and management principles and are scornful of socialist values.

The impression given by the media that the Communist Party had only marginal support is not borne out by the facts. The PCF started off with control of 67 large towns - the same number as the RPR; it finished with 53 (the same number as the UDF confederation).

On the other hand, the various parties on the hard left achieved varying degrees of success. The 'New Left Movement' (Nouvelle Gauche, NG) fell far short of achieving the sort of unity envisaged at its founding conference last December. This movement encompasses parts of the Juquin Committees (formed to support Pierre Juquin's Presidential campaign last Summer) as well as the FGA (Federation pour une Gauche Alternative) which had already dissolved itself in anticipation of fusion with the NG and the PSU (Parti Socialiste Unifie),

which announced at its congress in mid-December its intention of fusing within the coming year. In addition there were a small number of unaligned militants and some members of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) as well as some Communist-Renovateurs (MCR).

In total this represented some 2500 of the 8000 militants who organised with Juquin for the Presidential elections. Officially the LCR and the MCR did not participate in the launch.

Ironically, the disappointing result obtained by Juquin in the Presidential elections created the impetus to launch the new movement, before the remaining enthusiasm disappeared altogether.

The constitution of the new movement was debated last November and the LCR vigorously opposed the text. Alain Krivine of the LCR, explained: 'At first, Juquin's candidature was an attractive proposition. It enabled two different cultures to work together. Unfortunately, the election result won little more than the usual hard left votes. In these circumstances, we think it would be wrong to submerge the revolutionary character of the League into a more heterogeneous body when we do not yet know how it will evolve.' However, the LCR does

not rule out the possibility of becoming part of a new unified organisation in the future.

It is perhaps not surprising that so many disparate elements of the hard left, some new (such as the MCR) and some old (such as the LCR) and with varying degrees of organisational control, were unable to sustain the momentum for unity indefinitely.

The fact that they worked together for the Presidential elections, and in some cases during the municipal elections too, is an encouraging sign. Now the priorities of the LCR lie for the time being in building struggles in the working class, where it has been very active of late, intervening in the national nurses' strike as well as in smaller local disputes. A recruitment drive is also taking place in the Nord/Pas de Calais region, where membership cards are being issued on an experimental basis.

While strengthening its profile in the working class and building its party base, the LCR is looking to the European elections as an opportunity to campaign with militants in other parties such as Lutte Ouvriere and the NG, in order to present a united front at the polls.

Dawn de Kock

Pro life, pro women, and pro choice

ON SUNDAY April 9, well over 300,000 women and men filled the space below the Washington Monument to hear a starry array of speakers and entertainers supporting abortion rights, before filling Pennsylvania Avenue and its surroundings as far as the eye could see, right up to the Capitol, where a second equally starry cast of speakers kept its audience cheering for three hours.

Only around 100,000 had been expected - which would have still topped the previous pro-choice march - but the numbers totally dwarfed the biggest-ever anti-abortion demonstration of 75,000. It even topped the 1963 civil rights demonstration of 250,000 with which many were comparing it for size and - even more - spirit.

American women awaited the judgment of the Supreme Court on *Webster-v-Reproductive Rights Services* which could overturn the historic 1973 court decision that led to abortion being legalised in America. It was the imminence of this case, heard on April 26, that led to abortion being the main theme of this demonstration called by the National Organisation of Women and brought so many hundreds of thousands out that day. Further local demonstrations were held in many parts of America on the day of the hearing; in New York thousands of women laid coat-hangers on the steps of the Federal Court.

One theme at the rally, heard again and again from many dif-



PHOTO: Jullio Eichant/Parflex

Campaigning against the Alton Bill in Britain.

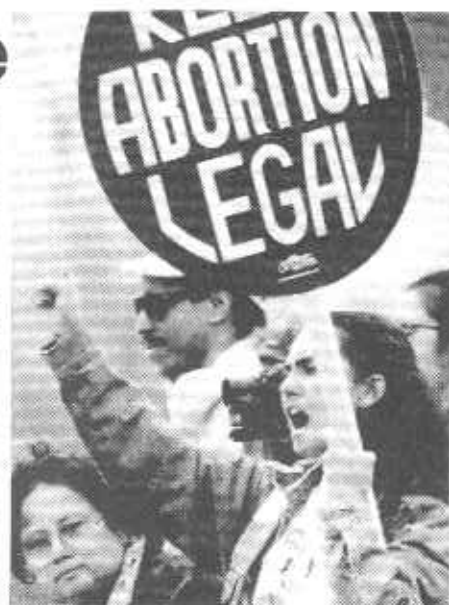
ferent speakers, was that it was necessary for the pro-choice side to reclaim for itself the 'pro-life' label. Anti-abortionists were only for foetal life - after that, baby, you were on your own. Campaigners for choice were the ones fighting for the overall agenda that would mean real choice for all women. Typical amongst the speakers was actress Valerie Harper, whose main concern is homelessness, who denounced the anti-abortionists with blazing anger for their totally anti-life attitudes. A number of speakers - urged by shouts from the massive crowd - drew attention to the missing woman - Barbara Bush, known to be pro-choice, but silent on the subject since her husband became President.

American anti-abortionists have been increasingly using violent tactics, though their mainstream supporters publicly give little support to these methods. During the period of the

in front of clinics, whilst others surround women attempting to enter them and use disgusting pictures, models, dolls and other methods to try and dissuade them. The pro-choicers are fighting back using a variety of tactics from injunctions, persuading the police to use their powers to prevent harassment and obstruction, etc - to more inventive ones, such as the time when the 'rescue' leaders had the tables turned on them - pro-choicers surrounded their headquarters, thus preventing them leaving for five hours!

Anti-abortionists are increasingly using these same tactics in Britain, too. A Bourne mouth clinic run by BPAS has been 'picketed' by 'pavement counsellors' at least once a week and we need to prevent the situation escalating as it has in the States by learning from the struggle there.

Over the past few years in the States the anti-abortionists have grabbed the headlines and made



Fighting for abortion rights in the USA.

demonstration, three clinics were fire-bombed. Equally problematic now is 'Operation Rescue', when hundreds of anti-abortionists pray, sing hymns and lie down

the moves. What came over clearly from the demonstration was that women - whether they remembered the days of illegality and believed a return to them was impossible or they were young enough to have grown up with abortion rights - had woken to the danger that these rights could be taken away from them.

To mark the march a video had been produced, a pro-choice answer to the infamous 'A Silent Scream'. For me, the most touching moment of 'Abortion for Survival' is hearing an elderly man in tears as he reads a letter his beloved sister sent him when he was only 14, trying to explain to him why she was seeking a (then illegal) abortion. 'And whilst I am scared, angry and sometimes disgusted, I suppose that most of all I've become some sort of a rebel. I am determined to fight back and I realise that with this choice I have to accept the risks that go along with this battle... I ask for your understanding even though it may take some time for you to accept the need for such a struggle on the part of your special sister and all women in their struggle.' He was never to see his sister again. She lost her personal battle, but her generation, their daughters and granddaughters are in fighting mood today. She and the thousands who died with her will never be forgotten.

Leonora Lloyd

('Abortion for Survival' is available for hire from NAC. Details 01-405 4801)

Decades of betrayal that led to the dockers' last stand

The National Dock Labour Scheme is under assault from the Tories, with the connivance of the employers. Here BOB PENNINGTON, who was an official of the 'Blue Union' on the docks in 1954-55, looks at the history of the scheme and the struggles of dockers for improved conditions.

Right until the last war and the National Dock Labour Scheme of 1947, casualisation had been a scourge on Britain's waterfronts.

Mayhew, the Victorian philanthropist, wrote of the hiring system, saying: 'Then begins the scuffling and scrambling forth of countless hands, high in the air to catch the eye of him whose voice may give them work... To look into the faces of that hungry crowd is to see a sight that must ever be remembered'.

It was not until the first world war that entry on the docks was regulated but the 'free call' was still the way the overwhelming majority got their jobs. How little improvement had been made to that degrading and humiliating system can be seen by the report of the Shaw Commission in 1920 which argued: 'If men were merely spare parts in an industrial machine, this callous reckoning might be appropriate. But society will not tolerate much longer the continuance of the employment of human beings on these lines. The system of casualisation must, if possible, be torn up by the roots. It is wrong.'

Casualisation had its roots in the fluctuating nature of dock work and in the employers' conviction that it was the only economic way that demand and supply could be matched. As they were only trading for profit, they saw no reason why men should not make themselves available for hire when, and only when, there were ships to load and unload. Because the unions did not challenge the profit motive, and saw their function simply as getting the best deal within the system, they were unable to mount an effective challenge to casualisation.

Wartime measures

The arrival of the second world war saw a changed situation. Ernest Bevin, former General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), became in 1940 Minister of Labour in Churchill's coalition government. He, along with the rest of the government, was seriously worried that labour shortages

would seriously affect the docks. For the first time in over two decades unemployment had virtually disappeared, and the government urgently needed dockers. When the interests of the bourgeoisie were threatened and the inefficiency of casualisation jeopardised the war effort, something had to be done. Consequently, the dockers and the employers were registered, and the labour force was given a guaranteed weekly wage.

These war-time measures showed that the

1945, even before the war had ended, 10,000 London dockers were on strike. Again in that September a strike which started in Birkenhead spread nationally, lasting six weeks. This was over a national pay award and was bitterly opposed by the new Labour government, the Tories, the Liberals, the Communist party and of course every 'right thinking' trade union official.

The situation was explosive. A militant dock labour force wanted reforms that would end casualisation permanently, would provide a guaranteed pay packet and jobs, and improve safety. Employers who used the ports for importing or exporting their goods favoured measures that would speed up turn-round times, and cut down on disputes. They were therefore sympathetic to measures that would provide a stable labour force, whilst being opposed to nationalisation. The union bureaucracy did not favour nationalisation either. They wanted to retain a system that gave them power by government



'The labour force kept demanding better wages.' - Liverpool dockers, 1950

old system was neither necessary, nor was it inviolable. However the real question was how to replace it. There was an obvious case for nationalisation. A single employer would have been in a far better position to forecast incoming work and distribute labour accordingly. How, asked the advocates of nationalisation, could a multiplicity of firms, made up of shipping companies and stevedoring firms - who never consulted with each other on such matters - plan anything so complex as the overall allocation of labour?

The post-war Labour government had no stomach for nationalising the docks, nor did it even have the semblance of a plan for such an undertaking. But it had promised to end casualisation, and had to come up with a solution. Under pressure, the port employers reluctantly accepted the principle of a maintenance payment, but wanted to retain control of hiring and firing and the administration of docks and harbours. The trade unions were not at all inclined to give up their say in administering the register which determined who got hired. The full time officials particularly enjoyed the positions that legislation had provided, seeing this as an extension of their self-perceived role as mediators between capital and labour.

At the base, among rank and file dockers, there was a strong mood of militancy. In March

decree - much preferable in their eyes to having to mobilise the membership in struggle - and which provided them with privileges and perks. The Labour government saw its job from the outset as being to reconcile these different interests. They were anxious to get rid of the old anarchic system that had plagued the docks for years. They even wanted a better deal for the labour force - as long as it did not antagonise the employers too much.

The 1947 compromise

No single section of the conflicting groups was strong enough to impose its own solution. The climate of opinion in 1947 would not have tolerated a full-blown return to the old methods. On the other hand there was no leadership from the unions or Labour's left, that was able, or even wanted to lead a campaign for nationalisation. Thus the 1947 National Dock Labour Scheme was from its inception a compromise. It was certainly an improvement on the past, but hardly represented the dockers' millennium. As Lord Devlin said later: 'The misconception that the scheme was a concession granted to the dockers and not the best means of solving the industry's labour problems has to be eradicated'.

Nevertheless the scheme was a step forward. The worst aspects of casualisation had gone.

Dockers had won some job security and a minimum guaranteed pay packet. The trade unions had the right to control 50 per cent of the register, which meant they could determine the recruitment of half the labour force. The unions were also represented on the various boards set up under the scheme, and on the disciplinary boards.

Of course the class struggle continued. The labour force kept insisting on better wages, safety improvements and an increased fall-back guarantee to provide a decent wage if no work was available. In the early years of the scheme there were national unofficial dock strikes in May-June 1948, April 1949, May-July 1949, April-May 1950, February-April 1951 and October-November 1954.

These were led by unofficial committee, often in alliance with the National Amalgamated Stevedores' and Dockers' Union (invariably dubbed the Blue Union after the colour of their membership cards), whose 7,500 members were then solely based in London, and always against the official leadership of the TGWU. It was a time when dockers were in a favourable position to build on and extend the gains of the scheme, but the opportunity was not taken. The TGWU, particularly under the ultra-right wing leadership of Arthur Deakin and his short-lived successor, Tiffen, preferred to collaborate with the government and the employers than to allow scope for a politically militant leadership, and so the advances that could have been made did not take place.

The break to the Blue Union

The Blue Union played a role in the life of the docks out of all proportion to its size, and was a constant thorn in the side of the employers and TGWU officialdom. In 1954 thousands of dockers in Liverpool, Birkenhead, Manchester and Hull, exasperated with the Arthur Deakin and the refusal of the TGWU (known on the docks as the 'White Union') to fight the employers, decided to join the Blue Union. The Hull dockers sent a message to Liverpool which said: 'For many years we dockers in Hull have resented the way that the TGWU has handled our disputes. Time after time we have reported our grievances to the TGWU, only to be told 'our hands are tied'. We of Hull have decided that the time has come to do some 'untying'. Thus the Blue Union came to Hull

What Birkenhead dockers' leader Billy Johnson was to describe as 'the biggest prison break in history' followed. Around 15,000 to 16,000 dockers in the Northern ports joined the NASD. In Birkenhead, out of a labour force of about 2,500, only two or three stayed with the White Union. The appeal of the Blue Union in the northern ports was that it was hated by both the employers and the White Union.

The NASD was a relatively democratic

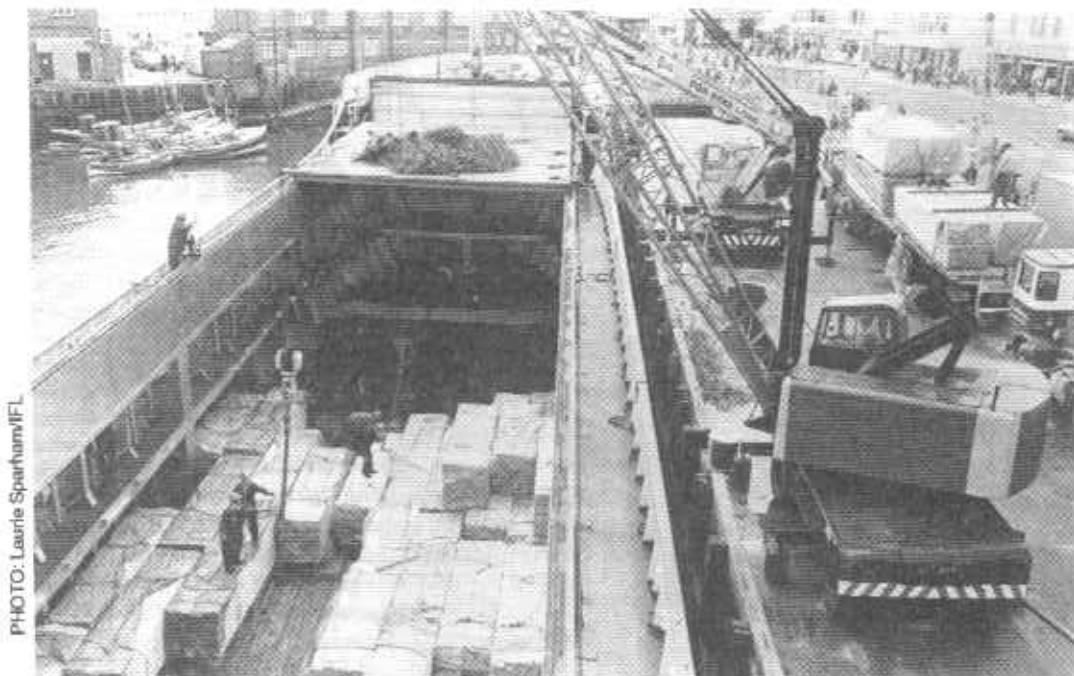


PHOTO: Laurie Sparrham/IFL

union. All its officials were elected every three years, and thus under the constant pressure of the members. Report-backs invariably went to mass meetings rather than to branches. The officials had to operate on a mandate from the membership, unlike the TGWU where they were controlled from above. Although the 1955 recognition strike failed, the Blue Union still retained a presence in the northern ports. In Liverpool, the successful strike of 1967 should be credited to the unofficial committee, whose chair was Jimmy Benbow, an old-time Blue Union militant.

By the mid 1960s, following the return of a Labour government, the employers and the port users were exerting enormous pressure for change. The age of containerisation had dawned, and the technological revolution was arriving in dockland. Who better to make sure it did, than Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who had boasted of Labour's intention to apply 'the white heat of the technological revolution' to British industry. He and his Minister of Labour, Ray Gunter, appointed Lord Devlin to report on the docks. Phase one of his report completed the abolition of casual labour, in return for the introduction of productivity deals and the end of the piece work system. It also tightened discipline and attacked so-called 'restrictive practices'. This set the scene for a number of bitter disputes. The unrest on the docks was denounced by Gunter as 'communist led': Wilson echoed this when he told a dinner of London wine merchants 'Everyone here will endorse his (Gunter's) words' - and not surprisingly they did!

Devlin strikes again

In 1972, under the Tories, Devlin stage two was introduced. This accepted containerisation on the employers' terms and laid the basis for a proliferation of unregistered ports and the establishment of inland container bases, which would in effect be inland ports doing the job of registered dockers. Dockers began picketing the new unregistered ports; and as a result the TGWU was fined by Ted Heath's National In-

dustrial Relations Court over the picketing of Heaton's Transport in St Helens, where dockers' work was being done by unregistered labour.

Liverpool dockers struck, and the strike spread. Eventually five unofficial London dockers' leaders were arrested and imprisoned in Pentonville for refusing to stop picketing Midland Cold Storage. A wave of strikes then hit the docks, the print, and other industries; even the TUC threatened a national one day stoppage. The government was forced to find a face-saving formula in the face of such resistance and the dockers were released.

After the Pentonville Five were freed, the national dock strike continued, demanding the extension of the National Dock Labour Scheme to all unregistered ports. It was a militant strike with extensive picketing of the unregistered ports. Terry Turner, a Hull docker, kept a diary of the 1972 events and he records the conditions on some of the unregistered wharfs; 'During recent picketing at these places it has been seen that ships work with casual labour employed for a pittance of a wage, and that sometimes the crews work the cargoes'. At the same time, in Turner's own port of Hull, employers were insisting that there was a surplus of 500 dockers.

Jones sells out

When the Aldington-Jones report appeared it was a sell-out. It talked about making a determined effort to bring container work into the docks; but the reality was that in return for a guarantee that existing dockers in the scheme ports would have a 'job for life' (provided they resisted the pressure to take redundancy), the unregistered ports would proliferate and the industry would be split. Turner commented 'Dockers see this report as a palliative. Something more substantial is required about dockers' futures before peace can come'. The *Daily Mirror* estimated the proposals would mean the loss of 2000 jobs by the end of the year.

There was bitter resentment from the dock-



Jones – co-architect of a sell-out.

ers at the report. Jack Jones called a national docks delegate conference of the TGWU to try to get them to accept the report. There were thousands of dockers outside Transport House when the conference took place, and great battles with the police. After a long battle Jones swung a majority in his favour. When this was announced there were riots outside and dockers stormed the meeting room. Jones was physically attacked, for which dockers were later disciplined by the union. The National Port Stewards Committee tried to keep the strike going – but it was impossible against the weight of the TGWU.

The dockers' fears had been right. Aldington-Jones reduced registered dockers from 60,000 then to 9,000 today. It was also the end of the Blue Union, which had played a militant role in these events. One of the most apt comments and about the Blue Union came from Morris Foley, a former TGWU full time official, who said: 'This union (the NASD) had done a lot for our industry. They were for many years the backbone of the union movement as far as London was concerned'. Unfortunately a culmination of dwindling membership caused by redundancies and an erosion of their negotiating rights finally forced the NASD into amalgamation with the TGWU.

Now that the chips are down in a new confrontation with a hard-line Tory government, today's dockers are once again up against a crisis of trade union and political leadership, and facing the need to organise their own strength to ensure they are not held back by the likes of Todd and his co-thinkers among TGWU officials and executive members.

There is no scope for half measures. If the dockers are defeated or sold out this time around there will be little if any chance to come back again for another try later on: dockers have much to defend, and the strong traditions of docks militancy have much to offer other sections of workers confronting today's ruthless employers' offensive.

A new ERA for education?

The past few years have seen a ferocious attack on working class educational interests by the Tories, culminating in the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). The Labour leadership, clothed in its new realist garb has either been silent on these attacks or bent under the pressure of the Tory offensive towards supporting 'progressive' notions such as regular testing! The NUT leadership has been more interested in defeating and marginalising the left in the union than in mobilising teachers in defence of their interests.

The combination of ERA together with the defeat of teachers over pay and conditions, the defeat of left Labour councils and the defeat of the Inner London Teachers' Association (ILTA), which has been the vanguard of left teachers, mark a qualitative defeat for the working class, and hence the successful installation of key elements of the 'new Tory education'.

Local management of schools

The keystone of ERA is the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS). More than the national curriculum or even national testing, this will change the face of British education.

There is genuine dissatisfaction, both among teachers and parents, with the bureaucratic management of schools by Local Education Authorities (LEAs). By offering apparently greater power to schools and to parents and governors, the Tories hope that they will win consent to other changes. In this context, it should be noted that while some genuine powers are handed over, the overall effect of ERA is a centralising one. The Act provides the Secretary of State with well over 300 new powers, including the power to lay down detailed programmes of study. Moreover, the power which governors will have under LMS will be severely constrained by lack of funds and governing bodies will end up having to administer expenditure cuts and/or spend time and effort on fund-raising from private sources. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the left to develop a policy which allows genuine participation of parents and students in the management of schools.

LMS signals the end of effective local authority control of education. Where education has, since 1944, formed the major part of local authority expenditure, together with housing and social services, LEAs will now function as 'clearing houses' for the distribution of funds to schools. Only 7 percent of the education budget will be allowed to remain under the direct control of the LEA, and this will have to be spread very thinly to cover a range of 'discretionary'

provision, from school meals to in-service training of teachers (other than that funded directly by the government), support for children with 'special educational needs' and supply cover to allow 'facility time' for teachers with union responsibilities. LEA's will be unable to lay down policy on such issues as gender and 'racial' equality (though they will be allowed to provide guidelines) and, other than the distribution of funds, their only real function will be the inspection of schools to ensure that the national curriculum is being delivered.

This will have disastrous effects on the power of the unions in the education sector, which will be forced to negotiate in small, single workplaces, since national and local agreements on conditions of service will become untenable and unenforceable. The effect of LMS, taken together with open enrolment and the possibility of opting out, is likely to be an increase in competition between schools and between individual teachers. The NUT (and other unions) will need strategies for preventing this. In particular, the tendency of the NUT to look increasingly to 'case work' is the opposite of the strategy needed – especially when, as in the case of the Highbury Quadrant teachers, it is unwilling to defend militants within its own ranks.

The ERA and women

The vast majority of people employed in education are women. The effects of the ERA and, in particular, of LMS on them are likely to be disastrous. Equal opportunities practices may well appear to be (and may objectively be) more expensive. Rights to maternity leave are likely to be under early attack – indeed, there are already signs that it will not be guaranteed in all cases. Part time, temporary and casual supply posts are overwhelmingly held by women, and these, too, are likely to be increasingly threatened. Dinner supervisors and cleaning staff will also be under attack with the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering. These are issues which the left must take up and force the unions to fight on.

Opting out

As with the proposals for re-organisation of the NHS, opting out is a staging post on the road to privatisation. The issues raised by LMS will be even more acute in schools which have opted out, which will have total control of employment and conditions of service. Under LMS employment will be in a somewhat ambiguous position – contracts will be with LEAs, while hiring and firing will become the responsibility of the school's governors. However, none of this ambiguity will exist in opted out schools. Contracts will be with the school alone, and governing bodies will be able to refuse to recognise unions, to decide on the terms of their contracts and so on, without let or hindrance.

While most of the schools which have decided to opt out so far are those under threat of closure or those in wealthy areas where parents aspire to private education, there have been some votes to opt out by parents in inner city areas (Small Heath school in Birmingham, for example), where cuts in education expenditure by the LEA have led parents to believe that their children's education will benefit from being removed from LEA control.

The national curriculum and national testing

Baker's intentions in the introduction of LMS and opting out have been well thought out and, in the absence of major action from the unions and the Labour Party, are quite likely to be successful. But there is a contradiction within the introduction of the national curriculum which can, and should, be exploited.

Baker's ideas on education are simplistic, based on his own memories of (private) schooling. Although the members of the various working parties on the National Curriculum and on testing have been hand-picked by him for their record of conservatism in education (Profs Black, Cox, and co), their reports have not been in line with his demands. In particular, the Cox Report on the English curriculum has, for the most part, been based on the best practice current in primary schools.

In spite of sending the reports back for redrafting, and, in the cases of science and maths getting most of what he wanted, there remains the possibility, particularly in the case of English and particularly in primary schools, for progressive teachers to subvert the intentions of the Tories. The problem with this will, of course, be that the introduction of national testing is likely to lead to 'teaching to the test', just as it did in the days of the 11 plus - something which progressive teachers must oppose.

This is not to argue that left teachers should content themselves with trying to subvert the national curriculum. Nonetheless, it is important that every avenue for opposition to ERA should be used, and this is one which must not be forgotten.

Racism and religion

The overall effect of ERA is likely to be racist. Under LMS it is likely that schools with large numbers of black students will lose funding, which will not be compensated for by the use of Section 11 funds. Testing will operate in racist (and sexist) ways, with large numbers of black children relegated to lower streams early on in their education. In spite of this, there is a large section of the black community who regard the introduction of the national curriculum as being positive, hoping that it will go some way towards ensuring equality of opportunity for their children. The concern of these parents over the institutional racism of the education system, nearly 20 years after the publication of Bernard Coard's *How the West Indian child is made educationally sub-normal in the British school system*, is well-founded and means that we have to ensure that an anti-racist perspective is integrated into opposition to the Act.

Meanwhile, the clause enforcing Christian

worship has increased pressure towards the establishment of denominational schools for Muslims and other black groups. This pressure must be resisted and all forms of religious worship in schools opposed.

While all this represents an enormously significant attack on working class rights it carries within it the basis for continuing the fight. Whereas 10 years ago, the majority of teachers voted Conservative, today the attacks on their pay and conditions of service and on the education system as a whole has seen the radicalisation of a large layer of teachers. The majority of teachers are dissatisfied with ERA, and flashpoints are bound to arise as LMS is introduced in all areas.

Recently the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA), which is the largest left grouping in the NUT, has begun to move away from a narrow view of the task for left teachers as being purely to do with pay and conditions. It has produced a Charter for Education, which has been taken into the Chesterfield movement; STA members facilitated the education workshop at the Women for Socialism Conference and are among those leading the Women for Socialism day school on Socialist Feminism and Education to be held on June 10. The STA is sponsoring a model resolution for this year's Labour Party Conference, which is based on the need for action on education which is not confined to pay and conditions; and its resolutions to NUT national conference spanned a wide range of issues, including salaries and conditions of service, racism, equal opportunities and Local Management of Schools.

At NUT conference, the STA inflicted a number of important defeats on the executive, notably on union democracy and racism (with the executive accepting the STA resolution after their amendment to it was heavily defeated). The STA effectively set the agenda for conference, with its resolutions being the main ones in virtually every section. The 'Broad Left' (which, in the NUT, means the right) leadership of the union is in disarray, with sections of it opposing General Secretary designate Doug McAvoy's moves to turn the NUT into another EETPU, and they were clearly divided on a number of crucial issues at conference. For example, Marian Darke, who will



PHOTO: John Harris/IFL

Baker's ideas are based on memories of private schools.

almost certainly be opposing McAvoy in the coming union elections from within the 'Broad Left', made a speech opposing the executive's position on whether NUT members should apply for jobs in City Technology Colleges; this proved critical in swinging the delegates behind the STA resolution.

However, there is still a long way to go. Exactly how to fight LMS effectively will be the subject of further debate within the STA, and will certainly be discussed at a Conditions of Service Conference to be called by Ealing NUT in conjunction with other STA-controlled Associations in September.

The resolutions at national conference calling for action were either narrowly defeated or only narrowly won, and General Secretary Fred Jarvis was able to argue, at the end of conference, that such a situation did not provide a mandate for action.

The defeat of the executive on issues of democracy has led to the union's first ever election for the position of General Secretary, to be followed later in the year with elections for Deputy General Secretary. The STA's candidate in the General Secretary election will be Bernard Regan, and he will be fighting on a class struggle platform, paying particular attention to the needs and rights of women, black and lesbian and gay teachers. In the current situation in the union, it is entirely possible that he will run McAvoy much closer than the NUT's leadership would like, and that STA candidates could be elected to the posts of Deputy General Secretary and Vice President. If this happens, it will represent a major move to the left for the union.

Debbie Epstein

Apartheid's murderous role in Namibia

Evidence of South African atrocities against Namibian freedom fighters is mounting. A documentary film, showing the bodies of combatants who had been shot in the head at point blank range, was screened in the US Senate on April 18 and is due to be shown on American TV at the end of April.

The South African military is hunting out and executing fighters from the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in the north, while South African battalions are lining up along the Namibia-Angola border to catch any fighters who try to get back into Angola. Earlier in the month, *Sunday Telegraph* correspondent Simon O'Dwyer-Russell reported (April 9, 1989) that he saw 18 dead combatants, most of whom 'had apparently been shot in the face at close range with small calibre weapons'.

This information complements what SWAPO, church sources and local civilians have been saying for the past few weeks concerning the battles in the northern Namibia and the breakdown in the United Nations ceasefire. For weeks now Namibians have insisted that it was South Africa who broke the ceasefire and that South Africa has been using the fighting in the north as a cover to conduct a 'scorched earth' policy against civilians (in which hundreds have been killed or wounded) and a 'shoot-to-kill' policy against PLAN combatants and SWAPO activists. But who listened?

At the first news of the outbreak of fighting, along with Margaret Thatcher's pronouncement that 'a very serious incursion has taken place...and we condemn it totally', the majority of the western media (particularly the British, with *The Independent* taking the prize) launched into a scurrilous attack against SWAPO. Without any of the facts at that time being known, and relying on South African military sources, SWAPO was condemned as the aggressor by supposedly sending its combatants over the border from Angola on April 1, and thereby breaking the formal ceasefire which came into effect at 4am that day. The rows that have broken out since have centred on the interpretations of the United Nations plan for Namibia's independence and its related resolutions and documents - UN Security Council Resolution 435 - and the supposed agreements reached at last year's peace talks, particularly in relation to the ceasefire and SWAPO's military wing, PLAN.

SWAPO has always argued that Resolution 435 (1978) was a massive compromise. Had they not gone along with it they would have been accused of trying to hold up the implementation of Namibia's independence. It was, in fact, a watered down version of the earlier 1976 Resolution 385, which was drafted by the now-

defunct Western Contact Group (Britain, US, France, Canada and West Germany), together with South Africa, outside the framework of the UN. Needless to say its terms are very favourable to South Africa.

Resolution 435 relegated the UN's role to one of monitoring the elections, with South Africa's colonial Administrator General in Namibia in effect organising them. The independence plan does not insist that Walvis Bay - the country's only deep water port and crucial to the economy - is an integral part of Namibia. It was annexed by South Africa in 1977 (using 19th century British colonial treaties!), together with several off-shore islands. South Africa says it will negotiate the future of Walvis Bay and the islands with a 'friendly' government.

SWAPO has not even been party to any of the peace negotiations since July/August 1982! Since then, the South Africans, backed by Reagan, Thatcher and co, have consistently argued that they would not sit at the negotiating table with SWAPO. They got away with dictating the conditions of the peace talks. SWAPO's absence last year at the peace talks between Angola, Cuba and South Africa over the future of Namibia and the issue of Cuban troops in Angola was a scandal.

Namibia's independence process was set to begin on April 1. No sooner had the formal ceasefire come into effect than the South Africans accused SWAPO of breaking it by moving PLAN combatants over the border from Angola. The South Africans then requested that the UN Secretary General's special representative in Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, sanction the use of South African police units to round up the PLAN fighters.

By a stroke of luck, Margaret Thatcher was on hand to twist Ahtisaari's arm into going along with this (and to denounce SWAPO to the world's press). Local South African police surrounded and attacked a PLAN unit at around 11am at Okahenge in northern Namibia. Eyewitness accounts of the incident all report that the South African forces opened fire first. The UN inquiry into the presence of PLAN in the north later stated that the combatants had 'no hostile intent'. Six local South African Defence Force (SADF) battalions, including the notorious South West Africa Territory Force's (SWATF) 101 Battalion, were let out of bases to assist the police units. What then followed was over ten days of some of the worst fighting in Namibia's war of independence.

While the SADF, its notorious Koevoet



Apartheid's gunmen patrol Namibia

counterinsurgency unit and its local SWATF battalions went on the rampage, they were elevated by much of the media into a freedom-loving peacekeeping force, obviously protecting Namibia from marauding bands of SWAPO fighters. The smear campaign against SWAPO got into full swing, full of racist and patronising insults, insinuating that SWAPO, representing black people, were incompetent and could not understand or were misrepresenting what had been written down in the mounds of UN documents and resolutions concerning Namibian independence. SWAPO's President, Sam Nujoma, came under personal attack as the western press tried to label him a 'tribal leader' in an attempt to dismiss what the liberation movement and the masses of black Namibians have been struggling for over the decades of colonial rule. In contrast, the South African, British and US governments were portrayed as beyond reproach and obviously telling the truth.

In retrospect, it appears that South Africa's deliberate breach of the ceasefire and its subsequent attacks on SWAPO were well planned and well timed. They were well timed to coincide with Thatcher's 'unexpected' visit to Namibia's capital Windhoek on April 1 - Thatcher and Pretoria were in this together, days if not weeks in advance (Pretoria knew long before anyone else that Thatcher would be going to Windhoek). What is more, the presence of PLAN fighters inside Namibia before April 1 was certainly not news to the South Africans - they have been fighting a bush war against PLAN for the last 23 years.

But why would South Africa, in collusion with Thatcher, try to sabotage the peace process before it had got off the ground? The whole exercise was designed to give the South Africans international credibility in their role in Namibia and to isolate SWAPO. It was a chance to test how far they could manipulate the UN peacekeeping forces, and to get everyone used to South Africa dictating the terms of the independence elections. It was also a chance to score a few military points against SWAPO and to try to demoralise and intimidate people in the



PHOTO: John Liebenberg/NCCT

South Africa is keen to isolate SWAPO: above, February rally in Katutura.

lead up to the elections.

South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia is the central issue in all this, not the location of SWAPO's fighters. And the key to stopping further bloodshed is the immediate withdrawal and disbandment of *all* South African military and police forces (including Koevoet and SWATF).

There was never any confusion on SWAPO's part about the provisions for PLAN combatants in the various UN documents and resolutions. Nowhere does it state that PLAN should not be in Namibia at the outset on April 1. When Resolution 435 was adopted it was envisaged that at the time of the formal ceasefire PLAN fighters would be confined to bases in Namibia under the supervision of the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG). South African complaints against this procedure were never resolved by the UN, who up until the last minute fudged the issue, despite requests from SWAPO to clarify the situation. Pretoria and Thatcher, to deflect scrutiny of these documents, announced that SWAPO had broken the Geneva Protocol (August 5, 1988), which according to them, stated that all PLAN forces should be north of the 16th parallel (in Angola) before the peace process could start. This document does not say anything of the kind. It refers to PLAN forces in Angola (not in Namibia). In any case, this was still a secret document on April 1.

It is true that the beauty of such bureaucratic documents is that they are often vague and their meaning can be manipulated, but the main point here is not the interpretation of documents but that SWAPO was again not party in the first place to the latest peace negotiations, which started in May 1988 in London. To add insult to injury, South Africa, Angola and Cuba met near Windhoek (inside Namibia!) and drafted the Mount Etjo Declaration (April 9) which made provisions for the withdrawal of PLAN forces from their own country — without the

liberation movement being present.

UN Capitulation

Once a UN peacekeeping force arrives in a colonial country like Namibia there is a feeling among many in the west that everything is going to be all right. This is often based on the assumption that the UN is a neutral body whose interests are divorced from those of imperialism, that it is able (and willing) to impose its will on the conflicting sides in a war and that everyone involved will be persuaded to abide by the rules and play cricket. In fact, looking at other colonial and neo-colonial situations, for example the Congo and Lebanon, the UN's historic role is precisely to come down on the side of its paymasters, the imperialist countries, when the crunch comes.

And the UN role in Namibia in the past few weeks is a glaring example of this. Ahtisaari's sanctioning of the use of the South African military (the colonial power!) to 'police' the liberation movement was a terrible betrayal of the people the UN is supposed to be protecting. It was also in contravention of Resolution 435! As SWAPO Secretary for Information and Publicity, Hidipo Hamutenya, said in London recently, 'the same people are killing us, whether under South African or UN flags'.

On top of this, UNTAG has been shown up to be wholly incompetent through its lack of preparation in deploying its peacekeeping forces. But the source of this leads back again to the major powers. The permanent members of the UN Security Council (Britain, US, France, China and USSR) reduced the size of the UNTAG force down to 4,650. They were warned by African states and the Non-Aligned Movement that this would be a problem. Even the original number of 7,500 is not enough and was based on calculations made in the late 1970s. Since then South Africa's military presence in Namibia has dramatically escalated not only in the number of conscripts being sent

in year after year, but also in the formation of the SWATF and Koevoet as well as the deployment of the South African-backed UNITA bandits in the north. Due to UN Security Council delays only a fraction of the UNTAG force was stationed in Namibia by April 1 and only a handful of them in the northern war zone.

With South Africa's Administrator General, Louis Pienaar, calling the shots over their 'right' to 'interrogate' PLAN fighters and his proposal that 'verification operations' take place to find out how many combatants have gone over the border and what types of weapons they are using, SWAPO quite rightly instructed its fighters to go back over into Angola without reporting to the UNTAG assembly points. The whole set-up was a trap, the assembly points have been swarming with the South African military, and as mentioned earlier, captured combatants are being executed. South Africa has also recently admitted to holding 28 PLAN prisoners under AG9 (which means detention without trial for an indefinite period).

The performance of UNTAG gives Namibians little hope at this time that there will be one hundred percent 'free and fair' elections. What will happen when people come out to vote at UN-monitored election stations? Will the UN stand idly by and let people be intimidated or even murdered for daring to vote for SWAPO? And who will be checking the ballot boxes to make sure votes are not rigged in favour of the small pro-South African parties, such as the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) who will be taking part in the elections?

If Pretoria had illusions that escalating its terror campaign against the civilian population in the north would break support for SWAPO then they are mistaken. The north has long been a SWAPO stronghold and there is no indication that the escalation of the war in the last month has weakened support for the liberation movement. During the fighting civilians continued

to assist PLAN fighters by hiding them, by going themselves to check out whether the UNTAG assembly points were safe for the combatants. Churches in Namibia issued warnings to the fighters that the assembly points were a trap. The mass organisations of workers and students, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) and its six affiliated unions and the Namibia National Students Organisation (NANSO) have come out firmly behind SWAPO. Together with the Council of Churches in Namibia they organised a mass rally in commemoration of 'our fallen freedom fighters' on April 9.

The South African propaganda machine, by focusing on the issue of PLAN's presence in Namibia has managed to deflect international attention away from other South African schemes to sabotage 'free and fair' elections and future independence. For example, South Africa's puppet government, before it resigned in March, recommended sweeping privatisation of public services including health, post and telecommunications, water and transport. The NUNW rightly claimed this plan was aimed at sabotaging the independence and launched a campaign in opposition to privatisation in March. Thousands of workers marched through the capital Windhoek on April 1 in protest and have threatened a general strike if the policy is not reversed. If everything is privatised by the time SWAPO wins the elections, how much longer will it take a new government to undo the damage. And how much easier it will be for pro-South African capitalists in Namibia to sabotage essential services if they are under private ownership, not to mention the demands for financial compensation they will try to extract from a future government who will want to renationalise these services.

The issue of voter registration will be a major hurdle. South Africa is trying to get as many non-Namibians as possible to register as residents while trying to place obstacles in the path of exiled Namibians being able to vote. Louis Pienaar, who is drafting the election procedures (imagine! the colonial administrator is being given carte blanche to do this) is proposing that the voting age be 21 - thus excluding masses of youth who form the base of SWAPO's support. He proposes that one year's residency in Namibia is sufficient to vote. Colonel Botes, in a letter to mainly white conscripted South African soldiers in the '91 SWA' brigade stationed in Namibia, requests his troops 'to participate in the election campaign beginning on June 26. Make sure that you register as a voter and also that you vote. Even if you now live in the Republic of South Africa, I specifically ask you to make arrangements to travel twice to SWA [colonial name for Namibia] - first to register, then on November 1, to vote. I myself will do so.' Botes claims that people will be able to vote if they were born in Namibia or if they have lived there for one year.

The UN Special Representative has yet to approve Pienaar's proposals, but on past performance he may well go along with whatever the



PHOTO: NCCT

Koevoet thugs in Eengola, northern Namibia.

South Africans have in mind. This would mean that thousands of South African soldiers would be able to vote - on average over 30,000 conscript troops and thousands of regulars have been deployed in Namibia each year over the past decade, not to mention the thousands of UNITA troops that are now registering as Namibians! Meanwhile, Namibians themselves may be penalised. Will all the Namibian youth who have been born in exile, mostly in the SWAPO settlements, be able to vote? Not if South Africa has its way.

Pienaar is also prevaricating over the repeal of all racist and oppressive laws saying that only those specifically related to voting procedure need be abolished. South Africa, already conceding that SWAPO will win a majority, is hell-bent on rigging the elections to stop them gaining more than two-thirds for the Constituent Assembly in November. Without the two-thirds they will not be able to dictate the terms of the future constitution.

Namibians in general and SWAPO in particular were never under any illusion that the beginning of Namibia's independence process would run smoothly. They know only too well what South Africa is capable of. Nevertheless, after years of struggle and sacrifice on their part and years of South African aggression, super-power maneuvering and UN dithering, their independence is close. Despite the set-backs of the last few weeks, the independence process is still on course.

It is in the interests of the imperialist powers, particularly Britain and the US that Namibia's independence goes ahead. The US desperately wants the Cuban forces out of Angola. British-based multinationals (eg Rio Tinto Zinc) want to hold on to their massive economic involvement in Namibia. Thatcher, in line with her 'diplomacy without sanctions' policy wants to argue that Namibia's independence is proof of the correctness of this strategy. She will use it to argue that all sanctions against South Africa be dropped and that the apartheid state be brought back into the international capitalist fold. South Africa can no longer afford its costly occupation of Namibia, and sanctions are starting to bite Pretoria's own economy.

The Soviet Union, in line with their rap-

prochment with the west and their need to scale down their involvement in southern Africa as a whole, want an end to the war in Angola. This is dependent on an end to South African aggression against Angola and therefore Namibia's independence. It is also dependent on stopping all US and South African military aid to UNITA. What must not happen is a sell-out of Namibia in the interests of peace in Angola and Soviet diplomacy.

In the long-term, the Soviet Union, the socialist countries and labour and socialist movements throughout the world should campaign hard to assist SWAPO to win more than a two-thirds majority in the elections. Any pressure on them to make concessions to South Africa will not only set back Namibia's task of reconstructing the country but will seriously affect the direction of the long-term struggle against white supremacist rule inside South Africa. A SWAPO victory and independence in Namibia will be a massive victory for the oppressed, not only in Namibia, but throughout the region and inside South Africa.

Ros Young

Campaign for 'free & fair' elections and a SWAPO victory.

For information on how your trade union, Labour Party, community group, etc can support SWAPO write to the:

Namibia Emergency Campaign (jointly organised by the Namibia Support Committee and the Anti-Apartheid Movement), c/o 13 Mandela Street, London NW1, 01-387 7966 or 01-267 1941/2.

The NEC is organising the following activities. Get delegated from your union, Labour Party, etc:

Saturday 13 May

- National Mobilising Conference, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube Holborn), 11-5pm.

Sunday 14 May

- Activists Meeting, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1 (nearest tube Goodge Street), 10.30-3.30pm.



Mass turn-out in Kaunas for first legal Lithuanian Independence Day.

Revolution from above? Wakening the Soviet masses

There has been something to delight almost everyone in the exciting surge of events in the Soviet Union since Mikhail Gorbachev took over as party leader in 1985.

For those who believe Soviet workers' problems would be solved if they only had a parliamentary system like those in the west, there have been the first parliamentary elections since 1917.

For capitalist ideologues committed to the values of the free market, there are the proposals for perestroika, the restructuring of the Soviet economy on market principles, together with the prospect of substantial openings for outside investment and massively increased western and Japanese trade with the USSR.

For the White House, Margaret Thatcher and the NATO cold warriors there have been Gorbachev's dramatic military concessions and unilateral troop reductions, with the prospect of more to come, as well as a sharp turn towards a conciliationist foreign policy – boding ill for the struggling regimes of Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique, but offering an olive

branch to the racist regime in South Africa and capitalist governments in South America.

But by far the most historically significant and deep-going change has been the policy of *glasnost*, the lifting of the chill climate of fear and repression established in decades of dictatorial control by the Kremlin bureaucracy since the rise to power of Josef Stalin in the mid 1920s. While Gorbachev and his co-thinkers see this as a means of strengthening their hand against stubborn elements of the bureaucratic 'old guard', they have taken steps which have allowed the Soviet working class back into political life: it is a huge gamble for them to take.

Already, almost every political issue – from the desirability or otherwise of a multi-party state, to the existence in the USSR of a massive layer of chronic poor, the extent of bureaucratic privileges, and even criticism of the armed forces – has been opened up for debate, at first in relatively exclusive academic and intellectual circles, but now increasingly by sections of workers in and outside the Communist Party. It seems

that the only figures exempt from criticism are Lenin and Gorbachev himself.

In January, the party Central Committee decreed a blanket rehabilitation of all the 'hundreds of thousands' of those unjustly executed or imprisoned under Stalin. Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the October Revolution and first leader of the Red Army, remains the only prominent victim of Stalin's terror not yet to have been rehabilitated. Much of the party bureaucracy, including Gorbachev, still use Trotsky as a convenient demon-figure whenever they wish to oppose certain lines of policy. However there have been large meetings calling for his rehabilitation as a leader of the Revolution executed on Stalin's orders. Arrangements for the publication of Trotsky's major works in the Soviet union are already in hand.

The lifting of political taboos, the relaxation of censorship and restrictions on meetings, and the explicit repudiation of so many past crimes of the bureaucracy would in themselves have had dramatic enough effect: but on top of this has come the general election for the Congress of People's

The recent elections to the Congress of Peoples' Deputies in the USSR helped highlight the extent of the changes that have taken place. Here JOHN LISTER draws a balance sheet of four years since Mikhail Gorbachev took the helm at the Kremlin.

Deputies, opening up unprecedented opportunities for unofficial Communist Party and non-party candidates (provided they obtained endorsement as candidates from at least half of a selection meeting of at least 500 people). The resultant contest, despite efforts of a section of the bureaucracy to rig the slates in the traditional way, produced a far from traditional response – with packed, animated election meetings and debates, and the marvellous spectacle of old guard machine bureaucrats, who had manipulated themselves into unopposed candidacies, finding themselves ousted by voters crossing their names off the ballot.

These changes are far more fundamental to the political development of one of the world's most powerful, most educated, but until now most repressed working classes than any of the other economic or political changes carried out under Gorbachev. Now that Soviet workers and intellectuals have scented fresh air, begun to think for themselves and to learn the real facts of history, it is hard to see how they can again be beaten down. The salutary example of Poland's Solidarnosc – legalised again after seven years of repression failed to destroy it – should underline the scale of irreversible political development that is now beginning to take place in the Soviet Union.

Anathema to old guard

Each of these democratic developments has been anathema to the old guard of Brezhnevite bureaucrats, who reach instinctively for their revolvers as soon as they hear the word dissent. And in the case of the resurgent struggles of nationalist movements within the USSR with their different demands – among them the Armenians, the Baltic states, the Georgians, and the Ukrainians – Gorbachev faces a real dilemma. On the one hand, a resort to traditional methods of police and military repression to contain mass demands for national rights (as recently with the tanks and poison gas used against demonstrators in Georgia) could destroy important elements of glasnost, strengthening precisely the worst, most conservative layers of the bureaucracy in the party and armed forces. Worse, it could further stoke up the anger and frustration in these republics, creating an even sharper confrontation with Moscow, and lending strength to the more extreme nationalist elements who could press



the demand for separation from the Federation. On the other hand if Gorbachev is seen to allow such movements to get out of hand, he could face serious opposition at Politburo and Central Committee level, and pay a heavy political price for opening a Pandora's box of complex demands and emotional energy which the central state machinery could find impossible to contain.

Gorbachev has faced bureaucratic opposition to many aspects of his reforms, but the broad consensus of acceptance around glasnost is much more tenuous when it comes to confronting the Stalinist tradition of Great Russian chauvinism, especially towards the non-Slav and non-Russian nationalities. Even in the newly-emerging left currents supporting glasnost and perestroika – many of which are focussed in Moscow – there are visible hints of national arrogance towards such movements. This represents a political weakness of the left, since in many cases the nationalist movements have drawn in the support of a large proportion of the working class, and have focussed on legitimate grievances on language and other issues where they suffer oppression from the centralised Moscow bureaucracy. Even if they were calling for separation, the task before marxists is to take the side of the oppressed against the bureaucracy, and, if necessary, to wage and win the argument against separatism. The general line defended by marxists on the national question should be to stand *unconditionally* behind the struggle of the oppressed Soviet nationalities for their right to national self-determination – up to and, if necessary, including the right to independence. However this does *not* commit marxists in advance to *uncritical* support for any given nationalist movement, its programme or its demands: in general we are in

favour of the free association of socialist republics, and in favour of political revolution against the Great Russian chauvinists *within the USSR* rather than its break-up. We are socialists, not nationalists, but as socialists we are champions of the oppressed against the oppressors.

Strands of policy

How are marxists to assess the different strands of Gorbachev's policy? Are we obliged to accept or reject them all as a job lot, or is it more appropriate to distinguish those aspects which we can support from those which we oppose? The reality is that Gorbachev's strategy embodies profound contradictions because it is an attempt to escape from a contradictory situation through a process of reforms and *within* the present global balance of class forces – *without* making a revolutionary break from the past.

Gorbachev has emerged as the leader of a reformist wing of a ruling bureaucracy whose history and implantation in Soviet society runs back to the days of Stalin and the extermination in the late 1920s and 1930s of the old Bolsheviks. This bureaucracy has become even larger, even more solidly entrenched in Soviet society than it was in the mid 1930s when the exiled Leon Trotsky – as a result of a detailed economic, political and social analysis of the USSR – argued that only a working class *political revolution* could sweep it away and allow the workers once more to take control of what had become under Stalin a horribly degenerated form of the workers' state established in the October revolution: 'No devil ever yet voluntarily cut off his own claws. The Soviet bureaucracy will not give up its positions without a fight. The development leads obviously to the road of revolution.' (*Revolution Betrayed*, 1936)

A very different approach is represented by Mikhail Gorbachev today. Though recognising the need for deep-going changes in the economy and in society as a whole, Gorbachev's starting point is to reshape rather than abolish the bureaucracy, and to renegotiate a new form of accommodation with capitalism on a global scale rather than to struggle for a socialist solution.

International dimension is vital

The international dimension to the problem of bureaucracy in the USSR has always been vital. It was the initial isolation of the October Revolution, with the failure of post-war revolutionary struggles elsewhere in

“Now that Soviet workers and intellectuals have scented fresh air, begun to think for themselves and to learn the real facts of history, it is hard to see how they can again be beaten down”

Europe, but especially in Germany in 1918-23, which determined many of the early developments and limited the options of the Bolshevik leaders: 'At all events, under all conceivable circumstances, if the German revolution does not come, we are doomed'. (Lenin, March 1919) When the German revolution did not come, the imperialist powers were able to focus huge military resources on waging protracted and damaging wars of intervention in their efforts to unseat the Bolsheviks - eventually leaving the economy devastated, agriculture in chaos, and the Communist Party cadres terribly over-stretched in the tasks of running a war-torn economy. It was from this early isolation and dislocation that the bureaucracy first gained its foothold as the administrators and policemen regulating queues and shortages, the technical managers of enterprises, and the arbitrators between the interests and demands of peasants and workers.

In this context of deprivation, setbacks and fatigue, Stalin emerged as the focus of political conservatism, resting on the political dilution of the Communist Party, the nationalism of the peasantry and the narrow horizons of the career administrators, and advocating an abandonment of any ambition towards extending the revolution, while looking instead to get on with the task of building 'socialism in one country'.

This policy was soon transformed in the 1930s into a line of seeking alliances with 'democratic' sections of the imperialist bourgeoisie; and by 1939 this had collapsed into the notorious Stalin-Hitler pact. All this meant outright opposition to proletarian revolution which might jeopardise the diplomatic and military deals struck by the Kremlin. It served to entrench the USSR in a state of permanent isolation, and thus permanent economic backwardness, cut off from the more advanced technologies of the capitalist countries. This isolation was barely broken in the post-war period with the extension of Soviet control over much of Eastern Europe: even Stalin's wholesale looting of industrial plant from East Germany and Czechoslovakia did little to compensate for the fearfully primitive state of Soviet technology. To this day one of the most modern Soviet brick works - the Butovo plant near Moscow - has only just been 'modernised' to the level of western plants in the 1920s.

Socialism on the back burner

Gorbachev's modern-day response to these decades of failure of building 'socialism in one country' is not to abandon the constricting and self-

defeating nationalism of the formula. Instead socialism as a global objective is no longer even given token mention, while Gorbachev and his co-thinkers seek ways to introduce the laws of the market into the Soviet economy, and to open it up for external capitalist investment.

Gorbachev's foreign policy reflects precisely this conservative, counter-revolutionary history, a continuity rather than any break from Stalinism, from Khrushchev's talk of 'peaceful coexistence' and Brezhnev's efforts at 'detente'; such policies have always been seen by Stalin and his successors as counterposed to support for independent revolutionary struggles. Gorbachev's recent grovelling visit to Britain, exchanging compliments with Thatcher and invitations with the Queen, is part and parcel of a well-worn Kremlin strategy of seeking collaboration and alliances with capitalist governments, irrespective of the needs and struggles of the working class. In this respect it is no coincidence that 'Eurocommunist' parties of western Europe, themselves having long ago abandoned any class struggle or socialist objectives, have embraced the 'Gorbymania' so widely promoted in the media.

Indeed Gorbachev's key foreign policy advisor Dr Georgy Shakhnazarov now talks openly of a gradual coming together of the communist and social democratic parties: 'The great split which began during the first world war and which was exacerbated by Stalin will be very complicated to overcome. Stalin's slogan was that the social democrats had betrayed us. He saw everything as treachery, and great tragedy came from that. Now, as Mr Gorbachev has said, we must meet each other.' (*The Guardian*, April 8, 1989)

Of course, it was not Stalin but Lenin who took the lead in denouncing the betrayal of the social democrats after the social democratic parties of Europe had each sided with their 'own' national capitalists at the start of the first world war. Lenin led the minority split in the Second International, and after the October revolution and formation of the Third (Communist) International, went so far as to



Gorbachev policy: continuity or a break from the past?

draft the famous 21 Theses, designed specifically to exclude parties from affiliation if they had not previously broken systematically from the politics of social democracy. As we know from bitter experience, the fact that Gorbachev and his team see a convergence between communism and social democracy does not indicate any leftward shift of the socialist parties: it confirms the continued, class collaborationist line of the Kremlin ideologists, and their shared acceptance with the social democrats of the continued indefinite existence of capitalism as the framework for future policies and developments.

Global class collaboration

The global line of class collaboration predictably finds its sharpest expression in areas of sharpest class conflict. Gorbachev has taken an even less supportive line than Brezhnev towards the Nicaraguan revolution, withholding all but the most tokenistic assistance and thus jeopardising the very future of the Sandinista regime whose economy has been ravaged by an economic blockade, US-backed contra sabotage and by last year's hurricane. Desperate Sandinista leaders are now forced to plunder empty currency reserves to buy oil from Venezuela. Soviet pressure is also clearly opposed to any escalation of the revolutionary struggles in El Salvador or any other central American country, which would upset the USA. Instead Moscow has been courting the major capitalist powers of South America, busily signing trade and other deals with Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, with scant regard to the struggles of the workers' movement in these countries.

There is unmistakable evidence of the same type of policy shift in another

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"...pressures for concessions to the apartheid regime have clearly been applied by Moscow to the Namibian SWAPO liberation forces."

global 'hot spot' – Southern Africa. Not only have Moscow envoys been involved in secret diplomacy with the apartheid regime, but Soviet pressure is being publicly applied to the African National Congress to soft-pedal their traditional line of armed struggle. The head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Africa department recently insisted that South Africa should not be talked to 'using the language of threats and banging one's fist on the table'. 'We don't emphasise the need to enhance the armed struggle' (*The Guardian*, March 18, 1989). Such a line will certainly have gone down well with Margaret Thatcher in Gorbachev's recent Downing Street talks – but leaves the black masses of South Africa high and dry in their struggle against racist oppression. Similar pressures for concessions to the apartheid regime have clearly been applied by Moscow to the Namibian SWAPO liberation forces. Mozambique now receives more aid from western countries than the USSR, while Angola's recent default on payments to Moscow for military support seems a factor in increased Soviet efforts to force the MPLA regime to negotiate a 'compromise' with imperialist-backed UNITA guerrillas.

In the far east, the Communist Party of the Philippines can expect no Soviet moral or material support as they battle on against continued repression meted out by the armed forces. Instead Moscow is offering to build power stations for Aquino. In south east Asia, Soviet pressure is almost certainly a factor in the Vietnamese decision to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea, leaving the unfortunate inhabitants to the none-too-tender mercies of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge forces massed with imperialist protection just over the border in Thailand. And while the continued Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was politically and militarily indefensible, the urge to defuse global conflict with imperialism was clearly one of the factors in the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Meanwhile in the middle east, Soviet pressure on the various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organisation has played a key role in bolstering the position of Yasser Arafat, who has with Kremlin support now abandoned the PLO's long-standing opposition to UN resolutions 242 and 338, accepted the legality of the Zionist state of Israel, and dropped the demand for the right of return of over 1 million Palestinians expelled in 1948. Arafat now looks instead to some form of Palestinian 'mini-state' as a solution. Soviet efforts have also been focussed on opening diplomatic relations with the feudal Saudi Arabian regime.

"Gorbachev's internal efforts at reform are undermined by his foreign policy."

It is fair to say that even if they were to result in socialist revolution, none of this list of struggles and causes put at risk by the new Soviet policy could in itself represent the key break in the isolation of the USSR. But, as we have seen, the line is equally craven in relation to workers' struggles in the advanced countries of western Europe. The fact is that Moscow's systematic opposition to revolutionary solutions, and consistent pursuit of class collaborationist politics on a global scale serves to entrench its isolation, and to set back or restrict the options of those in struggle. Ruled out by Gorbachev's stance would be any 'Cuban road' for third world revolutionaries, since Castro was from the early days of the revolution able to lean upon economic and military aid from the USSR as a counterweight to the US blockade.

Since the isolation of the USSR is in itself part of the material basis upon which the bureaucracy has always rested, Gorbachev's internal efforts at reform are simultaneously undermined by his foreign policy. Gorbachev himself linked his foreign policy to his domestic economic policy when he told West German Chancellor Kohl last October that Moscow had firmly decided to set out 'along the road of active economic interaction with the world outside'.

Worsening economic crisis

The harsh fact is that, despite four years of brave-sounding 'revolutionary' rhetoric, the Soviet economic crisis is still getting worse rather than better. Last autumn's estimates of a 36 billion rouble (officially 1 rouble = £1) budget deficit proved wildly over-optimistic: current figures suggest it is at least 160 billion, and possibly higher. A January 1989 government report showed that while the economy grew by 4.4 percent last year (faster than before), exports fell by two percent and imports rose by 6.5 percent, halving the trade surplus. A staggering 30 billion roubles' worth of food has been imported in the last three years as farms fail to produce

sufficient to feed the population, while factories could not turn out enough consumer goods to satisfy workers.

Continuing heavy defence spending, the costs of the Armenian earthquake, and the loss of 16 billion roubles a year in taxes as a result of Gorbachev's restriction on alcohol sales all contributed to the burgeoning deficit, which in turn is resulting in the problem of inflation. Soviet



Castro's 'Cuban road' – now blocked off.

economists admit to an inflation rate of 5 to 7 percent a year, but it could be as high as 10 percent – while the state bank pays out only 3 percent interest on workers' savings accounts. Economists estimate the real value of the rouble at around 40p compared to its official £1 exchange rate. Meanwhile the main symptom of this crisis is not rising prices but a growing shortage of consumer goods as too many roubles chase too few commodities: mismanagement and incompetence have ensured that in the world's leading potato-producing nation a mere 25 percent of potatoes produced ever complete the journey from field to domestic kitchen: the rest are left to rot.

Gorbachev's key economic advisor, Abel Agnibegyan, in a recent interview with *Newsweek* magazine admitted that 'The most pressing problem is the gap between purchasing capacity and the supply of goods. Out of 200 groups of products today, 90 percent of them are in short supply. Two or three years ago there were some shortages – good meat, good footwear, some other things. But

refrigerators, TV sets, washing detergent, cosmetics were all available. Maybe the assortments were not very large, maybe they weren't the best quality, but when you came to a store you would see such products. Now the shops are just empty. Anything put on the counter is purchased at once. It's not because production has decreased, but because the amount of money that people have has increased sharply, and demand has increased'. (March 13, 1989)

Agnebegyan spells out a series of policies to reduce the budget deficit including a progressive income tax, production of housing for sale, and increasing production of cars, videos, and audio equipment through joint ventures with foreign firms. But he also advocates a sharp increase in prices, especially of agricultural products: 'We need to reduce food subsidies and let prices rise in order to make agricultural products profitable. Prices on meat, dairy products and bread may have to double. We are ready to do that, with compensation for the people so their standard of living does not decline...' However the real prospect that rising prices would quickly reduce the living standards of workers and provoke major unrest has already brought one postponement of the deregulation of prices. Agricultural prices are now to be revised in 1990, with retail prices deregulated in 1992.

Incompetent bureaucracy

However the problems of supply are no nearer solution now than they were in 1985. The same incompetent, distrusted bureaucracy that has failed for over half a century is still in charge

of the main resources. The 3 percent of farm land in private ownership produces no less than 30 percent of the USSR's food supply: this is why Gorbachev (himself a former Central Committee member for agriculture) in March admitted that most state and collective farms were bankrupt nine years ago, and called for a new policy of encouraging peasants to take 50-year leases on land which they would be able to farm on their own as 'masters of the land', reaping increased prices for their produce.

The industrial picture is no brighter. Last October a two-day session of the Supreme Soviet was told by Finance Minister Boris Gostev that a number of unprofitable businesses were 'on the brink of being eliminated'. Some 24,000 state-owned businesses were running up huge losses, admitted Mr Gostev. Banks would soon begin publishing lists of bankrupt firms, which might be handed over to private cooperatives. The state purchase of industrial production would be slashed from 86 percent in 1988 to only 25 percent in 1989, with the remainder to be sold on the open market. However the state planning departments continue to decide the allocation of investment resources: it is not yet clear how managers will be able to adjust their production to meet anticipated levels of demand – or what will happen to



Selling some of the potatoes that made it to market.

those sectors which fail. One clue came in the boast from Mr Gostev that the USSR would shed a million surplus jobs in 1988. However he did promise that in 1989 investment in the consumer sector would grow 2.3 times faster than heavy industry.

Even more musical to the ears of the western business community were announcements by Mr Gostev of a further relaxation of restrictions on foreign firms' investments in the USSR. The maximum stake is to be increased from 49 percent to 80 percent, with rumours that some holdings may be 100 percent foreign-owned, effectively opening up sections of the Soviet economy to foreign subsidiaries. Such firms will only be attracted to the USSR if they enjoy access to relatively cheap labour and are guaranteed rights to repatriate profits: the resultant potential for a further intensification of the class struggle is unmistakable. A sign of this was the experience of the private cooperatives which Gorbachev at first encouraged to provide various goods and services. In a short period of time 77,000 such coops had sprung up, employing 1.5 million workers: but when they began making large profits, the government was forced to step in and impose price controls and sharply increased taxes on coop revenue – up from a 5 percent maximum to a flat rate 35 percent.

Gorbachev's problem on the economic front is that he is seeking to achieve a hybrid of a market system and a centrally-planned economy while keeping most of the central planning apparatus – the bureaucracy – intact, and allowing little if any real decision-making to fall into the control of the workers at the point of production. The planning process has

“...firms will only be attracted to the USSR if they enjoy access to relatively cheap labour and are guaranteed rights to repatriate profits.”

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"To put Chinese factories on a 'commercial' basis could involve up to 30 million redundancies!"

for decades been encrusted with the routinist and incompetent practices of generations of party careerists: yet to replace this with a free market while the present management structures remain unchanged could produce chaos.

Gorbachev's team will be further alarmed at the evidence of shambolic failure of liberalisation measures carried out to much western ballyhoo by the Chinese bureaucracy. Amid runaway growth of inflation, the money supply, consumer spending and industrial growth, while production of grain and cotton and provision of transport and power have lagged behind, the Beijing bureaucrats in March unveiled a new round of austerity measures, including sharp increases in food prices for 200 million urban workers, to follow on waves of redundancies from the cancellation of major capital projects. There is a sharp polarisation of the Chinese masses between prosperous 'haves' and a large layer of downtrodden 'have nots'. Industrial growth rates were halved in the first two months of 1989, hitting rural industries (which have expanded since 1978 to employ 80 million workers). To put Chinese factories on a 'commercial' basis could involve up to 30 million redundancies! So grave is the crisis that Beijing last autumn had to postpone by two years its price reforms and reimpose centralised controls over the economy: the major growth industry of the bureaucratically mismanaged mess is corruption.

Far more than in more rural, less industrialised China, Soviet Communist Party chiefs are seriously reluctant to be seen as reducing the living standards of key sectors of industrial workers, who comprise a large section of the party's rank and file: the last thing they want is to create conditions for a direct confrontation with a Solidarnosc-style radicalised, independent trade union movement.

Modernisation – under workers' control

Of course marxists are not opposed to any modernisation or restructuring of the Soviet economy: on the contrary, this is essential if the needs of the working class are to be met. The model we would put forward however is neither the present bureaucratic centralised planning, nor the free market with its disregard of social need and usefulness and exclusive focus on cash-flow and profitability: we argue for a system of *democratic centralised planning*, based on workers' control and management of the production process, of the enterprises and of whole industries through factory councils, and local and national soviets.

"...the Soviet working class has endured over sixty years of relative austerity at the hands of the same bureaucracy."



Sparse display on the meat counter.

To accept perestroika in the way it is proposed means to accept that the same bureaucracy which reduced the Soviet economy to its present parlous state should now be trusted to manage the introduction of a potentially devastating series of changes, continuing to take decisions on behalf of the workers. The old argument is being trotted out that a period of austerity is necessary for the workers before economic growth can provide a guaranteed right to a job, and adequate supplies of reasonably priced necessities including housing and consumer goods: these arguments are grimly familiar to workers in western Europe. But the Soviet working class has endured over *sixty years* of relative austerity at the hands of the same bureaucracy, which now asks for more concessions. They have no reason to trust the same failed figures: Soviet workers must organise to take the power in their own hands if they are to solve their problems.

Trotsky's classic analysis of the forces driving towards political revolution placed great emphasis on the issues of the workplace and the working class. He stressed that: 'The revolution which the bureaucracy is preparing against itself will not be social, like the October revolution of 1917. It is not a question this time of changing the economic foundations of society, of replacing certain forms of property with other forms...'

'It is not a question of substituting one ruling clique for another, but of changing the very methods of administering the economy and guiding the culture of the country. Bureaucratic autocracy must give place to Soviet democracy. A restoration of the right of criticism, and genuine freedom of elections, are necessary conditions for the further development of the country. This as-

sumes a revival of freedom of Soviet parties, beginning with the party of the Bolsheviks, and a resurrection of trade unions. The bringing of democracy into industry means a radical revision of plans in the interests of the toilers. Free discussion of economic problems will decrease the overhead expense of bureaucratic mistakes and zigzags. Expensive playthings – palaces of the Soviets, new theatres, show-off subways – will be crowded out in favour of workers' dwellings. 'Bourgeois norms of distribution' will be confined within the limits of strict necessity, and in step with the growth of social wealth, will give way to socialist equality...

'And finally, foreign policy will return to the traditions of revolutionary internationalism.'

(*Revolution Betrayed*, pp 288-290)

It is in this context, the restoration of the right of criticism, the first (relatively) free elections since 1917, and the opening of a political dialogue reaching increasingly into layers of the working class that Gorbachev's contribution can be seen as most unambiguously positive.

New political awakening

Like the kiss of Prince Charming for Sleeping Beauty and her transfixed court, Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, the relaxation of decades of rigid press censorship and political repression has produced a rapid transformation of the frozen and stagnant society of the Brezhnev years. Political debates and differentiations have opened publicly within the Communist Party, socialist discussion clubs and circles have sprung into life, and national minorities have gained the courage to voice and act on their pent-up demands for equality and a greater degree of independence from the

deadening, centralised hand of Great Russian bureaucracy. Most recently, the general election for the Congress of People's Deputies gave 150 million Soviet voters their first ever chance to participate in such a process, and produced a number of dramatic upsets.

The spectacle of dozens of career party bureaucrats tumbling to embarrassing defeat in the election will have given new confidence to millions of Soviet workers. A Politburo member and some 34 regional party secretaries bit the dust, as well as the mayors of Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. The opportunity for voters to voice their *disapproval* of unpopular candidates by crossing out their names on the ballot form produced humiliating defeats for bureaucrats in Leningrad, Kiev and Tomsk in Siberia, who had all arranged to run unopposed but still failed to secure 50 percent of votes cast. Among the red faced military figures rebuffed by voters (sometimes their own other ranks) were the commanders of Soviet forces in East Germany, the Far East and the Moscow region, and admirals of the Northern and Pacific Fleets; also rejected was the head of the Estonian KGB.

Most publicised of the victorious oppositional candidates was Boris Yeltsin's landslide 9-1 win over the official Communist Party candidate, the boss of the prestige Zil limousine works. Yeltsin, though ousted as party boss in Moscow, is still a member of the Central Committee; a vote for his populist denunciations of special shops and other bureaucratic privileges is not a vote against the CP but against the establishment, not least the notorious Moscow party 'mafia' with whom Yeltsin had clashed while in charge of the city. However Yeltsin has built his reputation as an oppositional figure, and spoken of grouping together up to 30 percent of the deputies in the Congress to vote on a common line on key issues: if this happens, a substantial number of such oppositionists should secure places in the more influential Supreme Soviet, which will be given increased powers under Gorbachev's reforms.

Legalise factions and parties

Yeltsin's proposal for a political caucus of deputies is not a long way different from forming an organised faction or tendency within the party – though it is probable that on many issues his stand would also be supported by some of the non-party candidates who managed to win election to the Congress. This represents a serious challenge to the ban on factions which was imposed as a 'temporary measure' under Lenin's leadership during the tense, nervous situation in



Yeltsin's proposal of a Congress caucus could potentially become a Party faction.

1921, and which was then shamelessly exploited by Stalin to suppress all forms of dissent, and has remained in force ever since. In similar fashion the emergence of the socialist clubs and of candidacies of non-party members represent the embryonic stirrings of alternative politics to those of the CP, which call either for recognition as distinct tendencies within the party or for the right to form alternative, legal parties. The rival parties to the Bolsheviks were originally only repressed because they took the field in opposition to the revolution in the vexed period of the Civil War – not because Lenin argued any virtue in a single-party state.

Trotsky, in fighting the Stalinist degeneration of the revolution, was always insistent in his call for the legalisation of soviet parties as a key component of any political mobilisation of the working class:

'Democratisation of the soviets is impossible without the *legalisation of soviet parties*. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognise as soviet parties'. (*The Transitional Programme*, 1938)

Interesting confirmation that the Soviet working class is not falling head over heels to vote for pro-capitalist, restorationist parties came in an opinion poll held during the recent elections. While 46 percent said they thought there should be political pluralism and only ten percent against, only 16 percent were in favour of there being a bourgeois democratic party to vote for (with 59 percent against), and only three percent said they would vote for such a party. While 74 percent thought there should be a green party, only 16 percent said they would vote for it, and only nine percent said they would vote for a socialist party, com-

pared to 41 percent who said that they would still vote Communist. (*The Guardian*, March 27 1989).

One pertinent question that could also be asked would be the extent of potential support for a Trotskyist tendency or party in the USSR, based on a revolutionary platform of genuine soviet power, of free trade unions, of freedom of soviet parties, of an end to all bureaucratic privileges, and an internationalist foreign policy. It is likely that initial support would be small – not least because so few Soviet workers or intellectuals know anything but bureaucratic lies and distortions about Trotsky and the struggle of the Left Opposition against Stalin. However the existing level of support does not define the potential that could be tapped in the right conditions.

The path of Trotskyist revolution is by no means the most obvious, easy path: Tariq Ali in his recent book *Revolution From Above* argues that there is a strong popular revulsion in the USSR against military spending, and a leaning not towards revolutionary internationalism but increased isolationism. This would not be entirely surprising, given the extent to which domestic problems have multiplied and the working class have been excluded from any voice in the various global policies of the Kremlin, while forced to shoulder the economic costs of the military effort, and while conscript soldiers and their families have borne the brunt of the painful experience in Afghanistan. Tariq Ali correctly argues that this shows the need to revive a 'popular internationalism' within the Soviet working class; but what he does not admit is that *this will not happen spontaneously*. A committed internationalist, marxist current is needed that will challenge both the present

"...a vote for Yeltsin's populist denunciations of special shops and other bureaucratic privileges is not a vote against the CP but against the establishment, not least the notorious Moscow party 'mafia'..."



The Soviet masses have discovered new ways to express themselves politically.

popular mood and the Gorbachev line of intensified class collaboration, and spell out the necessity to break the isolation of the USSR and the other bureaucratised workers' states.

Such a political tradition already exists, and has a record of consistent struggle against Stalinist politics from the very outset: that is the tradition of the Trotskyist Fourth International, whose cadres were ruthlessly eliminated by Stalin's mass repression, but which has never given up on the principled defence of the USSR against imperialism and the perspective of a cleansing political revolution that would break the power of the bureaucracy and restore the power of the working class. The lifting of repression through glasnost means that building of a distinct political current on these lines is now a real possibility in the USSR. It is not a matter of principle that such a current must immediately proclaim itself a fully-fledged and organisationally distinct 'party' in competition with the Communist Party: it is possible to imagine different tactical ways in which forces could initially be grouped around an independent political banner, possibly as a de facto tendency within the CP, possibly as a wider 'socialist club'. But the seeds of a Trotskyist party must be carefully planted in the fertile soil of today's historic debates.

Already the March election has raised the political level of debate inside and outside the Communist Party, while focussing most attention on the possibilities of reform achieved within and through the party machinery itself. In this respect the Yeltsin victory – as an expression of radical currents emerging within the CP – actually helps Gorbachev in his objective of reshaping and restructuring the party machine, using pressure from below as a means to discredit and dislodge some of the more obstructive and powerfully-placed elements.

Do the elections now mean that the

Soviet working class can now simply vote its way to political revolution – ousting the 'bad' bureaucrats one by one until only the good guys are left? Certainly this is the illusion that will be created among some more reformist-minded elements on the left in Europe and (more understandably) among sections of Soviet workers. However we should remember that the bureaucracy is a social layer of some 15 million men and women with a privileged lifestyle to defend, all of which depends upon them keeping their hands on the levers of power at every level of soviet society. To imagine that by effecting comparatively small – if dramatic – changes in a parliamentary election (100-200 'unofficial' candidates elected or 'official' candidates rejected out of 1,500 deputies, while 750 more places were allocated without public elections, 425 of them directly controlled by the CP hierarchy) Soviet workers are really achieving control of the state, is the most crass electoral illusion.

The most significant aspect of the election is that it has helped develop a political process of awakening of the Soviet masses, who have discovered new ways of expressing their hostility to the bureaucracy, and are unlikely to be satisfied for long with the prospect of occasional parliamentary elections. Trotsky pointed out the contrast between universal suffrage and the essence of soviet democracy:

'The bureaucracy replaced the soviets as class organs with the fiction of universal electoral rights – in the style of Hitler-Goebbels. It is necessary to return to the soviets not only their free democratic form but also their class content. As once the bourgeoisie and kulaks (rich peasants) were not permitted to enter the soviets, so now it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets. In the soviets there is room only for representatives of the

workers, rank and file collective farmers, peasants and Red Army personnel.' (*The Transitional Programme*)

As we have seen before several times in post-war eastern Europe, so long as one 'reform' wing of the bureaucracy is seen as offering the solution, and the workers remain at the passive level of casting occasional individual votes in mass ballots, the workers will at best be offered choices on which bureaucrat should take office and how far the USSR should move towards 'market' solutions. Because the working class is a propertyless class that must make its revolutions consciously, and defend them actively, there is no such thing as a real proletarian 'revolution from above'. Though Napoleon could successfully 'export' the property relations of the French bourgeois revolution through use of bayonets and invasions, the sorry post-war events in eastern Europe showed that even the huge historic step of expropriating capitalist property across vast tracts of the continent could be carried out under Stalin's control in such a way as to weaken and alienate rather than strengthen and mobilise the working class. Likewise there is no shortcut to political revolution: it must be a real revolution, in which Soviet workers must mobilise to take power in their own hands, wresting it forcibly from the bureaucracy.

The task before the Soviet workers is not to replicate the bankrupt parliamentary structures of bourgeois democracy – seen from decades of experience to be largely irrelevant to the day to day running of the economy and state machinery. It is to regenerate and re-assert the long-defunct powers of the soviets, the workers' councils which were the key to the 1917 revolution and which should now offer a constant challenge to the deadening, centralised power of the bureaucracy.

It is through collective class action, through the fight for workers' control in the factories, through pressing for the full opening of the books of the 'bankrupt' enterprises and drawing up a workers' plan that the fight for genuine workers' management of industry and of the economy as a whole must take shape. The Soviet working class must fight as a class to win back the power that was so systematically taken from it as Stalin consolidated the power of the bureaucracy. Socialist discussion clubs and intellectuals have begun again to popularise the historic slogan 'All power to the soviets!': the workers must make it their own, and give it a concrete expression.

“...the bureaucracy is a social layer of some 15 million men and women with a privileged lifestyle to defend, all of which depends upon them keeping their hands on the levers of power at every level of Soviet society.”

The changing face of capitalist Europe

The European workers' movement is confronted with economic depression, growing mass unemployment, austerity, attacks on social security and the welfare state, and the erosion of fundamental democratic rights. These trends are compounded by the effects of capitalist rationalisation as the bosses prepare for 1992 and the single European market. Here, in the first of two special articles for the Euro-elections, DAVE PACKER looks at the political implications of 1992 for the workers' movement in Europe. In the following article, HARRY SLOAN looks at the kind of programme the workers' movement needs to meet the challenge of 1992.

EVEN THE strongest European economies are feeling the cold wind of recession and austerity. One consequence of this has been a growing class polarisation. Although this process is uneven, due primarily to the differing tempo of the crisis in the different European countries, the polarisation is forcing the pace of political change on both left and right.

In France we have seen the dramatic rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, a neo-fascist party. Such a development was unthinkable ten years ago. On the left we have seen a significant split to the left from the Communist Party (PCF), with Pierre Juquin and the renovateurs, and more recently the emergence of the 'reconstructors'. This reveals a profound crisis within the PCF—one of the two mass parties of the French working class. It followed a series of electoral failures, but also, significantly, in the wake of the PCF's miserable sectarian record in the wave of mass struggles in the winter of 1986/7.

While we in Britain have been suffering the aftermath of the defeat of the miners' strike, most of the rest of Europe has seen a rise in the mass movement. Waves of struggles involving women, youth and workers, which began in France during the winter of 1986/87 against the Chirac government, continued in Italy, where we saw the re-emergence of strike committees and co-ordinations—the COBAS. West Germany has seen mobilisations for the 35 hour week; there has been a general strike in Portugal; and in the Spanish state nearly eight million workers joined a massive one day general strike last December.

After these big class battles the communist and socialist parties have often gone into crisis, with left wing oppositions emerging. This year's conference of the Italian Communist party (PCI) saw the production of a counter-resolution to the leadership at national conference for the first time since the war. A similar development has occurred in the Portuguese CP.

At the same time, various left oppositions have emerged within the European social democratic parties. The Bennite left in Britain was one of the first on the scene, reflecting an early end of the 'post-war consensus' here. (Also later represented by the right wing split of the SDP). But it was followed by left currents forming in the West German SPD, in particular that led by La Fontaine (now moving back to the mainstream), several currents in the French SP, within PASOK in Greece



In the shadow of Gorbachev – Thatcher tries to hold a hard NATO line.

and the PSOE in Spain, where Redondo, General Secretary of the UGT, and others, broke with the Gonzales government and, in conjunction with the Workers Commissions, organised for the general strike. In Greece and Spain most of these left currents rapidly found themselves outside the official party. We have even seen left currents in the Swedish socialist party.

None of these developments has, so far, been so dramatic as the rise (and temporary decline) of Bennism in Britain. However, as the class polarisation deepens, the trend is clear: the traditional mass reformist parties, both the CPs and the social democracy, faced with the collapse of the post-war political and economic consensus, slide into crisis, spawning various, often heterogeneous, currents to the left and right. Despite the programmatic limitations of most of the left currents, they are a reflection of and a response to the real mass movement and marxists can only welcome them.

One of the most important political developments of the 1980s has been the emergence of populist Green movements which present themselves as an alternative to the traditional workers' parties, condemning their failure to campaign effectively on ecological issues or to stand firm against the deployment of new classes of nuclear weapons. In West Germany, where the Greens are a significant political force, this has resulted in a partial fusion of green issues and traditional working class concerns—a fusion which has shaken up the SPD, but at the same time left the Green party very unstable. The working class has in general remained loyal to its traditional parties. This is partly because in most countries in Europe, the Green parties almost entirely focus on ecology and peace issues, but also because the left wings of the traditional parties have begun to take up these issues in a more systematic fashion, like the Bennites in Britain and the La Fontaine current in West Germany.

The New 'Europeanism'

One factor influencing current political developments is the growing tussle within the bourgeois camp over which system of international alliances the European states should adopt. Simply summed up, the United States, during the early years of the Reagan administration, launched a cold war offensive against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Reagan was trying (and Bush still is) to force the west European states into a more determined 'Atlanticist' posture of political, military and

economic subordination to the United States. This offensive faltered in the face of a mass peace movement, growing inter-imperialist competition and the emergence of a new leadership in the Soviet Union.

But a ruling class opposition to Reagan-Thatcher 'Atlanticism' has also emerged in Europe, as the latest rows between Thatcher and Kohl vividly confirm. This is not to suggest that the European bourgeoisies are on the verge of breaking with the Atlantic alliance or NATO, rather it is a radical reformulation or a shift within that alliance. The pan-Europeanism of the right means a closer integration of the Common Market nations with the aim of countering the domination of the United States (and Japan). This implies much closer technological, economic and military links. The result has been the move towards the Single European Act of 1992. For some forces, this is perceived as a step towards European political union – although not by Thatcher.

This conflict is expressed in the current sharp division over short range nuclear weapons, in which Bush and Thatcher, thrown onto the defensive by Gorbachev's initiatives, are confronted by united front of the main European imperialist governments, led by Chancellor Kohl.

Two questions immediately arise: where does Gorbachev stand in these conflicts, and where should socialists stand?

As far as the Gorbachev leadership is concerned, their stance is determined not by socialist internationalism but by bureaucratic calculation. In order to give themselves the breathing space for the perestroika programme of economic reform they want international stability. They also want to get US military and political pressure off their back. Moreover, closer technological and trade/credit links with the capitalist west, particularly with West Germany, are essential to the development of an economy, weighed down by bureaucratic mismanagement. Gorbachev's policy is to intervene into the crisis-torn relations between Europe and America and subtly play off one against the other.

The response of the more ideological leaders of the European workers' movement has been significant, if contradictory. This is particularly the case with the communist parties. The new left forces emerging from within the PCF and in the Portuguese CP are pro-glasnost, while the majority leaderships are more 'hard line' and sectarian in character. However, in the ultra eurocommunist and pro Gorbachev Italian PCI, the situation is more complex, and Cosutta, the main leader of the left, has a 'hard line' stalinist background. This incoherent response within the European CPs reflects a deepening crisis of stalinism as a political force.

Gorbachevism has won the greatest applause from the rightward-leaning eurocommunist parties. The Italian Communist Party, after years of distancing itself from Moscow, is singing Gorbachev's praises at the top of its voice. Even the former leaders of the far left II Manifesto, who have gone into the PCI, are now saying that Gorbachev shows that they 'underestimated' the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev's 'westpolitic' is also having its impact on European social democracy, not only within the West German SPD, but also within the leadership of the Labour Party and others. It is significant that Benn and Scargill (who at the 1987 Chesterfield Conference led an attempted



Germany's Kohl is less than enthusiastic about risking a nuclear war that would devastate Germany.

standing ovation for the Soviet representatives), appear to be influenced by Gorbachevism.

Gorbachev's approach to European social democracy is far from being an attempt to turn these parties into ideological fellow-travellers of Moscow. It is rather an attempt to bring them into a new relationship with the Soviet Union, and create an alternative pole to 'Atlanticism', which has been their traditional post-war orientation. Gorbachev makes an appeal for expansion of trade with the east – a policy that plays on their desire

to preserve welfare state capitalism in western Europe, together with effective trade union and civil liberties, without confronting the capitalist system itself.

All this is a far cry from traditional 'Atlanticist' preoccupations of old guard, cold war, social democrats like Schmidt, Healey, Craxi and Soares. Reformist pan-European ideas, in left or right variants, are now important trends within European social democracy, and they have close parallels within right wing eurocommunism, nationalist currents such as the Scottish National Party and some Green parties. From the point of view of the working class, they are as bankrupt as the old 'Atlanticist' ideas of the post-war settlement.

Overall, we can predict that the influence of Gorbachev's policies on the left will be a conservative one, given Gorbachev's commitment to a 'global historic compromise' with imperialism.

1992 and all that

The new brand of right wing reformism in European social democracy, led by figures such as Jacques Delors (president of the European Commission), and SPD theorist Peter Glotz, proposes the creation of a 'Social Europe' – the defence and extension of social and political rights – which they say will come about through the reorganisation of European industry and an economic upturn. They argue that the SEA will not only create more jobs, but existing jobs will be defended from the full force of American and Japanese competition. The only way of saving jobs is the unification of the European market and a controlled opening up of trade with the East.

But this capitalist Europe, or 'Fortress Europe', is also a free-market Europe. It answers the needs of the biggest European enterprises to face

"The Gorbachev leadership's stance is determined not by socialist internationalism but by bureaucratic calculation. In order to give themselves the breathing space for the perestroika programme of economic reform, they want international stability."

DOING THE FUTURE

PHOTO: John Hammett/FL



Britain's TUC: everywhere, European workers are confronted by treacherous leaderships.

up to competition with America and Japan. It will lead to an increase in monopolisation and the exploitation of labour. The single market means deregulation, open markets, free movement of capital and some labour.

The present disparities in social legislation, wage levels (ie productivity of labour) in the different countries of the EC are a means of putting pressure on the workers to accept worse conditions or face the consequences: redundancy, and/or a shift in production elsewhere. In this context the use of super-exploited immigrant and migrant labour will be systematised so as to further undermine wage levels. The creation of a pool of cheap labour will be a crucial element of 1992. Central to our struggle against the SEA and all its works must be a fight against the racist laws now being formulated.

The trade union and labour movement must create the instruments necessary to fight the multinational and European companies. The class struggle forces in the trade unions and in the mass workers' parties must coordinate their efforts and present a political and strategic alternative to the SEA.

In developing working class answers to 1992 and all that, we should avoid the 'little Englander' conception of national autarchic planning, which has in the past been associated with the Labour left, and was implicit in the so-called 'Alternative Economic Strategy' of the late seventies and early eighties. To the 'Europe of the bosses' we should counterpose a socialised and planned economy on a real pan-European scale that would include the eastern bloc countries. This poses the task of uniting the west European working class and its allies with the 300 million people of eastern Europe including the Soviet Union in a *United Socialist States of Europe* based on a new international economic cooperation and division of labour. A Europe that is socialist, democratic and internationalist. A Europe that supports the struggles of the peoples of the world and cancels the third world debt. A Europe that links the struggles of the workers east and west and builds a society with political and social institutions based on instruments of direct socialist democracy and self-management.

Socialists should approach 1992 with the slogans:

No to the Single European Act.

For a Europe of the workers and oppressed, East and West!

The crisis of the mass reformist parties

In the European workers' movement today we are confronted by big parties of the working class, with treacherous leaderships, who everywhere hamper the struggle against developments such as the SEA, and attacks on workers living standards and organisation. But the working class and its allies have not been able simply to by-pass the traditional mass organisations.

Despite some defeats, the most combative sections of the working class continually push forward, and test out new alternative leaders from within their own ranks and organisations. This is as true at the national level as within individual workplaces.

Along with the trade union bureaucracy, the traditional parties, with few exceptions, remain politically dominant within the workers' movement across Europe. Together they constitute the main obstacles to building mass revolutionary socialist alternatives. On the other hand left currents, and occasionally centrist splits from these parties, provide revolutionary socialists with many opportunities to link up with the broader workers' movement and avoid left propagandism.

One of the key strategic questions for revolutionaries is how to wrest control from the reformist misleaders and break their bureaucratic stranglehold. This cannot be achieved by simple denunciation, but must involve a consistent fight in the mass organisations to force the leaderships into unity with workers in struggle. Only in this way will the workers come to see the need to break with the unreformable party apparatuses.

In the Europe of 1992 and beyond revolutionary socialists will be forced to address themselves to the big political recompositions that are beginning to unfold at the heart of the traditional organisations as the result of the deepening class polarisations.

The question is posed. Is the marxist left in Britain and Europe going to contest the leadership of the workers' movement where many of the key political battles will be fought? Are we going to turn the movement to these battles inside the mass organisations, link up with left forces by means of the united front in action around the demands of the workers and oppressed?

To do otherwise will reduce us, at best to syndicalism, or at worst we will find ourselves posturing on the sidelines.

"The class struggle forces in the trade unions and in the mass workers' parties must coordinate their efforts and present a political and strategic alternative to the Single Europe Act".



A pure example of capitalist, pan-European planning: climbing (part of) the British grain mountain.

European Elections

No to the bosses' 'single market':

For a United Socialist States of Europe

THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS of June 1989 are going to be mainly centred on the theme of the 'single market' of 1992 and the Single European Act. After years of austerity and increasing unemployment, the unification of western Europe is now presented as a hope of new growth and a big reduction in unemployment, implying that the economic crisis which capitalism cannot resolve at a national level can somehow be overcome on a continent-wide basis.

Yet no amount of reorganisation of capital can conceal or eliminate the fundamental conflict of interest between the classes: capital can only expand profitably through increasing its exploitation of the working class. The consequences of this will be just as grave for workers on a European level as they have been in each individual country. The single market will mean all-out competition between the nations, each keeping its own national regulations and norms, tax systems, levels of productivity and working conditions.

Through this competition is supposed to emerge a thorough reorganisation of European industry and an economic upturn. Certain defenders of the 'single market' even argue that the shock of abolishing the frontiers, eliminating the non-tariff barriers and free circulation of capital should give rise to a new economic order — once the laws of the free market have finally purged the system of all protectionism and what they see as an overdose of state intervention. All of this is quite the opposite of a planned expansion of production to meet social needs in Europe and world-wide: the single market will be a derelated bear-garden in which the gulf between classes and between 'haves' and 'have nots' will widen.

The employers want to get European workers to agree to the single

market by arguing that what is at stake is fighting competition from American and Japanese companies. This would be bad enough even if it were true: but there is nothing to suggest that a 'European capitalism' is really on the agenda. They are simply trying to create a sort of European chauvinism which they will use to justify more redundancies, productivity speed-up, wage freezes and other measures.

The perspective of the 'big market' is certainly one of the answers through which the major European firms could seek to defend themselves and squeeze out their rivals — but it is not the only one. In certain industries, for certain products or research programmes, their alternative solution has been alliances or mergers with American or Japanese companies. The fundamental trend in the situation is the increased internationalisation of the capitalist economy: the Europe of 1992 is only one link in the chain of reorganisation. The ideological attempt to develop a 'European patriotism' to help sugar the pill of industrial restructuring should be denounced in the same way as any other chauvinist defence of 'national' capitalism.

The Single European Act (SEA) is completely orientated to increasing profits from capital. In no way is it an attempt to satisfy the main social needs or to attack unemployment and poverty. To do that, a socialist solution is required, based on the expropriation of private capital across the continent and the liberation in eastern Europe of the nationalised means of production from the paralysing grip of Stalinist bureaucracy. The way forward for the workers and oppressed has to be a revolutionary solution, seeking to mobilise the labour movement throughout the continent. The penalty for failure will be to allow the employers further scope to regroup their forces for more concerted attacks on the working class.

The workers will carry the cost of the SEA

The bosses want a 'unified' Europe based on the same methods and recipes that they have been implementing in each individual country for the last fifteen years. They keep telling us that the profits of 'today' will be the jobs of 'tomorrow' – just as the restructuring of the steel industry, textile industry or shipbuilding was supposed to be followed by an upturn in employment and economic activity in the regions concerned. There has been none of this: so now a new refrain appears – blaming the failures up to now on tariff barriers and national divisions.

Of course the workers will again bear the brunt of the changes. The acceleration of industrial restructuring, the mergers, the takeovers – all of them enormously profitable for bankers, finance houses, speculators and swindlers of all sorts – will bring many more redundancies. Such regulation of the market that remains intact will lead to increased monopoly control, while policies of privatisation encourage free market strategies irrespective of social needs, especially in transport, energy, communications and the media.

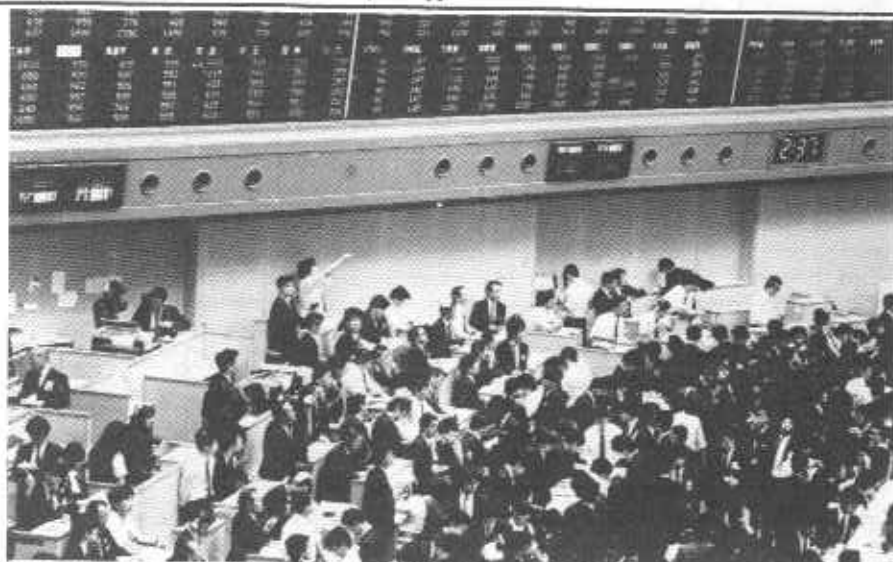
The single market will not unify a homogeneous Europe. There are already significant differences between countries and regions. The economic crisis has widened these inequalities, and the single market will increase them. Certain regions will experience cumulative growth while others will sink deeper into crisis, deindustrialisation and unemployment. The competition between different sets of regulations and standards is going to increase the pressure to reduce wages, impose 'flexible working' and worsen conditions.

The Europe of 1992 will still be a Europe of unemployment. While certain sectors and companies will in time benefit from the new markets offered by the removal of non-tariff barriers, this will not in itself increase employment. Whole sectors are going to be affected by large-scale restructuring and rationalisation, which will have a fall-out effect on the job market. Already in the EEC there are 44 million people with an income of less than half the average income of their country. There are more than 16 million unemployed, 40 percent of whom are young people. None of this will be changed by the SEA and its incantations about the single market.

The competition between tax systems, the need to bring VAT rates into line, the attempts of each country to direct capital investment towards the most financially profitable countries, will all lead to the introduction of government policies designed to attack working class incomes while benefiting the capitalists.

European workers are not the only ones to suffer from a united bosses' Europe. The search for greater profits in capitalist Europe does not end with rationalisation of the community's market: it also implies gradual military integration (already there are moves towards a joint Franco-German military brigade) and a greater coherence of the different national policies towards the Third World, coupled with a more aggressive line from European multi-nationals. From now on, the Community countries will act as a group in negotiations with Third World countries on the debt. They will act as a group in talking to the USA and Japan about the world market and monetary policies, which will then be imposed on dependent countries. They will act together in negotiations of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development).

The Lome Convention, a mechanism regulating trade between the EEC and 63 countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, has not



Tokyo stock exchange, as Japanese firms rush to set up shop inside 'Fortress Europe'.

PHOTO: Philip Gordon/Reflex

"I said that the social Europe we wanted was a job-creating Europe, and the social programmes we wanted were those that would encourage an entrepreneurial, competitive Europe. That's the essential disagreement between us [and Jacques Delors]." (Lord Young, interviewed in Newsweek, April 17, 1989)

reduced the inequality of trade. Under cover of protecting these countries it has increased their economic and political dependence. The Stabex system which is supposed to regulate the receipts and exports of these countries has been overtaken by fluctuating demand for raw materials, and takes no account of the relationship between prices of exported raw materials and imported commodities. The European workers' movement must lead the fight for the cancellation of Third World debts, for new, favourable terms of trade, and a programme of planned economic expansion involving countries of the North and South in a concerted war on poverty.

In all the European countries belonging to NATO and the Atlantic Alliance our demand is that they leave and close down all US bases. The Franco-German brigade is the precursor of a project of gradual European military integration. We are opposed to all the proposals to strengthen or re-equip the military forces of European imperialism, whose sole function is to buttress capitalist rule over the working class in the west and to threaten the bureaucratised workers' states in the east. France and Britain must unilaterally destroy their nuclear weapons, withdraw their troop garrisons from overseas, and, along with other west European states, disband their vast standing armies.

A challenge for the workers' movement

The interests of the big financial and industrial groups are increasingly intertwined; there are more and more alliances, making confrontations between workers and their bosses even more complex and difficult. An increasing number of subsidiaries and links between European multi-nationals has already put many decision-making centres effectively outside the framework of any one nation, confronting the trade union movement with new problems and dangers.

The introduction of the single market is a challenge thrown down to the European workers' movement. The bosses hope it will establish a better relationship of forces for them to impose their wages policies and divide the working class. We have to expose and challenge these capitalist projects.

During these European elections there will be a lot of noise about the problems of the European institutions, the relationship between the states and the political workings of the Community. Though convinced of its needs on the economic front, the bourgeoisie is still hesitant to set up European institutions and over their relationship to the national states. The perspective of a single market does not remove regulatory functions from national governments. This is why there are contradictions ac-

accumulating between the scheme of a united Europe and the still irreplaceable role of social control by the state machinery in each member country. The discussion on European institutions, on the role of the European parliament and European Commission are part of this question. In some countries this is increasing the crisis of right wing parties.

There is also now a big discussion among the members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) on joining the European Community. Here again the workers' movement has no interest in the arguments between different parties and sections of the employers. The workers' movement should start from its own demands and the goal of improving wages and living standards. Our opposition to the bosses' Europe is based on the fact that each of the institutions of the EEC represents a device of European capital aimed at controlling the working class and preserving capitalist rule.

For a Europe of the workers!

Faced with the bosses' attacks, the workers' movement must oppose the SEA. Against a Europe of united bosses we must counterpose a Europe of workers united in a new, active internationalism and cooperation, raising their own class demands in the struggle for socialist solutions in each country and across the continent.

It is urgent for the trade union movement to establish means of coordination and centralisation of information and struggles on a company-wide basis. This means that inter-union and national divisions have to be broken down and chauvinist prejudices swept away. The trade union movement must create the instruments necessary to link up and unite its forces in the multi-nationals and European companies.

Faced with the dangers of the SEA, the working class response must be not a utopian, reformist idea of some sort of 'European' social dialogue between bosses and unions (along the lines promoted so successfully by top Eurocrat Jacques Delors at last year's TUC Congress), but to struggle. There is no way that the Thatcher government, having faced down the struggles of the British labour movement to impose its policies for the past ten years is now going to back-track on all of them simply at the request of some European tri-partite talks. The same goes for any right wing government. The talk of somehow imposing superior European social legislation across the continent, a 'social Europe', was always a confidence trick: it began only after the policy of a 'single Europe' was already decided, and represented the attempts by the reformist labour bureaucracy and politicians to amend or add to the SEA through top-level negotiations in carpeted offices in Brussels (suitably remote from the eyes and influence of the workers).

The whole dialogue has taken place between people who are already convinced that the 'single market' is a miracle solution to problems of economic growth. The European employers' associations, organised in the CES, are already committed to the ideal of the single market: yet in the name of deregulation and liberalism the employers and the Commission have already announced that there is no question of enforcing any homogeneous social policies onto member states. While the bosses want to internationalise their capital as far as possible, they refuse workers the benefit of the same level of social benefits across the 'united' Europe. This at least makes clear the class content of the SEA, since no matter how civilised and social democratic may be their rhetoric, so long as the employers are firmly in control any social policy concessions will simply be a facade to conceal the reality of capitalist exploitation.

The workers' movement has nothing to gain from any so-called co-

management of the introduction of the single market. It should first of all be concerned about the relationship of forces between the workers and the bosses. It is through class struggle – and not through accepting the logic of the SEA and adding reformist social policy demands – that the capitalist offensive can be blocked.

The trade unions should counterpose their main demands to the SEA, fight to defend the gains already won in various countries, and fight in other countries around demands that such benefits are extended to them. Within such struggles for partial demands, socialists must raise the wider perspective: the problems of the working class and the oppressed will never be solved while capitalism remains intact.

Attempts to create competition between workers in Europe by imposing different wages and conditions must be fought. Some countries like Greece and Portugal, the Spanish state and Ireland suffer wages, conditions and social benefits that are quite different from those elsewhere in the EEC. Their bosses and governments argue that this gives them a 'comparative advantage' that could bring great benefits in the single market. Workers must fight this logic and demand an improvement in social conditions to at least the levels prevailing in other EEC countries

– demanding the 40 hour week in Portugal, for instance. The fact is that the employers seek to bring wages, working conditions and social benefits into line downwards. Workers must respond with demands and action to force them into line upwards, insisting that the advantages won in one country or one sector be matched elsewhere in Europe. This will be won only through trade union and wider struggles, not by any social consensus or appeals to the ideals of a 'united' Europe.

The general strike in the Spanish state showed that it is possible for workers to oppose governmental austerity policies and challenge the authority of capitalist governments. The nurses' strikes in Britain and then in France last year and the present struggles of Italian health workers show not only that health and other social benefits are under attack across Europe, but that workers can fight back. There have also been struggles of youth against cuts and attacks on education, and mass action by railworkers (France) and teachers (France and Spanish state). The German metalworkers took the lead in

the fight for a 35-hour week. All these examples found echoes across Europe and point to the need to organise jointly and spread struggles and solidarity internationally.

A socialist alternative

The Europe we want is not that of capitalism, exploitation, imperialist ambitions, militarism and repression. In opposition to this capitalist Europe we put forward another, different, socialist Europe. The alternative to the market economy and its destructive consequences can only

be a socialist, democratic, fraternal internationalist Europe, built on the expropriation of private capital, on direct democracy and workers' management.

Only such a Europe will be able to combat all oppression:

- The oppression of women, whose aspirations will never be fulfilled by the EEC or the single market. A socialist policy would guarantee the right to paid work; equal pay for work of equal value; the right to education and training; full trade union and employment rights for part-time workers; free contraception; the right to free abortion on demand; increased social services, especially childcare and health services; and full participation in political and civic life.

- The oppression of immigrant workers from colonial and semi-colonial countries, who are subjected to racist immigration and nationality laws and restrictions on entry and refused equal political

"[Delors] was talking about 'social gains'. He was talking about the social Europe we would have, which included things like co-determination. Now we've lived through that, and there's no way we would ever go back to that."

"(...) take the average Frenchman. You see if he wants to be in the same country with Italy, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Britain and Ireland. I suspect at the end of the day he still considers himself a Frenchman". (Lord Young on 1992)

rights, and of black communities born and brought up in Europe, who suffer from racism, discrimination at work, in housing and access to social services.

● The oppression of nations and nationalities in the heartlands of Europe – in the North of Ireland and Euskadi – and in colonies like New Caledonia.

The Europe we want is based on a completely different economic system, starting from production for need, not profit, and taking into account the urgent task of protecting and restoring the already damaged environment and resolving the problem of energy sources.

Our perspective is of a European socialist federation, a *workers' Europe*. This will be born out of the combined forces of the anti-capitalist struggles for socialist revolution in the west and the anti-bureaucratic struggle for political revolution in the east. Perestroika and galsnost are not miracle solutions to free the workers of eastern Europe from the repressive and wasteful straitjacket of bureaucracy. Comecon is no more a voice for internationalism and solidarity between peoples than is the EEC. Bureaucratic unification, like market unification, is a source of inequality and oppression.

Without waiting any longer we have to organise the convergence of struggles between the workers' movement in western Europe and the independent organisations in eastern Europe. This means building revolutionary socialist currents and parties in every country, linked through an international movement. Such a tradition already exists – in the forces of the Trotskyist Fourth International.

A policy for the workers' movement

Whatever the outcome of the European elections, the working class movement needs its own programme of demands which begin from the defence of gains already won and immediate needs, but which reach out towards the necessary socialist transformation of society. Only in this way can we really fight the implications of the Single European Act and the bosses' strategic reorganisation. The first demands should be:

● *Against all austerity policies*, whether implemented by parties of the right or 'left'. For workers' unity against all forms of class collaboration, 'co-management' and European or national patriotism. Defend living standards against inflation through a *sliding scale of wages* – monitored by trade union committees – to compensate for each increase in prices, interest rates and taxation.

● *Against unemployment*: for trade union and political action to fight plant closures and redundancies, including European-wide action to fight rationalisation by multi-nationals. Against the bosses' calls for sackings, demand a shorter working week – an immediate universal policy of a 35-hour week, leading to the wider policy of work-sharing without loss of pay. Demand programmes of useful public works to create new jobs at trade union rates of pay.

● *Against the capitalist restructuring of industry*: trade unions and other workers' organisations must demand the *opening of the books* of the multinationals to expose the extent of back-room dealing, asset-strip-



PHOTO: Carlos Guarita/Reflex

A united Europe for the working class and oppressed – or for the bosses?

ping and swindles, and lay the basis for alternative plans based on expropriation of private capital and expansion of production to meet social needs.

● *Against competition between European workers*: for identical conditions at work, in health and safety, paid holidays and retirement, the right to free, tax-funded health care, social security and education throughout the Community at the most favourable level.

● *Against women's oppression*: for the right to abortion and contraception on demand; for a massive expansion of state funded childcare, health and social services; equal pay for work of equal value.

● *Against racism*: repeal all immigration restrictions and racist nationality laws; for equal political rights including the right to vote for all immigrant workers. Defend the black communities against racist violence.

● *Against imperialism and militarism*: cancel the Third World debt; immediate unilateral nuclear disarmament. Disband NATO and other imperialist alliances, expel US bases, withdraw British French and other troops from overseas; disband the standing armies of western Europe. British troops out of Ireland! Independence for New Caledonia!

● *Against destruction of the environment*: halt building and close down all nuclear power stations. For national and Europe-wide plans to protect and restore the environment.

Our vision of a socialist Europe involves not creeping reforms or even 'radical' restructuring of capitalism, but the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. No single country can complete a socialist revolution in isolation, but there is no magic panacea to trigger a synchronised pan-European movement: the revolution must *begin* in particular countries and spread Europe-wide.

The priority for the workers' movement is to develop links at rank and file and official level which can open up solidarity around key class battles, especially in fighting the multinationals and opposition to austerity measures. Within this the development of a revolutionary marxist leadership in the unions and other mass organisations of the workers' movement is an urgent task. Such a leadership is essential in the fight against reformist and Stalinist bureaucracy and for the perspective of the European socialist revolution.

Forward to the united socialist states of Europe!



In El Salvador, the murder of Archbishop Romero formed a focus for the developing struggle against the regime.

Marxism and religion

The opium of the people?

With the Salman Rushdie affair still in the news, this month's Back to Basics looks the Marxist view of religion. Should we still see organised religion of any description as a bulwark of reaction, conservatism and obscurantism as Marx and Engels did in the nineteenth century? If so so how do we couple that with defence of freedom of worship?

Religion historically has been one of the most powerful means at the disposal of the ruling class for the maintenance of inequality, exploitation and slavish obedience on the part of sections of the working class.

The struggle with religion has two sides which must be distinguished. On the one hand we have the struggle with the church as a special organisation, existing for religious propaganda, materially interested in the maintenance of popular ignorance and religious enslavement. On the other hand, we have the struggle with the widely diffused and deeply ingrained prejudices of the majority of the working class and other sections of society.

The union between Church and state goes back centuries. The association between the church and the feudal state of landowners, for example, was very intimate; the autocratic state was sustained by the landed interest. The Church itself was a major landlord, owning millions of acres. These two powers were inevitably compelled to join forces against the labouring masses.

During the period in which the urban bourgeoisie was in conflict with the feudal nobility, the bourgeoisie fiercely attacked the Church,

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since it owned territories which the bourgeoisie wanted for itself.

It is this conflict that explains why the demand for the separation of Church and state was made by the liberal bourgeoisie. However, it was never fully realised. Everywhere the struggle of the working class against the capitalists was growing more intense, and the bourgeoisie saw no reason to break up the alliance of the Church and state. They thought it would be more advantageous to come to terms with the Church, that is, as Bukharin and Preobazhensky termed it, to 'buy its prayers on behalf of the struggle with socialism.'

The work which the bourgeoisie in its struggle with the Church had left unfinished was carried to a conclusion by the proletarian revolu-

tion in Russia in 1917. One of the first decrees of the Soviet state was that concerning the separation of Church and state. All its landed estates were taken away from the Church and handed over to the masses. All the Church's capital became the property of the working class. The Soviet state rejected all thoughts of using the Church in any way whatever as a means for strengthening the proletarian state.

However, its one thing to carry through the separation of Church and state. It is much more difficult to combat the religious prejudices already deeply rooted in the consciousness of the masses. Religious propaganda finds its most fertile soil where social institutions do not allow people to understand the real nature of society.

In capitalist society production and the exchange of goods are not carried out with full consciousness and in a planned way, they happen as though they were the result of elemental forces. The market controls the producer. Workers excluded from decision making in production do not know if too many or too few goods are being produced, why prices rise at one time and fall at another, why crises and unemployment occur. So, having little control over such important events in their lives, working people can easily accept the notion of 'the

will of God' as an explanation. Religion also teaches them their station in life.

In organised, communist society, on the other hand, production and distribution no longer hold any mysteries for the working class. The working class collectively and individually participates in elaborating a general plan of production and will have ideas and proposals on the matter. The transition from socialism to communism, from the society which marks the end of capitalism to the society completely freed from all traces of class division will bring about the natural death of all religion and all superstition.

In reality, of course we would make a big mistake if we thought we could sit back and watch the end of religion. In the Soviet Union, after 1917, the Church became central to the political struggle against the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Bolsheviks made a point of continuing the struggle against religious propaganda. Their methods were varied and made use of debates and the publication of literature. They also placed a big emphasis on putting out scientific

knowledge to undermine the authenticity of religion. They opened up the shrines to expose the 'incorruptible' relics, to show up the trickery on which religion was grounded.

However, in marked contrast to later, cruder, Stalinist efforts, the watchword of the Bolsheviks was sensitivity. To thrust atheism on the masses, to interfere with religious practices and to mock the objects of popular belief would not assist but hinder the campaign against religion. If the Church was persecuted it could win sympathy amongst the masses. Persecution would remind them of the days when there was a link between religion and the defence of national freedom; it would strengthen the anti-semitic movement and in general it would mobilise all the remains of an ideology which was already beginning to die out.

The well-known phrase 'religion is the opium of the people' is generally reckoned to be at the heart of the Marxist concept of religion. However a closer look at the issue would reveal Marx's understanding of the dual character of religion.

'Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world just as it is the spirit of an unspiritual situation. It is the opium of the people.' (*Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 1844).



The Iranian revolution: religion used by Khomeini to smash class mobilisation.

Marx wrote the above passage when he was still a follower of Feuerbach, a neo-Hegelian. His analysis is therefore without any class reference. But it none the less grasped the contradictory character of the religious phenomenon; sometimes a legitimisation of existing society and sometimes a protest against it.

Engels for his part, tried to explain concrete social expressions of religions. Christianity no longer appeared as a timeless essence but as a cultural form undergoing changes in different historical periods; first as a religion of the slaves, then as the ideology of the Roman Empire, then tailored to feudal hierarchy and lastly adapted to bourgeois society.

Engels, though, realised that the conflict between materialism and religion is not always identical with the struggle between revolution and reaction. For example in Britain, eighteenth century materialism defended absolute monarchy, while protestant sects used religion in their struggle against the Stuarts. While remaining an atheist, a materialist and an enemy of religion, Engels, like Marx, understood the dual character of religious belief; defending social order on the one hand and protesting against it on the other.

Later on Lenin insisted in *Socialism and religion* that atheism should not be part of the Party's programme because 'unity in the really

revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven'. This never meant that Marxists should not wage a struggle against religion but that atheism was not a condition for party membership.

Rosa Luxemburg shared this opinion, but developed a different and looser approach. Although an atheist herself, she attacked, not so much religion, more the reactionary policy of the Church. In an essay written in 1905, called *Church and socialism* she claimed that modern socialists were more faithful to the original principles of Christianity than the conservative clergy of today. Since socialists struggle for a social order of freedom and equality, priests should welcome it. When the clergy support the rich who explain and oppress the poor they are in open contradiction to Christian teachings. Luxemburg, predated for example Tony Benn and Eric Heffer tried to rescue what she saw as the social dimension of the Christian tradition for the labour movement, rather than undertake a

philosophical battle in the name of materialism.

Amongst the more recent leaders and thinkers of the communist movement Gramsci showed the greatest interest in religious issues. His ironic criticism of the conservative forms of religion especially jesuitical catholicism did not prevent him from seeing the Utopian dimension of religious ideas. 'Religion is the most gigantic Utopia that history has ever known. It affirms...that man is...equal to other men...but it also affirms this is not of this world but of another (the Utopia).'

He also pointed out 'that every religion...is really a multiplicity of different and other contradictory religions. There is a catechism for the peasants, a catechism for the petty bourgeoisie and urban workers and a catechism for workers and for intellectuals.'

In general Marx and Engels felt that the subversive role of religion was a thing of the past without any significance in the era of the modern class struggle. This was true for a period but today new questions are posed in this field. The methods of Marxism still apply and will aid our understanding whether of liberation theology or the growth of Islamic fundamentalism or the relationship between the Catholic Church and Solidarnosc in Poland.

Ann Potter and Graham Topley

Hillsborough: a working class tragedy waiting to happen

The emotional reaction to the events at Hillsborough stadium on April 15 has spread beyond Merseyside and the football world to the whole of British society.

However shocking and painful the images on television and in the press have been, the disaster at Hillsborough will have come as no surprise to many football supporters. The immediate causes of the tragedy – inadequate and incompetent policing, fans being crammed into cages like animals, huge delays getting into the ground and bad planning and communication by the football club – are problems which fans encounter week in, week out at every major league ground in the country. Hillsborough was a working class tragedy waiting to happen.

Socialists need to look into the underlying causes of the disaster and to propose ways in which the working class, through its own activity and organisation, can provide solutions.

On one level, Hillsborough was typical of the tenth year of Thatcherism. In common with Piper Alpha, the Herald of Free Enterprise, Kings Cross and the Clapham train crash, the disaster was a symptom of the unfettered operation of market forces. The frantic search for short term profit – whether it was by British Rail, Pan Am, P&O Ferries or football club owners – means a further decline in already inadequate health and safety provisions. This, combined with cuts in the emergency services and the general deterioration in the infrastructure necessary for a healthy and safe environment, means that the loss of life from 'accidents' and other environmental causes has increased significantly in the lifetime of the Tory government.

Football in its present form is a relatively new sport. Most of our larger clubs were founded in the early years of this century, and the English Football League itself has only just celebrated its centenary. Huge crowds at football matches only became common in the 1920s. From then to the present day, football crowds have been almost entirely working class in composition. Working class football fans formed their own supporters clubs early in the development of the League. These supporters clubs organised travel, social and sporting events, fundraising and, in some cases, elected representation to the boards of their football clubs.

Over the years, most official supporters clubs have been transformed into appendages of the football clubs themselves, and have lost any accountability to or mass involvement by the fans. In many cases, they are just a means for fans to obtain membership cards to enable



PHOTO: Stefania Cagnoni

them to travel to away matches. In recent years, however, there has been an explosion of self-organised unofficial supporters clubs and fanzines – known collectively as the 'Alternative Football Network'. An independent national organisation for fans – the Football Supporters Association (FSA) has been growing steadily and now counts its membership in the thousands.

The existence of football as a mass spectator sport and the self-organisation of football fans should be supported wholeheartedly by all socialists. In some cases, football provides the only collective experience which young working class people have available to them. The collectivity of the terraces and of supporters organisations represents a gain for the working class as a whole.

Predictably, as with all working class social formations under capitalism, football crowds are contradictory phenomena. Forms of ruling class ideology – sexism, racism and nationalism – are deeply rooted in the mass of football supporters (most of whom are white and male). Consequently, fascist groups have had some limited success at recruiting on the terraces, although fascist influence (with a few notable exceptions) has declined recently.

The ruling class, in the shape of the Thatcher government, encourages extreme nationalist sentiment among football fans, and is at least benevolently silent on racism and sexism. Their views on the collective experience and organisation of so many working class people, however, are another matter.

The proposed introduction of compulsory ID cards is precisely an attempt to exert social control over (much smaller) football crowds. The ruling class regards the loss of more lives in crushes outside and inside grounds as an acceptable price to pay. The knee-jerk reaction of Douglas Hurd and Colin Moynihan to the Hillsborough disaster was to propose all-seated football grounds – thus trying to destroy much of the collective emotion and spirit to be enjoyed on the terraces.

Football supporters also provide a useful scapegoat for the Tories – an 'enemy within'

who can be used to justify the most extreme attacks on civil liberties. 'If they behave like animals, they should be treated like animals.' The bracketing together of all working class football fans as 'hooligans' who need to be locked up in cages was directly responsible for the deaths of the 95 Liverpool supporters.

The Labour leadership shares with the government the view that football's problems can be reduced to 'football hooliganism'. Roy Hattersley provided a graphic illustration of this bipartisan approach when he stated in a recent 'Newsnight' interview that if he and Douglas Hurd were to be locked in a room overnight they would emerge with an 'acceptable' ID card scheme in the morning.

The tendency of some on the left to treat football supporters as an irrelevance, or worse, as irredeemably reactionary, is simply allowing the Tories, and their allies in the Labour leadership, to quite literally 'get away with murder'; the murder of football as a mass spectator sport, and of football fans in future tragedies such as Hillsborough.

Instead of ignoring these issues we should be developing a political programme for the transformation of football into what it has always had the potential to become – the 'People's Game'. Some of the elements of such a programme are already being developed inside the football supporters movement. Arguments against racism and sexism are common in football fanzines. They also raise demands such as supporters' representation on boards, better facilities, opposition to any form of ID card scheme, and so on. The FSA has begun to exert some real influence on the football authorities on some of these questions. Socialists need to have an input into these debates where it matters – in the supporters' organisations themselves, as well as raising them in the Labour Party and trade unions. We should be arguing for supporters' control of football clubs, women-only sections in every stadium, nationalisation (or municipalisation) of football grounds, opening the facilities of clubs to local community use, matches to be stewarded by supporters themselves – police out of football grounds...

I am sure that the list can be added to. The important point is that socialists cannot continue to abstain on the important questions that are raised by football supporters themselves.

Glenn Sutherland

The Football Supporters Association can be contacted at 59 Oakwood Road, Liverpool L26 1XD (membership £2)

Organising miners in 1920s West Virginia

Matewan
Film, directed by John Sayles

Reviewed by
Bradley Judd

MATEWAN FOLLOWS union organiser Joe Kenehan into the isolated dells of the West Virginian coal region. But, Joe is not alone. The mine owner of the Stone Mountain Coal Company has hired the most ruthless and feared strike-breakers available in the 1920s.

Matewan vividly brings to the screen the struggles that transpired to unionise in this century, showing the extent to which the bosses must go to keep control. The strike-breakers do not hesitate to use any methods, including murder, to stop the union.

Like *Mississippi Burning* and *Norma Rae*, *Matewan* has the feel of a documentary drama, but it more successfully portrays historical fact. Unlike *Mississippi Burning*, which

transforms J Edgar Hoover's vicious FBI into pro-civil rights activists, *Matewan* sticks close to the facts. And *Matewan* does not have the tidy resolved ending of *Norma Rae*, where the union election seems to guarantee victory. The textile workers at JP Stevens found in reality that the election was only the beginning of the story.

Matewan portrays the subtle manipulation of relations between the different groups brought into the strike by the mine owner. Whites against Italian immigrants against blacks brought up from the southern states, each group, with difficulty, sees through prejudice, to acknowledge common interest. And, just as they are coming together, new divisions are effectively exploited.

Issues of loyalty arise, with one unionist's betrayal and the falsified charge of rape against Joe Kenehan. The contemporary case of the socialist activist Mark Curtis in the American mid-west mirrors the false charges against Joe Kenehan.

The church sides against the miners and the disillusionment with this betrayal is shown by



PHOTO: Andrew Ward/Report

Fighting against divisions – refugees from 13 nations march during the British miners' strike.

the crisis of one youth, who had been preparing for the pulpit. He is forced to break from the church and place his faith in the union.

The film does stretch credulity in several areas. First, the town mayor sympathises with the union, and tries to remain neutral and control the excesses of the strike-breakers. Such a local government would be the exception and not the rule in labour actions. Secondly, when the miners are forced to defend themselves, and resist the company violence with weapons, the former Wobblie, Joe Kenehan, becomes a pacifist and sits out

of the struggle, continuing to argue for a non-violent defence. Here there is a blurring between ideas prevalent today, with the character of an ex-Wobblie.

Matewan tries to avoid direct implications for activism today, making Joe Kenehan a mythic saintly figure, set in the remote and distant past. But *Matewan* inevitably raises issues of struggle that are relevant today.

Director John Sayles, with the beautiful photography of activist Haskell Wexler, has created the best film based on historical events to come out of Hollywood in a long time.

Hidden gifts

Rain Man
Film, directed by Barry Levinson, starring Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise

Reviewed by
JOHN LISTER

IF, LIKE ME, you dread 'earnest' films overlaid with sound moral intent and obsessive desire to focus on 'awkward' topics, you still need have no fears in going to see *Rain Man*, despite the fact that its main character, an Oscar-winning role for Dustin Hoffman, suffers from the personality disorder known as autism.

However *Rain Man* is not simply about a particular form of mental/psychological handicap: it is about character. Hoffman plays Raymond Babbit, the autistic older brother of car importer Charlie Babbit



Hoffman as Raymond.

(Tom Cruise). Raymond has been confined for most of his life to a mental institution – a fact known only to his father, and not to Charlie until his father dies.

Yet while Raymond is the one with a diagnosed condition that makes him unable to form normal human relationships, 'normal' Charlie is the one at the start of the film who is completely wrapped up in himself and uncommunicative, not least with his girlfriend Susanna (Valeria Golino).

As the story unfolds, Raymond reveals his hitherto hidden gifts of memory and mathematical skills: but Charlie too reveals a hidden streak of

affection – both for Susanna and for Raymond.

In preparation for the role, Hoffman virtually moved in with two brothers – one autistic, one not. His portrayal is based on painstaking research into autism, which affects about five (largely male) children in every 10,000 births. Though 80 percent of autistic children are mentally retarded, ten percent have a special talent – for model-making, drawing or some other skill, which stands out in contrast to their condition.

A much smaller category – only 200 or so have ever been recorded – fit the category of Raymond Babbit, 'autistic savants' with near-miraculous powers in certain fields, which may include mathematics, memory, musical skills, drawing or sculpture.

Rain Man is not therefore looking at autism in general, though it does remind us that so many people dismissed as mentally or physically 'handicapped' do have special strengths and skills which need to be appreciated.

The film does however raise the more general question of the treatment of mental illness and psychological problems: though it may offer him security and a structured, ritualistic life-style, is a large mental hospital (depressingly revealed in the film) the best environment in which to care for any individual?

Before the film ends comes a realistic reminder – when a smoke alarm sends him into a panic – that Raymond could not cope with life unsupported, and that many relatives, like Charlie, are not willing or able to give up their lives to caring for a disabled relative. But as Raymond climbs onto the train to go back to his familiar 'bin' we should wonder whether society cannot come up with some more civilised way of caring for people with such disabilities.

None of which detracts from the film's entertainment value; we are shown how to laugh with real affection, while we sympathise with Charlie's frustration. Don't miss it!

Protest and survive

Stark

Ben Elton (Sphere Books, £3.50)

Reviewed by Steve Potter

BEN ELTON'S FIRST novel is a parody of blockbuster thrillers with lurid covers in which dozens of characters scattered round the globe come together to defeat a conspiracy (generally communist or terrorist) and go to bed together.

Stark turns the tables. The conspirators are capitalist, the heroine and heroes ecologists and hardly anybody goes to bed with each other.

The book is funny, in the style of Ben's TV shows, but the book has a serious intent. Interspersed between the jokes are chunks of propaganda. Why are dolphins dying? How are they destroying the rain forests? Why can't you get maple syrup anymore? What does asset-stripping mean for people's jobs? What are the consequences of dumping toxic waste at sea? Will the green-house effect submerge most of Bangladesh in forty years time?

The book has been seriously promoted with cardboard cut-outs in bookshops. You can buy it your local supermarket. Lots of people will buy it and read it.

Which is good, for the radical ecologist movement has stiff competition at the moment. Read this: 'After all, it's up to all of us to fight the problem of pollution and to leave a safer world for our children and grandchildren.'

Who said that? Jonathan Porritt? Margaret Thatcher? Neil Kinnock trying to sound like Margaret Thatcher? No, it comes on the back of a packet of Peaudouce nappies.

Through a miracle of marketing capitalists are now selling themselves, the polluters, as saviours of a future world.

Only Arthur Scargill has seriously tried to claim ecology for what it is — a central working class issue: the response of much of the British far left is to sniff suspiciously around the ecological issue, declaring it to be too 'soft' to merit serious attention.

No doubt some will take this attitude to *Stark*. But that's their problem, not Ben Elton's.

Deceit and immorality

Dangerous Liaisons
Film, with Glenn Close,
John Malkevich and
Michelle Pfeiffer

Reviewed by Di Paton

'ELEGANT', 'WITTY' and 'cynical' are all words that come to mind in describing *Dangerous Liaisons*.

It is a story of deceit and immorality adapted from the book *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Laclos, and set in the circles of the French aristocracy just before the revolution.

Glenn Close plays a powerful widow who never remarried 'in order to be able to have any man I wanted'. She sets Visconte (John Malkevich), the charming playboy, the task of 'deflowering' Cecille, the daughter of an acquaintance of hers, a virgin straight out of a convent school, and promised in marriage to another man. The prize is to sleep with Close herself.

Visconte rejects this challenge as too easy; instead he will seduce a married woman known for her virtue (Michelle Pfeiffer) while her husband is away.

An often entertaining pursuit sequence follows as Malkevich begins the task of seducing both women. He uses trickery, blackmail and false declarations of love, and is eventually successful in both cases. An

unexpected problem arises: Malkevich falls in love with Pfeiffer, but through his vanity rejects her in order to claim his prize. At this point the plot twists and meets him with a hard sting in its tail and he discovers that Close was manipulating him all along. I didn't feel that anything particularly tragic had occurred, as the two leading characters are too thoroughly nasty for us to care much about their downfall.

Dangerous Liaisons is strangely ambiguous in its treatment of women. At times Glenn Close sounds almost like a feminist (not bad for the eighteenth century!), talking of how, as a young woman, she was marginalised by men talking as if she wasn't there, or hiding her from the real world. She learnt to use her intelligence to discover what is really going on, and to use the information to her advantage.

Some of the images of women's sexuality are also positive — women are certainly not presented as asexual, nor is there a simplistic good/bad division made. However, the overriding way in which sexual relations are portrayed is one of commerce and exploitation. The audience is invited to share the 'joke' as Visconte 'ruins' the young Cecille by teaching her sexual tricks that will betray her experience when she marries. Even worse, there is one scene in which the charming Visconte rapes Cecille (although we do

not see the actual rape), who later admits to Glenn Close that, despite guilt, she enjoyed it. I found this section of the film quite disturbing to watch: not the fact of the rape itself, but the way in which it is treated as merely another part of the cynical and sexy intrigues of the French aristocracy.

The film is lavish in its period design and setting — full of beautiful houses, beautiful people (especially John Malkevich) and even more beautiful eighteenth century ball gowns.

Despite often revelling in its own nastiness, the overall message of *Dangerous Liaisons* seems to be that immorality doesn't pay — if you mess around you get hurt — a familiar theme these days. All the characters who indulge in 'sinful' sexual relationships meet with their comeuppance, and the only contrast made is with the 'good' behaviour of Pfeiffer before she succumbs to Malkevich's charms.

The possibility of relationships developing outside of the moral code which are not based on greed and selfishness, and which do not end in disaster, is barely hinted at. Nevertheless, despite political limitations, *Dangerous Liaisons* is often very funny, and is worth seeing for its wry view of the deceit and hypocrisy of the ruling class of the time.

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Gorbachev and Political Revolution

Glasnost has vindicated the critique of Stalinism by the Trotskyist movement in all but one respect — Trotsky's theory of the Political Revolution. According to this, as I understand it, the bureaucracy, having usurped political power from the working class, would never willingly concede it. Hence the need for a working class revolution from below, in a more or less violent process.

The recent elections in the Soviet Union however now clearly hold out the possibility of a relatively peaceful process of reform leading to full socialist democracy.

The important points to note here are:

- The elections were sponsored by a wing of the bureaucracy led by Gorbachev;
- The democratisation process, even if limited, is irreversible and was initiated from within the bureaucracy itself;
- The process of reform is currently centred around a leading figure in the CPSU — Boris Yeltsin.

All this is a far cry from the scenario of the masses storming the Kremlin and shooting the Stalinists against its walls. (A fate some of them may richly deserve, but that is beside the point.)

With Krushchev and now Gorbachev, it is clear that the Soviet bureaucracy is capable of a much greater degree of self-reform and political reform of Soviet society than seemed possible in the 1930s, when Trotsky was formulating the theory of political revolution. At the very least we can now see that the process of political revolution will be different and more complex than previously envisaged by Trotskyists. It involves, as Tariq Ali says, an element of 'revolution from above'.

I believe this view deserves debate, of the kind *Socialist Outlook* so well provides. It would be tragic if Trotskyism, having done so much to defend democracy in the working class movement, were to be left in a political backwater because it did not recognise a democratic revolution when it was taking place.

When history settles a question only sectarian dogmatists cling to obsolete theories, as all good Trotskyists should know.

Alan Radford
Bristol

Afghanistan

There is something of a problem with favouring the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (SO 13). It is the not insubstantial matter of the consequent slaughter of large sections of the Afghanistan population by the Mujahedin.

Revolutionary socialists formulate strategy not through abstract models of development but day to day reality; the reality of the removal of Soviet Armed Forces is genocidal slaughter and the enforcing of a viscerously reactionary fundamentalist regime. Their remaining provides elementary physical defence.

The editorial is quite correct to assert that only the 'self-organisation of the oppressed... can pave the way for socialism.' But this is not immediately useful to those who are about to be lacerated by the bullets of the Mujahedin. While the SAF were there they at least mitigated their worst affects.

Khomeini's counter-revolution was an enormous setback for the revolutionary movement: can we favour the preconditions for the creation of a similar state in Afghanistan?

The PDPA Stalinists instituted a number of significant reforms: abolishing bride prices, establishing schools, and various important land reforms. Its replacement by those who advocate in their refugee camps the stoning of women adulterers, who are in the pay of US imperialism and have a political programme best left behind in the seventh century, would be disastrous.

It is with uncharacteristic disregard for the lives of thousands that SO can countenance the regime of Hehmalayar i Islamic — financed by reaction and fuelled by religious backwardness. A political solution and a Marxist current await to be brought into being in Afghanistan.

Whatever the possibilities of either in the short term, they are hindered by abandonment of the country to the Mujahedin. Its rule will mean mass murder, misery and barbarism. To watch it unfold over the next year is a sickening prospect.

Simon Kennedy
Abertawe

Afghanistan 2

John Lister's article and also the editorial statement on Afghanistan (SO 13) attempt a position somewhere between a defencist (ie Marxist) position and the 'third camp' degeneration of the SWP(UK). As such they are full of contradictions. We are told that whilst we should have favoured a Soviet troop withdrawal all along we are also told that now they are withdrawing this represents a defeat for the working class!

Of course it is true, as John states, that the Soviet bureaucracy had no intention of sovietising Afghanistan but was merely interested in securing the rule of a left Bonapartist regime within its sphere of influence. This line was clearly emphasised

at the time of the intervention in 1979 by the ousting of the Khalq Faction and the murder of Amin and the installation in power of the Parcham Faction (the more conservative of the two PDPA factions). Despite this, should the Marxist response have been to join in the imperialist orchestrated chorus and demand that Soviet troops withdraw — or should it have been to demand precisely that the Soviet bureaucracy sovietise Afghanistan? That is demand that the bureaucracy base itself on the independent mobilisations of the Afghan workers and peasants and commit itself to the expropriation of the ruling classes and the establishment of a workers' state.

In relation to the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1940, the former position was maintained by Schachtman whilst the latter was maintained by Trotsky. If John and other comrades claim to hold a Trotskyist position then the onus is on them to show why it was correct to oppose a Soviet withdrawal from Finland but correct to have called for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It is obvious that the Soviet bureaucracy got into deeper and deeper water throughout the 1980s but this must be seen as a product of the rightist orientation of the bureaucracy and the Parcham Faction of the PDPA, resulting in the dismantling of many of the gains of the 1978 revolution in order to pacify the big landlords and other forces who had an interest in overthrowing the regime. This culminated in the PDPA abandoning any claim to be a Marxist-Leninist party at the end of 1988.

By setting themselves against the establishment of a workers' state the Soviet bureaucracy and the Parcham Faction demobilised sections of the Afghan masses and also encouraged the Mujahedin in their counter-revolutionary war. The Afghan crisis confirms Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. Namely that in the underdeveloped and oppressed nations, national liberation can only be achieved under the proletarian dictatorship, whilst the Menshevik-Stalinist, bourgeois-democratic line leads to defeat.

It is no accident that *Socialist Organiser*, who were the most vociferous on the Marxist left in favour of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan at the time of the intervention, have today abandoned any pretence at defending a Marxist position on the workers' states and explicitly defend the position of Schachtman against those of Trotsky. The line of *Socialist Organiser* on Afghanistan is part of their consistent capitulation to imperialist pressure as expressed in their positions on the Malvinas, Palestine, Ireland etc.

Whilst the international politics of *Socialist Outlook* can in no way be compared to the social chauvinist cretinism of *Socialist Organiser*, Afghanistan stands out as the exception that proves the rule. A failure to correct this wrong position may result in today's exception becoming tomorrow's rule.

Patrick Scott
London

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